

DRIVE

on the right path

COUNTRY REPORT / BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA



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DISENGAGEMENT, REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION OF FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTERS

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Abstract

Throughout the last decade, BiH has been confronted with the challenge of its citizens joining foreign terrorist organizations and their treatment upon return. The first wave of FTF departures started in 2012 and subsided by 2015, with the last wave of FTF repatriations taking place in December 2019. Still, a significant number of BiH citizens is in Syria and is expected to be repatriated. In comparison to some Western Europe countries who refuse to repatriate their citizens from Syria and Iraq, the Western Balkan countries may be praised for their efforts, however limited they are. In the present country case report, the main factors in the process of repatriation, reintegration and rehabilitation are analysed. Intergovernmental cooperation is the basis for any further action. Prison approach and preparedness of the staff is also important, especially with the treatment and education programs. Reintegration measures, taken by different actors in this process, are rather scant in BiH. The lack of political will affects any possible actions and measures being taken. In addition, it affects the vulnerable categories (women and children) in their process of reintegration into the society, especially having to deal with prejudice or rejection to some degree. All of these topics will be analysed, emphasizing the greatest obstacles and what these key actors have in common in their approach towards returnees.

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Abbreviations

BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
DRR	Disengagement, Reintegration and Rehabilitation
IC	Islamic Community in BiH
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MoIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OSA BiH	Intelligence and Security Agency of BiH
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
SIPA	State Investigative and Protection Agency

1. Introduction

First off, it is important to describe some key drivers of radicalization and violent extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) in order to build the foundation for further research and analysis. Vidal (2020) highlights the relevance of socioeconomic and political inequality as key factors facilitating radicalization in regions of MENA and the Balkans. While also including religion, described as the starting point for the process of radicalization. In the national context of BiH, Korajlić et al (2020) analyze the socioeconomic and political situation which enable radicalization processes. Poverty usually leads to unequal access to education and from there to unemployment, which in turn increases BiH citizens' vulnerability to radicalization. The authors note that 75% of their cluster sample¹ was unemployed prior to departure and that majority of travellers come from families with no income. Further, as indicated above, it is important to emphasize the role of religion, in this case Islam, in the process of radicalization potentially leading to violent extremism. It was mentioned that among the returnees interviewed for the study, a common motive for their departure is to „right a wrong“. They felt the need to help other Muslims who, in line with this narrative, suffer great injustice. It is worth mentioning, moreover, that almost everyone included in the cluster sample stated that the atrocities committed during the war of the 1990's in BiH did not provide a major motive to leave for Syria and Iraq. All interviewees, however, experienced some kind of loss, violence or injustice against them or their families during the war of the '90s. Thus, even though Korajlić et al (2020, 54) mention that their sample of research subjects referred to „global injustice done [to Muslims in Syria and Iraq] through various approaches and in different ways“, as a motive for departure, different studies clearly demonstrate the importance of socioeconomic and political factors, thus highlighting the multi-causality of radicalization trajectories.

According to our informants interviewed for this report², key motives for departure, and hence factors of radicalization, were of financial nature, while others were related to mental health problems and/or family issues (such as disputes with the family or between parents and children). Family issues present a significant problem since a majority of those who went to Syria were in their early twenties or late teens. Some would leave on their own, some would get married under Sharia law and bring their families to Syria. The most common motive, however, seems to be religious ideology, and more specifically a skewed interpretation of Islam as indoctrinated by jihadi groups; in fact, most FTFs barely had any religious education (low or not at all). Traditional Islam in BiH has been nurtured for centuries through elementary religious education; yet Bosnian FTFs were, for most part, not attending this type of school. Therefore, in light of the lack of religious education, there is ample room for misinterpretation and the creation of misconceptions about Islam. However, two of our interviewees emphasized the socio-economic and political situation in BiH as motives for departure or drivers for radicalization in BiH. Further, focus group

¹ 11 returnees from Syria and Iraq and 9 family members of people who departed to that region.

² Five interviews were conducted with people from security sector (state official, law enforcement agency, prison official), social services and expert in the field.

participants mentioned how ignorance, curiosity and partially love motivated these people to travel to conflict zones in Syria and Iraq.

One interviewee mentioned that the first wave of FTF's left BiH in order to join ISIS' Caliphate in 2012, with a few more departures being recorded between 2012 and late 2014. Having in mind these periods and the decline of the phenomenon of FTFs towards the end of 2014, the law amendments of the Criminal Code of BiH³ during that year may be considered a quick response to the fast-growing trend of FTF departures. The same interviewee stated how the decline in departures and increase of returnees who came back on their own volition may be related to the codification of new offences that were created so as to enable the prosecution of FTF returnees including the criminalization of participation in a foreign military, paramilitary or parapolice formation, to name one example.

The Strategy of BiH for the Prevention and Fight Against Terrorism 2015-2020 may be seen evidence of the government's dedication to prevent and counter violent extremism. This strategy incorporated a number of activities related to, for example, detecting signs of radicalization, preventive measures as well as cooperation with NGOs and the religious community. All of these activities were planned and directed at the development of a democratic society. The implementation of these activities aimed to involve many different actors, such as Ministry of Security of BiH, Ministries of Interior Affairs (MoIA), judicial institutions, civil society organizations, local community etc. However, according to one of our interviewees, the Strategy was founded on the assumption that these departures would have permanent effect; it hence displayed a lack of dedication towards the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees. According to our interviewees, state authorities are contemporarily planning to mitigate this shortcoming by dedicating one third of the new strategic document (for preventing and combating terrorism) to the thematic of deradicalization, rehabilitation and reintegration, under the title of "Prevention".

