



ROADMAP
2024



BEST PRACTICES

of community-based Rehabilitation and Reintegration (R&R) and P/CVE approaches



Developed by:

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January 2024

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The Roadmap of the “Best practices of community-based Rehabilitation and Reintegration (R&R) and P/CVE approaches” was prepared in the frame of the project “Sustainable Community-Based Reintegration of Albanian Nationals Returning from Syria” Programme, which is being implemented in Albania by the Institute for Democracy and Mediation in cooperation with the Observatory for the Rights of Children and Youth and the Woman Center for Development and Culture Albania, under the national coordination of the Coordination Center Against Violent Extremism, with the support of the Global Community Engagement and Sustainability Fund (GCERF).

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INTRODUCTION

The transnational dimension of violent extremism requires a comprehensive approach to prevention. Knowledge sharing is essential to enabling an effective response. Moreover, as more countries increasingly focus on preventing violent extremism (PVE) (as opposed to purely repressive counter-terrorism measures), actors need to be able to understand and demonstrate which measures work better.

Within this context, WCDCA considers sharing the good practices implemented in the framework of the program "Sustainable Reintegration into the Community of Albanian Citizens Returning from Syria" a useful resource to analyze the process and give recommendations for further action and proactive engagement. This document presents some of the good practices developed within the framework of the program implemented by the Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM) in cooperation with the Coordination Center Against Violent Extremism, the Woman Center for Development and Culture in Albania (WCDCA), and the Observatory for the Rights of the Children and Youth (Observatory) with the financial support of the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF).

The aim of this roadmap is twofold: to promote evidence-based models for the reintegration of returnees from conflict areas and to share the expertise of PVE practitioners on good practices implemented in the framework of the GCERF program implemented in Albania.

After introducing the practices and some examples of how these activities have been received and evaluated in different target areas. Following the presentation of the practices, we provide some examples of how these activities have been perceived and assessed in various target regions.

The material succinctly introduces both the good practices and challenges that were identified. These were emphasized during discussions with community members and practitioners in the field of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). The material also incorporates practical recommendations from experts who are actively involved in PVE efforts. These recommendations might be helpful for PVE practitioners and relevant policy stakeholders when designing P/CVE practices and R&R programs.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNITY BASED APPROACHES ON R&R AND P/CV

1. Establish a culture of feedback mechanisms among practitioners and funding parties by including an evaluation perspective from the outset, integrating it into program design, and providing opportunities to talk about what works and what doesn't.
2. Consider using a participatory approach by including multiple perspectives and ensuring a climate of trust between practitioners and researchers so that they can engage in open and transparent communication.
3. Provide long-term funding and ensure sustainability for tertiary PVE programs and projects to help build relationships of trust with interested individuals.
4. Offer opportunities for the further professionalization of practitioners and evaluators regarding the challenges during the evaluation of programs and projects implemented as a PVE consortium.
5. Facilitate an intensified and structured exchange of good practices, relevant research, and policy responses between actors involved in evaluation, for example, through national and regional workshops.



GOOD PRACTICES

BY



Institute
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GOOD PRACTICE 1

COMMUNITY BASED INITIATIVES - WORK WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES, SCHOOLS & CSO

Area of intervention: Social Cohesion

Nine community-based organizations in hotspot areas were supported with seed grants. Community-based initiatives accelerated civic participation while, at the same time, building more resilient and safer communities.

Types of activities: thematic workshops, exhibitions, training sessions on human rights, civic education and social inclusion, soft skills, and lead awareness raising activities, community meetings, and building educational plans for schools.

Study visits to institutions, internships, local campaigns, and traditional games movable carpet, painting art and sculpture workshop, field trip, training of trainers, capacity building.

Main themes: Social Cohesion, Volunteering, Civic engagement, Community empowerment and safety, Developing soft skills, Intercultural Dialogue.

IDM supported with grants 9 Community Based Organizations: FOKUS, SHKEJ, Woman Forum, YPN, CSDC, PVN, SHIS, IANS, MuZEH Lab.

Who was involved?

Pupils, students, municipalities, government institutions, civil society, youth, social workers, and societal groups.

What was the impact?

- The implementation of community-based initiatives led to a significant increase in civic participation, resulting in a safer and more resilient community.

-By promoting active citizenship, the efficacy of local community organizations was enhanced, empowering them to effectively address community issues and drive positive change.