Approximately 300 BiH citizens went to Syria between 2012 and 2015. Korajlić et al (2020) stated that, by January 2020, the number of returnees to BiH was 80. Meanwhile, the number of people from BiH who are still in Syria and Iraq is believed to be around 90; the number of those who died on the former Caliphate's territory is believed to lie around 130.⁴ As stated by one of our interviewees, the last wave of repatriated BiH FTFs - which is said to be the only one organized by the State - took place in December 2019, when 25⁵ people returned from Syria and Iraq with the help of the US Government.

Finally, the response of local community regarding returnees (especially those who have served their sentence) plays a major role in the process of their reintegration and rehabilitation. Korajlić

³ Official Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovina, No. 3/2003, 32/2003 - correction 37/2003, 54/2004, 61/2004, 30/2005, 53/2006, 55/2006, 8/2010, 47/2014, 22/2015, 40/2015, 35/2018 and 46/21 of 27 July 2021 – Decision of the High Representative for BiH.

⁴ These numbers are not absolute, since there are many factors influencing the methods of gathering the relevant information, such as different (and not completely correct) sources of information.

⁵ Seven adult men, six women and 12 underage children.

et al (2020) note that, based on a research design using surveys⁶, 31% citizens believed that radicalism is somewhat of a problem in their community, while 8% of them thought it to be a major problem in their community. 60% of the citizens surveyed had a negative opinion regarding the departures to Syria and Iraq. Another important finding is that 33% of surveyed citizens state that returnees are not welcome in their local community. 36% see returnees as a threat to their society.

The participants of the focus group appear to feel that returnees have a distorted image of Islam, as well as a generally limited understanding of religion. Their main association with the term „returnees“ is rather negative as they relate it to war, trauma, violence, fear and insecurity.

Further, Pečković (2018) note that, in the context of youth's opinion on radicalism and violent extremism, most of the surveyed subjects⁷ had a negative opinion about radicalism and find it to be almost exclusively related to religion. A majority of them consider radicalized people as irrational, brainwashed and ignorant. Still, other sources, including two of our interviewees, suggest that communities for most part accept returnees as part of society. On the other hand, during the focus group discussion it was mentioned that the community still has some prejudices towards female returnees in particular.

2. Institutional cooperation/Intergovernmental cooperation

Focus group participants described institutional cooperation and practitioner's preparedness for returnees as poor. State authorities and relevant institutions involved in the process of repatriation and rehabilitation of BiH citizens did not have a clear protocol for dealing with returnees. One of the core problems in this regard has to do with finding an approach to treat trauma caused by conditions returnees lived in and the overall situation in conflict zone. Key actors such as social services lack access to guidance or instructions regarding the treatment of returnees – rather, they relied on their professional experience and capacity.

Even though the last repatriation of BiH citizens from Syria and Iraq took place in December of 2019, BiH still does not have officially sanctioned DRR programs for returnees. One of our interviewees stated that State authorities envision to include several different services, such as social services, health and educational service providers. Other actors to be included are Ministries of Interior Affairs, judicial system, security and intelligence agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local community and religious institutions. This type of multi-stakeholder cooperation will be one of the cornerstone of BiH's DRR strategy, given that State authorities have acknowledged the importance of all these actors in the DRR process.

Programs for DRR in BiH have so far not been implemented and therefore, the role of community initiatives is yet to be determined. That said, it is important to elaborate on one of the most important institutions in the DRR process, namely the social services. Two of our interviewees

⁶ 231 adult respondents in survey from: Sarajevo Canton, Zenica-Doboj Canton, Tuzla Canton and Una-Sana Canton

⁷ 551 respondent aged 15 – 30, from 60 cities and municipalities across BiH.

took note of the need to invest in the education of staff in these services so as to enhance their preparedness to the phenomenon of FTF returnees and to raise awareness regarding the importance of DRR programs. The social services are key stakeholders, especially in the post-penal period for returnees, since they are suited to offer these people different kinds of support to support their process of reintegration and resocialization. Because of this, the importance of improving the social service's capacities must be emphasized. Trepanić (2021) reported that BiH in 2021 was the only country in the region without an up-to-date Strategy. The research team also learned through their informants that a draft of the new Strategy is scheduled to be presented to the Council of Ministers in the first quarter of 2022. According to one of our interviewees, the government has, for the purpose of drafting this strategic document, requested a comprehensive national risk assessment from security and intelligence agencies in BiH that takes into account risks posed by future waves of returnees and their families. Of course, details of these assessments are not publicly available.

When it comes to State engagement in preventing and combating terrorism and violent extremism, one interviewee highlighted that the Bosnian police force is a rather repressive apparatus, meaning that its ability to engage in preventive work is somewhat limited. Preventive measures have been outlined by strategic documents for preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism, but according to the interviewee, police agencies only started participating in prevention activity when they got included in the interdepartmental working group.⁸ This group includes, besides relevant security sector officials, the so-called „non-security“ sector, i.e. social services, health services, experts in the field etc. Still, with regard to the prevention of violent extremism, the focus is on actors from civil sector (such as schools, social services).

In late July 2021, a coordination team for the repatriation and reception of BiH citizens from conflict zones was established.⁹ In this Decision¹⁰ the team's tasks are „to create systems, procedures and ensure the necessary conditions for safe, humane and controlled return and reception of citizens of BiH from Syria and Iraq and their reintegration, rehabilitation and resocialization, which includes:

- assessment of these persons in terms of security, criminal prosecution, protection of the rights of citizens of BiH, especially women and children, health and psychological protection, social support, ensuring the right to primary education, legal aid, economic support, local community participation and other issues important for their reintegration, resocialization and rehabilitation. These assessments are the basis for the development of the Repatriation Plan and the Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Resocialization Program;
- development of the Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Resocialization Program for all categories of citizens of BiH, which will include short-term, medium-term and long-term

⁸ Full name: Interdepartmental working group of the Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the Development and Implementation of the Action Plan for the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

⁹ The Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina established this team, at its 42nd session held on July 22, 2021.

¹⁰ Document No. 63/21 in Official Gazette of BiH.

security measures, health and social protection measures, access to education, economic support and employment, local legal assistance and other necessary measures.“

Based on the Decision (in Official Gazette of BiH) that appointed this Coordination team, the only available information regarding the risk assessments may be retrieved from Article 5 (titled ‘The tasks of the Coordination team’), where it is stipulated that returnees would undergo a security assessment upon their arrival to BiH. No further explanation was provided with regard to the implementation of such assessments, nor whether they would take place on individual or national level.

On the basis of these findings, it may be concluded that the political will to take action in preventing and combating terrorism and to implement DRR programs seems to be present while, however, concrete action has not yet been taken. While BiH is awaiting its new Strategy on Prevention and Fight Against Terrorism, it may be useful to outline what existing institutional and legislative framework offer regarding the treatment of returnees and individuals sentenced for terrorist activities. As has been mentioned above, the Criminal Code of BiH criminalizes participation in illegal and foreign militant formations, a category that includes terrorist organizations. Furthermore, the Criminal Code of BiH has very little, if anything, to say about the rehabilitation of such convicts. This statement is supported by Article 100 of Criminal Code - „Imposition of criminal sanctions on adults for criminal offenses committed as minors“. In this article, rehabilitation¹¹ is mentioned merely as a sanction applicable to adults who have committed a crime while they were minors, and if they turned 21 during the trial. Further, Article 117 - titled Rehabilitation - contains a reference to the treatment of convicts who have served their sentence, stipulating that (ex)-detainees be entitled to the same constitutional rights as well as other laws and regulations (except for those rights limited by a security measure) as other citizens. Yet, no laws are currently in place to disengage, rehabilitate and reintegrate religious extremists and returnees from foreign conflict zones - a fact our interviewees confirmed. It may, furthermore, be worth mentioning that one interviewee suggested that there is no need to regulate these programs by law – in his opinion, they are predominantly based on social effort. Still, shortcomings in the current implementation of DRR programs indicate that there exists a need for legal regulation, which may turn out crucial for the mitigation of potential security risks linked to recidivism by FTF returnees.

In light of the fact that BiH lacks a Strategy for preventing and combating terrorism (including the rehabilitation of FTF returnees and other radical ex-detainees), it is difficult to take seriously state authorities’ assertion that there definitely exists the necessary political will to work on prevention and countering violent extremism (PCVE), as well as on rehabilitation and reintegration (R&R) of returnees. It appears evident that there is lack of political will to reintegrate and rehabilitate returnees.

One of the challenges with regard to the cooperation between institutions, and generally with regard to the DRR process, is the fact that these services’ employees had no previous knowledge on the thematic of FTFs, returnees or extremism and radicalization. The need to educate and train

¹¹ Alongside erasure of the conviction and the legal consequences of the conviction.

them accordingly is apparent, as they are play a key rol the in provision of support to radicalized individuals and returnees.

Another crucial challenge is the poor quality of cooperation and communication among key institutions such as correctional and the prosecutorial services. Of particular concern in that regard is data sharing – a critical shortcoming, given that information on a detainee’s case file may be of high value to correctional services: availability of such data may enable correctional services to improve risk assessment procedures on the basis of which a tailor-made approach can be formulated. Behind this backdrop, one of our interviewees mentioned that initiatives have been taken by State authorities in order to enhance the preparedness of officials directly involved in DRR processes. Besides introducing the phenomenon of radicalization and FTFs, the goal of these trainings was to inform officials about what was happening in Syria and Iraq during returnees’ stay, what to expect upon their return and so on. However, these initiatives did not go as planned as considerably fewer such trainings than planned were eventually held, including as a result of pandemic restrictions. In short, the need for better data sharing is apparent since it allows for better assessments serving as a precondition for the formulation of effective DRR programs. That said, it was noted by one of our interviewees that there exist data sharing mechanisms between police agencies and correctional services – if the correctional services assess that there is a need for sharing data. This kind of cooperation is described as relatively well-functioning, yet here too there is room for improvement.

Azinović and Bećirević (2017) further mention that these key agencies and institutions usually have their own tools and standards by which returnees are treated. The fact that BiH provides the possibility of dual citizenship¹² makes it even more difficult for these actors to put the right number on the record. Besides these challenges, there does not seem to be a standardized procedure regarding risk assessments. To summarize, institutional cooperation in BiH is hindered by the poor quality of inter-institutional communication and lacking coherence regarding the approach toward returnees and their DRR process across different agencies.

3. Process of risk assessment for returnees and individuals engaged in terrorism and violent extremism

Azinović and Bećirević (2017) describe the challenges faced by security and intelligence agencies as well as state authorities regarding the risk assessment of FTFs and their families in the BiH context. As mentioned above, there exists no shared standard as regards risk assessment procedures and tools by state authorities in BiH.

¹² The issue with this situation is trying to find a solution on how to note down people who went to Syria and have BiH citizenship but do not live in the state; people whose origins are from BiH and they live in a different country (usually EU country).

Relevant stakeholders certainly understand that returnees and individuals who engage in terrorism and violent extremism pose a (potential) threat to national security. In line with our informants' statements, some believe that returnees *could* be disillusioned and not interested in violent activities. Yet, this does not change the fact that returnees potentially present a grave security threat in the case of re-engagement in terror-related activities, the risk of which can only be determined and mitigated by means of effective DRR programs.