-Improved social unity can assist communities and individuals in maintaining peace and cooperation amid societal shifts, utilizing socio-cultural, recreational, and sporting interventions that encourage social interaction, acceptance, volunteerism, well-being, and inclusivity.

-The increase in civic participation was manifold with the implementation of community-based initiatives, and it also provided a safer and stronger community.

-Enhanced the efficacy of the local community organization by encouraging the practice of active citizenship.



Feedback from beneficiaries:



Photo from Young Professional Network, 2023

“

Grass-roots CSOs and other civil actors have little influence on local government planning and decision-making due to their limited advocacy skills and capacities to engage effectively in policy dialogue for advancing communities' interests. Therefore, it is essential to develop the capacities, knowledge, and skills of grassroots CSOs working in the selected hotspot areas to advocate for improved local public policies on integrated social care services and strengthen their impact on empowering vulnerable categories. (Representative from the local CSO, Shkoder).

”

The way forward

CBI strengthened local ownership: Civil society actors and institutions tend to have access to, legitimacy with, and influence among communities, so the involvement of civil society widens ownership, thereby improving the effectiveness of P/CVERLT policies and strategies.

GOOD PRACTICE 2

FORUMS WITH RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Area of intervention: Social Cohesion

The discussion in forums was focused on the following topics:

• The crucial role of religious (Islamic) counter-narratives in communities was to address the narratives that are spread by unauthorized actors.



• The causes of religious extremism are mainly the lack of a proper understanding of Islam and the need to feel significant.



• The dangers of religious extremism are first and foremost directly related to the religion itself, by diminishing the role of the official imams in the community, breaking Muslims into different groups that are hostile to each other, and damaging the reputation of Islam.



• How to address religious extremism by providing proper religious counseling to those who are interested in religion and by educating ourselves. For this, participants explained that years ago there were not sufficient well-educated imams, but now there are many of them who can provide professional religious guidance.

What was the impact?

- Religious leaders promoted understanding, harmony and religious tolerance.
- Imams and religious practitioners are more aware of how to address religious extremism by providing proper religious counseling.
- Imams are more eager and willing to provide professional religious guidance to returnees and those who are interested in religion.
- Higher awareness of the crucial role of religious (Islamic) counter-narratives in the local communities.

Feedback from beneficiaries:

“ Participants stated they have been approached by extremist individuals who spread extreme interpretations of religion. This has happened both physically and online, especially through the Telegram app. Groups or individuals who spread radical ideas do so by acting discreetly, mostly in peripheric areas or with isolated or vulnerable individuals. That is why it is very important to work on VE counternarratives and proper religious counseling. ”



Who was involved?

Participants in the forums were imams of the area, representatives from the Muslim Community of Albania, representatives from the CVE Center, and Muslim practitioners in the areas.

Partnership (any affiliations with other organizations and networks).

These forums were organized in coordination with the Muslim Community of Albania. The mufti of the selected areas has been the local liaison, who invited the participants and held a keynote speech on the topic.

The way forward

Considering the multifaceted, dynamic, and complicated reintegration process of the returnees, it is imperative to provide an inclusive approach where all actors can contribute to this process. As such, the involvement of religious communities in these forums is important not only for the prevention of violent actions in the future but also for the promotion of peace and tolerance and for strengthening the community's resilience to violent extremism.

GOOD PRACTICE 3

MULTIACTORIAL APPROACHES AT LOCAL LEVEL

Area of intervention: Advocacy

Local Public Safety Councils are important instruments to approach security & VE-related threats at the grassroots level, addressing social cohesion, and public safety, including R&R processes for returnees.

A series of activities were organised to raise knowledge and awareness of LPSC members, local officials and frontlines regarding the establishment and functioning of the Local Public Safety Councils. IDM proposed a concrete plan on the suggested path and necessary tools to assist the successful and efficient conception of LPSC.

The new model of LPSC that IDM is advocating for serves as an instrument for strengthening cohesion between institutions in taking and sharing responsibilities, as well as in dealing with security challenges including R&R processes of returnees at the local level. This model provides a comprehensive model of crime prevention at the local level, which relies on the interaction among the municipality, police, and prosecution, based on a cyclical model of interaction on the functioning and regulation of the LPSC.

Senior representatives from the Municipality of Elbasan shared their firsthand experience in adopting the regulatory framework of LPSC and the action plan.