It was also mentioned how risk assessments should not only be administered to returnees and radicalized individuals, but also to people - mostly youth - who are particularly vulnerable to radicalization and engagement in terror-related crimes. The process of deradicalization should incorporate both potential victims and those who spread violence-promoting ideologies. The emphasis should be on case-by-case type of assessment since these individuals need this kind of approach in the process of DRR as well. Azinović and Bećirević also noted that the police agencies are key actors in these assessments at the local level „and serve as the basis on which further measures or surveillance are initiated“ (2017, 31).

Based on one of our interviews, the research team has been able to gain information regarding risk assessments for inmates. In line with our findings, risk assessment is mandatory and requires revision every 6 months. There are two kinds of risk assessments, namely 'classical' and 'additional' risk assessments. Classical risk assessments are conducted with every inmate, while additional assessments are targeted to FTF returnees in particular. The purpose of the latter type of assessment is to collate as many information as possible, including such ones that may provide indications as to the level of radicalization. More generally, the assessment as a whole aims at providing a prognosis of the detainee's behavior.

In correctional services, this assessment is done by the Department for Reception and Observation and involves social workers, psychologists, the chief of the department, representatives from the security sector and (expert) associates for observation. Alongside these assessments, reclassification of every inmate is being done in order to take necessary measures in the future in line with the Law of BiH on Execution of criminal sanctions, detention and other measures.

The above-described risk assessments of inmates are subject to a formalized methodology as they are based on standardized forms, which are intended for use by officials across different correctional services in BiH. Various interviewees however stated that they are not familiar with risk assessment tools used in other countries, such as VERA-2R, RRAP or ERG22+.

National risk assessments are also conducted by the aforementioned Coordination team. This risk assessment is conducted jointly by all police agencies in BiH plus the Intelligence-Security Agency of BiH (OSA BiH). The resulting reports contain classified information to which, thus, only few stakeholders have access. The assessments are being conducted annually and on state level. It is the role of police agencies is to document relevant facts on the ground¹³ and report them to the central-level actors who eventually conduct the assessments. The reports resulting from these

¹³ These factors imply the possibility of radicalization which leads to terrorism and violent extremism (right-wing radicalism, sports fan hooliganism etc.)

risk assessments are drawn up in coordination with EUROPOL and TE-SAT. Still, our informants point at a critical shortcoming, namely that the monitoring and risk assessment procedures are not followed up upon after an inmate is released.

Furthermore, a number of safety measures have been instituted within prisons in order to prevent the spreading of radicalism. These measures include the restriction (or even prohibition) of grouping and association of FTF returnees. The need for such preventive measures is particularly salient with regard to detainees with extremist backgrounds since grouping may facilitate the spreading of radicalization. Therefore, the need to suppress it was noted.

On the other hand, it was mentioned during the focus group discussion that MoIA provides assistance to other partner law enforcement agencies. The MoIA does certain checkups and provides forensic intelligence gathered from field work, allowing these other agencies to improve their work.

Taking into consideration the fact that a relatively large number of BiH citizens still is in Syria and Iraq, the need for inter-institutional cooperation and coherence in the process of risk assessment is clear. This is true particularly in light of the assumption that new returnees may pose a more serious security threat than the ones who have returned earlier, owing to their relatively longer stay in conflict areas, and the concomitant exposure to desensitizing experiences that may cause trauma and PTSD and thus make reintegration considerably more difficult.

To summarize, the only systematically employed risk assessment methodology is the one used in prisons (classic and additional forms). Neither security and intelligence agencies were able to provide information regarding risk assessment; they furthermore appeared not to be familiar with risk assessment tools such as VERA-2R, ERG22+ and so on. None of the interviewees or focus group participants mentioned any structuring tool or methodology, suggesting that no other risk assessment procedures are in place.

4. Prison-based approach to DRR

In correctional facilities in BiH, FTF returnees are separated from other radicalized inmates as well as from other inmates considered vulnerable to radicalization. Prison staff are in charge of determining the constellation of cells; they will thus avoid pairing FTF returnees with individuals deemed vulnerable to radicalization. For the same reason, there exists a tendency to place FTF returnees in cells with fewer cellmates. The determination of cell constellations is based on the risk assessment and evaluation of every individual's behavior and personality. This, again, highlights the need for adequate risk assessment including a psychologist's evaluation of inmate's profiles. The psychologist's role within the evaluation process is to determine whether the individual's personality traits or charisma make them capable of influencing others in prison. For this purpose, inmates undergo an observation period during which evaluations are conducted and finalized within 30 days. After this period, every prisoner is placed within a unit for further monitoring and evaluation. This is in line with Article 170 of Law of BiH on Execution of criminal

sanctions, detention and other measures, which stipulates that risk assessments be conducted at the point of first reception so as to determine their intervention program. The aim of these assessments is to determine a detainee's escape risk, and the threat he would pose to society in case of an (attempted) escape.

As mentioned previously, there are additional risk assessment and methodology forms targeted specifically at FTF returnees. These forms are part of a handbook that is accessible for all prison officials in BiH. Through detailed questionnaires, officials can conduct assessments of returnees (and other potentially radicalized individuals) and tailor their approach to this category of inmates. Regarding professional trainings and education, one of the returnee inmates has supposedly finished school while in prison. Again others have found jobs in prison, e.g. in the canteen or the laundry room. Of course, such offers are not available from the start and for every inmate. There furthermore are continuous evaluation mechanisms so as to enable prison officials to determine an individual's personal development and behavior. In case of a positive outcome, detainees may be granted benefits such as home leaves. While enjoying these benefits, inmates have an obligation to report their leave to a police department at the beginning and at the end of their leave. For returnees using such benefits, this process includes reporting to state security and intelligence agencies such as State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA) and OSA BiH, alongside social services.

FTF prisoners have voiced appreciation for the trust placed in them, which they perceived as motivating. Trust is evidently not placed in the same way on every inmate but depends on the outcome of risk assessments and evaluations. As mentioned above, this presence of a mutual trust basis is linked to better behavior, respect and positive attitude, which in turn enabled the availability of certain benefits.

Further, one of the most important factors in the approach towards inmates is the so-called „education and treatment“ program, which is available to all detainees. It included sports activities, spending time in the library, as well as counseling with an educator. Prison psychologists furthermore offer a distinct set of programs¹⁴ such as a pre-release group, where inmates are prepared for life after of prison.

As has been mentioned earlier, radical inmates, including FTF returnees, are not allowed to share a cell with other returnees/radicals or prisoners considered vulnerable to radicalization, or to form groups within prison. The approach to returnees (including their education and treatment program) is based on individual security assessments. However, there are no separate education and treatment programs specifically for this category of prisoners. It is unclear whether these prisoners can jointly participate in such activities with other prisoners, or whether there exists a possibility of separating radical from non-radical inmates within the framework of this program.

Even though no separate programs for FTF returnees are currently being implemented, there exists an initiative to include the Islamic community in BiH (IC) in the process of resocialization of these inmates which, however, has never been finalized. There potentially are two problems with

¹⁴ Other programs include: work with addicts, prevention of antisocial attitudes.

this initiative: possible resistance of inmates towards IC and, conversely, possible resistance of members of the IC toward inmates.

One of our interviewees pointed at the challenge regarding the approach towards imprisoned FTFs, as their attitudes tend to be headstrong or even stubborn. This makes it more difficult to change their stances on certain issues and allow them to progress. Another challenge related to this one is the fact that some inmates were quite picky with food, and some of them even rejected food with halal certificate, for some reason.

According to our interviewees, the above-mentioned separation measures in prison have shown some success. Prison officers state that the strategy has succeeded in confining the influence of radical prisoners on other inmates, as well as limiting other risks that may be associated with the formation of radical networks in prison such as rebellion within the facility.

As Azinović and Bećirević (2017, 32) mention „so far, at the local level, only prison staff and police have any expertise on issues related to radicalization“. It is indeed the police and correctional services who act as frontline practitioners in radicalization prevention and DRR processes.

5. Prison staff capacities/preparedness

As part of the research conducted for this report, the research team has gathered relevant information regarding the capacities and preparedness of prison staff in their approach toward FTF returnees in prison. Firstly, the observation period for inmates enables prison officials and psychologists to evaluate these individuals and their behaviour in order to detect the extent to which an inmate is radicalized and, based on this assessment, to formulate an intervention and educational program tailored to their individual profile. Secondly, this evaluation serves to identify a detainee's potential security risks. These evaluation mechanisms aim at preparing prison staff to react to challenges related to the detection of radicalism in prison facilities and the prevention of the proliferation thereof within the facility. This strategy appears to be successful, with some elements of influence towards other inmates being noticed and preventive measures being taken. These elements of influence were present in the case detained FTF returnees as well as with other inmates. Following the observation period, detainees are assigned to the prison unit where they will serve their sentence, whereby the grouping of radical detainees is deliberately avoided in order to prevent the formation of radical alliances. Mechanisms for early detection of radicalism and violent extremism are present as well through the risk assessments and regular evaluations of prisoners, as described above. In line with the aforementioned, these assessments and evaluations have shown success with respect to the mitigation of security risks. There was an example of a former inmate who has shown great ability to influence others. Since he was convicted for terrorism recruitment, it was necessary to take measures to prevent him from spreading his ideology. These measures included restrictions in movement and contact with other prisoners, and accomplished to contain the spread of radicalism.

That said, a precondition for the successful management of radical inmates is an educated and trained prison work force. The great majority of trainings to date has been organized by the Council of Europe, for the purpose of which experts from BiH and from the Council of Europe have created a handbook for prison officials in BiH. This handbook also contains these classical and additional forms for risk assessments of inmates. These assessment processes afford prison officials the opportunity to get in close contact with the inmates as they monitor their behavior, appearance, hobbies and so on – anything that can help them „get the whole picture“. One interviewee also mentioned that before these new forms became available, prison officials managed risk assessments on their own. Another project organized by Council of Europe included group work – preparing inmates for post-penal life. Prison officials have sent letters to several companies, asking whether they are willing and able to employ these people after they've served their sentence. However, none of the companies responded in any way to these requests. There evidently is a need for the State to stimulate these employers, so these people could work there and eventually fulfill their existential needs.

When it comes to prison staff, approximately 20% of them were included in these trainings including Chiefs of departments, assistant directors and a number of prison (police) officers. Another fact worth noting is that projects/trainings¹⁵ organized by Council of Europe also included included state officials, psychologists, associates – i.e. they did not exclusively target prison officials.

The continued effort to implement these projects and to find custom solutions with regard to the approach toward each individual inmate is proof of the dedication of prison officials to accomplish progress that benefits both prisoners and prison staff. Our interviewee noted there were no significant complaints by prisoners regarding the approach of prison officials towards them.

When it comes to post-penal life of prisoners, one of our interviewees emphasized that the lack of probation services in BiH constitutes a problem. As it was mentioned, inter-institutional cooperation functions relatively well up to the point when the prisoner's sentence ends – after that, cooperation is basically non-existent, even though the Law of BiH on Execution of criminal sanctions, detention and other measures clearly states how prison officials and other relevant actors are obligated to provide support to every inmate after prison.¹⁶ Therefore, the lack of supervision and support during the post-penal period constitutes the core of the problem regarding the BiH's DRR efforts. There is a definite need for creation of probation services, which would rely on the experiences of prison officials during the programs of education and treatment with prisoners. Further, the importance of this service reflects in the need for those on parole, since they have the obligation to cooperate during their parole. Yet currently every (ex)prisoner is left on their own devices once leaving prison, which tends to result in high recidivism rates. Therefore, the necessity of probation service in BiH is obvious.