Main products: regulatory framework for LPSC; practical guideline on the regulatory framework drafted for LPSC; policy recommendations on the draft law on LPSC.

Main activities: workshops/ policy-level trainings on the needs & grievances of RFTFs and the role of LPSC; draft action plans on LPSC

Main takeaways/ results:

- Increased joint efforts with policy stakeholders in the technical assistance towards establishment of LPSC.
- Evidence-based recommendations were provided to inform the preparation of the draft law on LPSC.
- Increased advocacy efforts to establish a national wide reform through the adoption of the LPSC regulatory framework by municipalities.
- LPSC officials are more aware of the functionality of the local public safety councils and their role in crime prevention at the local level.
- LPSC serves as an important instrument to approach security & VE-related threats at the grassroots level, addressing social cohesion, and public safety, including R&R processes for returnees.
- Institutional actors (central and local governmental) acquire updated knowledge on community needs and VE threat in the given area to inform future decision-making.

Feedback from beneficiaries:



Photo, Local public officials and frontliners, December 2020

“Representatives from the administration team at the Municipality of Pogradec noted “We perceived Local Public Safety Councils” as a mechanism that is driven by the citizens needs because a one size fits all is not a suitable approach to respond to the complex challenges of ensuring public safety.”

Who was involved?

LPSC members, public officials, local stakeholders.

The way forward

By promoting a multi-sector and inter-institutional approach, the model guarantees inclusiveness, transparency, and citizen engagement in the identification and pursuit of local priorities, including public safety issues. Supporting initiatives that aim at influencing the policy agenda and engaging in constructive policy dialogue with local government stakeholders is a stepping stone in terms of project sustainability.

The strengthened cooperation and partnerships between local public actors and communities will foster mutual trust and establish future synergies on multiple levels. A social contract will be developed in order to address VE drivers in the future and chart out a coherent and inclusive vision for lively and vibrant local communities in the area.

GOOD PRACTICE 4

ACCREDITED CURRICULA

Area of intervention: Psychosocial/ Educational

The curricula for the training sessions "On the Identification, treatment and prevention of radicalization and violent extremism in the educational institutions" was accredited by the Order of Psychologists with 4 credits (Decision No. 18, date 18.05.2023 of the Order of Psychologists). The instrument targets the psycho-social staff in the education system and is fully aligned with the government's long-term strategies to address P/CVE.

It is foreseen as one of the measures in the country's strategy on countering terrorism and violent extremism 2022-2025. This is the first instrument that was validated at a national level thanks to GCERF support and the commitment of IDM team of experts. IDM received positive feedback and validation from both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection as well as CVE centre.

IDM in collaboration with the Order of Psychologist organized a series of 6 regional trainings with psychologists based on this instrument.

What was the impact?

- Psychologists can easily identify the early signs of risky behaviour toward radicalization.
- Psychologists have aware of how to conduct psychological assessment procedures and referral.
- Psychologists use the practical techniques for psychological assistance and the psychometric tests.
- Psychologists are better knowledge on how to conduct the procedures for designing and planning individual psycho-social interventions for the treatment of children with radical behaviours.
- Psychologists are more aware of the modalities and approaches for working in a multidisciplinary team within the school system.
- Psychologists have a more comprehensive knowledge on VE prevention approaches and mitigation measures.

Feedback from beneficiaries:



Orsjola A. Miha, a psychologist at the "Kongresi i Manastirit" school

“ Orsjola was one of the 15 participants in the training program *"Identification, Treatment, and Prevention of Radicalization and Violent Extremism in pre-university educational institutions,"* licensed by the Order of Psychologists in the Republic of Albania with 4 credits. *The training of psychologists should constitute an ongoing process. Each day, we confront new challenges in our roles as school psychologists, and it is increasingly*

imperative to learn how to effectively manage these challenges, particularly in cases where early signs of violent extremism manifest. It is essential for us to remain vigilant in identifying early signs.

Equally important is that these training programs be endorsed not only by the CVE Center but also by the institutions licensing school psychologists. Accredited trainings become even more valuable for psychologists as they recognize the training and certification in this field.”



Who was involved?



Pycho-social staff in the education system.



Photo from the training with psychologists, Tirana 2023

GOOD PRACTICE 5

USER-FRIENDLY AND PRACTICAL MANUALS & TRAININGS

Area of intervention: Psychosocial/ Educational

Effective reintegration approaches require engagement and work with communities, local and central institutions, frontline workers, individuals and families of returnees, and individuals who might be more likely to be influenced by extremist ideologies. The practice so far has shown that multi-sectoral cooperation ensures the continuity and sustainability of R&R interventions.