¹⁵ These projects were namely: *Supporting reintegration of violent and extremist prisoners in Bosnia and Herzegovina* and *The Council of Europe Prison Reform Programme* (as a part of „Enhancing human rights protection for detained and sentenced persons“ project), as it can be found on the official website of Council of Europe (Office in Sarajevo, BiH) and Council of Europe, European Union website.

¹⁶ Article 136 and 207.

Nevertheless, some supervision and support mechanisms for prisoners right after they have served their sentence do exist. Firstly, correctional services maintain contact with police departments and social services, alongside the family of prisoners. Social services can offer help, so much so as they are capable. Correctional services inform these institutions about the prisoner upon the latter's release so as to prepare the former for their reception. For FTF returnees, beside these institutions, correctional services will get in touch with state security and intelligence agencies, such as SIPA and OSA BiH. These agencies are presented with the summary of the returnee's treatment and are informed about their behavior, attitude and contacts during their sentence. This type of communication does not seem to last long, but merely aims to transmit key information regarding ex-inmates to authorities in the community he will settle in.

As mentioned before, the majority of education and training with prison officials is organized by Council of Europe. Furthermore the Civil Service Agency of BiH organizes trainings once or twice a year.

Likewise, correctional facilities organize briefings, which too may be considered a type of internal education. During these briefings, prison staff discuss current and potential challenges that may occur, including the phenomena of radicalism and FTF returnees. One of our interviewees also referenced workshops held by prison psychologists, where assistance is provided to staff struggling with burn-out syndrome.

6. Reintegration measures

According to our informants, local communities have accepted FTF returnees. Stigmatization in most cases did not appear to be a major issue, and the community appears to have offered assistance where it was needed and appropriate. Further, when it comes to acceptance of female returnees in their local community, one of our informants provided us with information regarding this issue. Female returnees also seem to be relatively well-accepted, even in light of the fact that their appearance may make them susceptible to criticism. It was mentioned that women feared the community's reaction, but that fear seems to have subsided as they are provided with support, even if it could be described as „minimal, unqualified, but it was friendly, neighborly“, which was what they needed. Our interviewee also stated the opinion on local community's perception of returnees – this phenomenon was interesting for a short period of time while there was certain media coverage. As these people returned to their local communities, however, public interest subsided.

Actors and stakeholders involved in creating and implementing DRR programs in BiH do not seem to be included sufficiently, and dedication to the issue too appears to be insufficient. Key actors, as mentioned previously, are police agencies and correctional facilities. Further, the role of social and health services should be emphasized; especially psychologists who voluntarily work with returnees play a key role both in prison and in the post-penal period. Social services deal with many challenges while working with returnees – women, children or ex-inmates. Social services and mental health centers offer their support to returnees by regular mental and physical health

examinations and check-ups. They offer one-off support in the amount of 50BAM for inmates upon completion of their sentence. Another group of stakeholders involved in these programs and initiatives is the concerned person's family, friends and neighbours. This category is crucial for the successful implementation of interventions including support and treatment of returnees. Family members in particular are considered a crucial pillar in the process of reintegration and rehabilitation. It is worth acknowledging that parents of BiH citizens who went to Syria and Iraq suffer as they barely have contact with their children and are only left with the option of attempting to send money in hope that they will survive and return home.

In the RAN Centre of Excellence handbook, the importance of support towards families of returnees is emphasized. To be more specific, parents will need "psychological and ideological, that is, theological support". Further it is mentioned that families play a key role in the reintegration process of returnees as they are most capable of exerting positive influence on the returnee, which they may use to prevent the spread of violent extremist and harmful ideology. Hence, the role of the family in reintegration and rehabilitation process must not be underestimated and was also mentioned in interviews and during the focus group discussion held for this report: parents, and kin more generally, are often the only contact FTFs have in their homeland. This is why there is a need to support those families and individuals (friends, neighbours) who can have a positive impact on returnees once they return. One of our interviewees, for example, pointed at the difficulties prisoners are confronted with after their release, especially with regard to financial support and housing, but also with social reintegration more generally. In light of the need for deradicalization or rehabilitation of returnees, the importance of family support becomes the more obvious. Since BiH does not have a formal approach toward DRR and lacks probation services, the role of informal initiatives in the process of DRR was described as crucial as besides the released detainee's immediate social environment, there is no institution that assists in accepting these people and providing them with accommodation (family or friends), financial assistance and, perhaps more importantly, provide emotional support throughout their recovery.

Besides initiatives by the Council of Europe and the prison-based DRR projects described earlier, it is worth to mention the role of foreign governments, such as government of Netherlands, which has funded rehabilitation of returnees (through IOM) by financing business plans for returnees. One of our interviewees, however, criticized this approach as, in his opinion, it did not succeed in fulfilling its goals and thus constituted a waste of money.

Another important stakeholder is the religious community, i.e. the Islamic community (IC) in BiH, however, our informants' understanding of the extent of the IC's involvement is ambiguous. According to one interviewee, the role of IC in the process of rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees is marginal due to the unwillingness of returnees to cooperate with the IC: this is because they are, in the course of their recruitment and radicalization, indoctrinated to reject official Islamic authorities including the local imam, the reisu-l-ulema and so on. Returnees have described the IC as corrupted and bureaucratized; they state that the IC does not allow them to practice Islam the way they want to, which was also mentioned as one of the reasons for their departure to Syria. The IC seems to be aware of this rejection and has no intention of forcing cooperation, even though it has signed an agreement with Ministry of Security of BiH earlier in

2021 with the aim at improving such collaboration. According to the interviewee, the lack of the State's will to work with the IC on this issue is salient. Through some meetings, the IC briefed State officials about their achievements while working with a limited number of returnees. This includes education of religious officials as well as a number of projects and publications. The IC apparently offered resources, knowledge and experience, i.e. anything that can be useful for the DRR process of returnees. The ambiguity with regard to the responses our team collected with regard to the IC's role in DRR processes may be due to different groups of returnees these actors work with, but has not yet been clarified. However, focus group participants also mentioned that cooperation and inclusion of IC is barely existent due to different factors affecting their relationship with returnees. But still, it was emphasized that the role of the IC would be crucial with regard to spiritual counselling and education and therefore could be key in the prevention of radicalization leading to violent extremism.

A detailed description of existing DRR programs is moot since no uniform, State-sanctioned approach exists. Besides the aforementioned projects organized by Council of Europe for FTF returnees in prison, there is not much to be said. One informant stressed self-rehabilitated and self-re-socialized. This statement itself reveals state authorities' lack of dedication in the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees (including women and children). Existing programs (for women) include regular meetings with psychologists and social services, but this kind of initiative is voluntary for both sides while legally mandated interventions do not exist. Consequently, coordination and cooperation between these key actors cannot be described as either good or bad, since willingness of both sides to be part of a program is a deciding factor. As the community seems to accept FTFs and female returnees, a great deal of fear, especially for women, has subsided. Still, one major challenge is related to trauma/PTSD treatment that may be needed as a result of traumatic experiences FTFs went through. With that being said, any kind of support (but especially emotional and psychological) will be crucial.

On the other hand, as mentioned, Articles 136 and 207 of the Law of BiH on Execution of criminal sanctions, detention and other measures emphasize the obligation of competent authorities to provide the necessary assistance to inmates after prison, with the goal to facilitate integration into society and life in freedom. Such assistance mostly refers to accommodation, medical treatment and employment. It will be necessary for prison staff to establish what type of help an individual requires, and to transmit such information to relevant institutions upon release of the prison.

One interviewee informed us that state authorities are currently in the final stage of drafting a document titled „Program of reintegration, rehabilitation and resocialization of returnees“. Activities described in this document are formulated broadly in order to allow policies to be implemented on every level in BiH. Participants involved in creating this document include representatives of prosecutor's office of BiH, OSA BiH, SIPA, Border police, MoIA of both entities (Federation of BiH and Republika Srpska), Police of Brčko District and services of social work, health and education, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and institutions/organizations who work on human rights issues and experts in the field.

When discussing the capacities of key actors involved in designing and implementing these programs, our interviewee said that capacities exist and they are available; currently, key actors deal with 6 women and 11 children. The same interviewee further mentioned that this does not represent a great challenge and they find their ways in working through these programs. Likewise, a new group of expected returnees will be dealt with accordingly. Apparently, there is no need to „spend huge amount of money or mobilize the whole society“ in this process of reintegration and rehabilitation of returnees.

As mentioned earlier, another data sharing mechanism between police agencies and actors who implement DRR programs centers on meetings of the Interdepartmental working group and the Coordination team for repatriation and reception of BiH citizens from the conflict zone. Focus group participants state that the cooperation between security and intelligence agencies has yielded adequate results. But cooperation between different institutions and actors, especially with regard to data sharing, is insufficient. Such deficiencies may be due to a lack of regulation: thus far no such attempt was made to institutionalize data sharing methods.

Shortcomings regarding data sharing also seem to be a result of the existing legal framework and data protection obligations in particular, especially with regard to communications between prison and prosecutorial services. A focus group participant– a police officer - mentioned that no prison staff/officials contacted them officially regarding this issue due to the fact of such data being mostly classified information. Moreover, it was emphasized that data should only be shared upon the permission of the competent institution. However, the same participant also mentioned that they would be willing to help refer the prison officials to whoever could give them data that can be shared, had they asked.

On the other hand, the same interviewee also mentioned that the police agency does not have access to the results of risk assessments from prison officials upon the release of inmates. Police agencies only receive basic information upon imprisonment of a returnee (who are they, the duration of their sentence etc). Therefore, the lack of legal framework to facilitate the sharing of more comprehensive data on a detainee greatly affects the quality of risk assessments.

7. Vulnerable categories – women and children

Azinović and Jusić (2016) identify three categories of Salafi women in BiH in relation to the FTF phenomenon. Firstly, there are those women who leave in order to join their husbands, secondly those who remain in BiH and refuse to leave, and thirdly those who leave on their own. Key motives of the last category’s decision to leave are of ideological nature and/or for the purpose of trying to find a husband and get married abroad. During interviews with different groups of Muslim women in BiH, Bećirević (2018, 26) noted that these women consider female FTFs as „misled by false promises“. Further, these women think that education is very important, since many female FTFs lack education and are hence more vulnerable to radicalization; furthermore, they may miss early signs of radicalization in their children.

According to one of our interviewees, a majority of women in BiH went to Syria and Iraq in order to accompany their husbands on their journey. Some went willingly while some were „victims of the process“. The same interviewee noted that the number of women from BiH who were engaged in recruitment processes is comparably low. Korajlić et al (2020) mention how radicalized women often are „immature and young“ – characteristics making them particularly vulnerable to recruitment. It is a common perception in BiH that women take traditional family roles in Syria, e.g. as housewives and caretakers of their children and husbands; they are not believed to actively participate in militant activities.