5 User-friendly and practical manuals which provided front-liners with a detailed mapping of existing R&R programmes in Albania, steps and procedures for case management and instructions on their day-to-day approach towards returnees were drafted:

- 1.Guidelines and capacity building component for frontlines on R&R programmes and case management
- 2.Guideline for mental health practitioners, social workers and psychologists on the psycho-social intervention of Albanian nationals returning from conflict zones
- 3.Guideline on prevention of radicalization and violent extremism: Rehabilitation and reintegration of Albanian nationals returning from conflict zones through community policing
- 4.Guideline for local self-governing units on the rehabilitation and reintegration of Albanian nationals returning from conflict zones
- 5.Training manual for frontliners: Mapping of R&R services for persons returning from conflict areas.

These guidelines were conceived as a user-friendly toolkits, practical guidance and positive models which will guide the work for providing of services for returnees and case management.

This particular capacity-building component was focused not only on the R&R support and management processes of Albanian citizens returning from conflict zones, but also on the context of VE in Albania, push and pull factors and PVE through community initiatives efforts as well.



Main takeaways/ results:

- Frontline workers are informed about the types of R&R programs and the access of returnees to these programs.
- Frontliners are guided on the procedures of case management service delivery of vulnerable categories and returnees.
- Public institutions are more aware of the importance of an integrated multi-stakeholder approach at the local level as an effective instrument not only during the R&R process but also further in the process of preventing radicalization and violent extremism.
- Key policy officials have more knowledge on the VE situation in Albania.
- Frontliners and institutional officials have better knowledge and skills on the use of instruments for R&R processes.

Feedback from beneficiaries:

“ Erin (fictive name) was shy, and quiet and didn't make any eye contact with no one. He also refused to receive help from a female worker. When Lorena* talks about him now: *“He is able to articulate, is able to answer the questions addressed to recalls, is able to look us in the eye. He manages to express a little more about his wishes and no longer answers questions with YES or NO. He is now part of the group and he engages in the daily activities organized with the other children and we are very happy that he is becoming more friendly now.”* ”

In the beginning, we noticed that the child was not attached to the mother, he did not show any sign of affection toward others and were not able to express their emotions. We could finally see the light at the end of the tunnel and this is a milestone. We tried to open a new window of hope filled with joy for these children. They seem to show more empathy toward their friends and familiars, I really think that they need to be part of the families and also to be altruistic to understand their problems so can give the best solution.



Lorena Cela, Child Protection Worker, Municipality of Tirana

Who was involved?

These modules targeted frontline workers, local and central government officials, social workers, psychologists, health professionals, teachers and police officials.

The way forward: Sustainability and replicability are ensured through the following:

- Institutions and front-line responders acquired capacities (knowledge and skills) to deliver R&R services in the future. Technical capacities of institutions and front-liners to deliver R&R services and PVE issues are strengthened, so that skills are re-applied in their local contexts. The know-how and skills that institutions and frontlines gained, could be used after the project ends by all the other interested key local actors.
- All these manuals were developed in close collaboration with local and central stakeholders. Their feedback and suggestions were incorporated into the final drafts. For example, the manual on Community policing was prepared in collaboration and under close supervision of the Albanian State Police. Moreover, the approval of the guideline through an order issued by the ASP Director, showed institutional ownership to raise the capacities among all ranks of police officers.
- Scaling up the activities: After building the capacities of frontliners in Tirana, they continued to scale up the case management practice in other municipalities. In the meantime, we are still working to scale- up several initiatives either by advocating at the local/ national level, or accrediting the modules and replicating them at a national scale.

GOOD PRACTICE 6

MEDIA AND NEWSROOM TRAINING ON REFLEXIVE JOURNALISM

Area of intervention: Education/Media Literacy

Media and newsroom training on reflexive journalism and ethical news reporting related to VE. Young people were trained on:

- Media reporting of various forms of terrorism and persons returned from conflict areas.
- Propaganda and media disinformation, dealing with ethical dilemmas.

Journalists and crime reporters were invited to share with the participants their experience in the camp, reporting techniques, ethical dilemmas in reflecting reality and the humanitarian mission of a missionary journalist, whose task goes beyond informing the public.