The stance of government towards female returnees is unambiguous: It does not view them as criminals, and they are neither prosecuted nor convicted. Similarly, women appear to be relatively well-accepted by society, having to adjust to their surroundings rather than the other way around. Still, they mostly did not try to find jobs, especially corporate ones. They tend to see themselves as housewives and stay-at-home moms. Even if they tried to find a job, it is likely that employers would be reluctant to employ them due to prejudices.

When it comes to offering support to returnees, we were informed of the government’s plan to provide female FTFs with support by linking them up with mental health centers, social services and educational services. Mental health centers would assess their intellectual abilities and mental health. Social services would assess the need for socioeconomic support. Educational services would evaluate their level of education and the need for improvement. The goal is to prepare and empower them to live on their own.

Further, health assessments were conducted with a group of female FTFs who returned to BiH in 2019. Health evaluations and counselling was provided immediately upon their arrival. The conversations conducted in the course of these evaluations were initially short, conducted by social workers, psychologist and medical staff. Although the women in question were reportedly cooperative, an issue that was brought to our attention was that some women do not own a health insurance and are thus not able to afford thorough check-ups – a serious shortcoming, considering the potential long-term trauma resulting from their prolonged stay in active conflict zones, sometimes for several years. Medical examinations aimed to detect physical health issues such as infectious disease, wounding, disabilities. For this group of returnees, no one needed to be hospitalized. Nine days after their arrival, another round of evaluations was executed. This time, as mentioned, the process was more comprehensive and included a more thorough analysis and longer conversations.

The integration of minor FTF returnees within the schooling system – three in total so far - has been described as successful, which may partly be due to the fact that these children were too young to be radicalized to the extent that might warrant treating them as a security threat. They were reportedly accepted by their peers and school and were not separated from other students during their classes. One of our interviewees highlighted the role of the teacher (and school itself) as crucial components in deradicalization and rehabilitation processes. This school's willingness to provide support in the process of rehabilitation of these children demonstrates the community's acceptance of FTFs. However, our research team was told that the arrival of new group of returnees with children aged 10-14 will pose a new challenge. Teachers and school

psychologists as well as pedagogues require preparation to the challenge as these new returnees may have psychological problems and be radicalized to a more significant extent than the aforementioned, younger children.

One of our informants emphasized that one of the biggest problems with regard to the reintegration of minor FTF returnees is their registration in the birth register and the regulation of health insurance for both women and children. These children did not have any kind of proof to confirm their place and date of birth. Institutions have failed to cooperatively resolve this issue.

Last but not the least, the school's capacities regarding training and preparedness to work with radicalized children seems adequate. Even though teachers are not trained in a manner that may be „systematic and targeted for this particular type of support“, teacher's preparedness for the challenges related to dealing with potentially radical children still is perceived as good enough to accomplish the goals of deradicalization and rehabilitation. These people are considered to be very professional and are believed to have the necessary „social empathy“ that allows them to recognize when children who are in need of support and to provide it.

8. Conclusion

BiH, as a country in transition that still grapples with the consequences of the relatively recent conflict still faces various challenges and obstacles. With many unresolved issues and continued institutional dysfunctionality, BiH presents fertile ground for radicalization to violent extremism, allowing harmful ideologies to flourish and proliferate. The need to enhance mechanisms to ensure national security is evident, alongside with improvement and respect of basic human rights and the creation of capacities enabling the State to assist to those who need help.

With regard to shortcomings of the approach to DRR in BiH, key takeaways of the present report are that there is an urgent need for better intersectoral and inter-institutional cooperation as well as for a minimum of political will to organize the repatriation and rehabilitation of FTFs; finally, the lack of adequate data sharing mechanisms between relevant institutions needs to be addressed. Further, the need for amendments of the legislative framework is evident. It is apparent that the issue of deradicalization, rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees should not be the exclusive responsibility of non-state actors or the community. While community initiatives doubtlessly add value to DRR processes, formalized institutional cooperation and a sound legislative framework should provide the basis of such processes.

Another issue that has featured as a recurring theme in this report concerns the education of practitioners who take part in the DRR of FTFs and other radicalized individuals, including social services, correctional facilities, and health and educational services. Mental health in particular should be emphasized. Basic medical check-ups were provided upon the arrival of last group of returnees, as well as therapy sessions, but these services depend on access to finances and health insurance. If no statutory apparatus or official procedures exist, unaddressed traumata may later

grow into much more significant issues not only for the returnee but also for the local community and the State's security as a whole.

On the other hand, the assistance provided to those who had returned before the December 2019 has been marginal. While relevant laws in BiH demonstrate that the State does acknowledge the need to disengage and reintegrate FTFs, the commitment to effectively implement such laws is scant. The to date non-existent national Strategy for countering terrorism demonstrates the lack of dedication to the issue. It should be the State's priority to act to resolve this issue, especially in light of the fact that future returnees might pose a bigger security threat.

Another key shortcoming is the lack of data sharing among institutional actors. State authorities and other relevant institutions do not have appropriate mechanisms or procedures in place to facilitate data sharing. Relatedly, risk assessment presents another issue, as such evaluations are not shared among institutions, thus making procedures long and ineffective. This may become an even bigger risk in the future as it is estimated that a much larger number of people will return.

In the end, a logically formulated legislative framework and political will to implement measures prescribed therein are crucial as starting points for the whole process of dealing with returnees throughout their DRR trajectory. Following suit, providing a clear strategy disengage and rehabilitate FTFs and other radical (ex)detainees and educating the personnel of social services, education system and prisons is the next logical step. If this is accomplished, the implementation of DRR programs will yield much better results in the long term.

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