All the interested journalists were invited to submit a application for preparing a news report on the rehabilitation and reintegration (R&R) process of returnees from conflict areas and PVE issues. The aim of this competitive grant was to promote articles that enhanced awareness of local communities on the R&R processes of returnees, PVE issues, resilience and social harmony. These articles aimed to increase the level of community acceptance and reduce the level of stigmatization of returnees from conflict areas.

Main takeaways/ results:

- Increased awareness and sensitivity among journalists regarding the nuances and potential biases associated with reporting on violent extremism.

- Journalists and media demonstrate improved accuracy in reporting on VE and R&R related activities. They have the necessary knowledge and skills to gather reliable information, verify sources, and fact-check their reports. This contributes to more trustworthy and credible news coverage, enabling the public to make informed judgments and decisions.

·Strengthened media capacity in reporting VE and R&R related activities can facilitate collaborations between media partners and relevant stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations, and academia. Such partnerships promote knowledge exchange, data sharing, and joint initiatives, leading to more comprehensive and effective approaches to preventing and countering violent extremism.

Finding the right balance between objective reporting and advocating for positive change in R&R and PVE was challenging. Journalists navigated this balance carefully to maintain their credibility.

Who was involved? Journalists

The way forward: Media partners and Journalists play a vital role in promoting inclusive narratives that counter extremist ideologies and narratives. By giving voice to diverse perspectives, including vulnerable individuals and affected communities, they will help counter extremist propaganda and foster social cohesion.



Photo from the training with journalists, Tirana 2023



GOOD PRACTICES

BY



GOOD PRACTICE 7

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF WOMEN COUNCILS

Area of intervention: Social Cohesion

Women Councils are responsible units created in the frame of the GCERF program that contribute to the capacity building of women and need to identify the most important issues that disturb the community and threaten the security of women in Albania.

The establishment of 10 Women Councils helped to apply a step-to-step approach in P/CVE, contributing to women networking and proactive engagement through the women councils established in Tirana (Yzberisht and Unaza e Re, Kavajë), Korçë (Buçimas: Rëmenj & Gurras), and Leshnicë), Elbasan (Librazhd, Mollas), Dibër (Mat), (Kukës), and (Shkodër) Postribë).

Who was involved?

The WCDCA, IDM, CVE Centre, the Office of Domestic Violence Coordination, representatives of civil society organizations, psychologists, religious community representatives, representatives from local operating NGOs, teachers, social workers, and women entrepreneurs, as well as rural women (housewives unemployed), participated in the organized activities. Important discussions were held on how to deal with the behavior of radicalized returnees and recommend topic-related activities based on their area of focus.

Why do we need the creation of the Women Councils for P/CVE and R&R?

Firstly, to respond to community needs and create more spaces for the concretization of action for social cohesion. Secondly, listening to the women's voice helps identify community needs, reduce stigmatization, and enable a more favorable climate for resilient communities to counter violent extremism.

How did it start?

The first Woman Council was created in Librazhd, aiming to increase cooperation and partnerships between institutions working with R&R policies. Starting with a close discussion with 15 first-generation women activists from the community, the Women Council, step by step, became a reality for the further discussion of challenges, identification of needs, and ranking of the next activities for proactive engagement.

During the meetings organized, women referred to the needs and challenges they face at the local and individual levels, while regarding the returnees, they did not have knowledge about approaches applied or good practices that they could implement as community members.

Strengthening the cooperation between the members of WC and the relevant institution, such as the local municipality, has been a great result that has also contributed to the engagement of more women in social and cultural life, including rural women.

In order to facilitate access for these women and engage them in activities, coordinating meetings and cultural activities were held with institutional actors, religious leaders, and other members of the targeted community, with a focus on women empowerment to create bridges of cooperation and recognition of women's contribution to community development.

What was the impact?

The creation of WC in 10 target areas resulted in the good of four types of empowerments, which are interlinked and feature in all P/CVE program implementation practices, such as:

1.Knowledge empowerment: through understanding the radicalization process, prevention work, and P/CVE challenges regarding building community resistance and collaboration processes.

2.Skills empowerment: through enhancing presentation and communication skills and skills for critical thinking, leadership and decision-making, and managing and raising funds.

3.Personal empowerment: contributing to managing emotions, enhancing self-confidence, self-reflection and awareness of personal motivation .

4.Professional empowerment: by understanding how to advance the program to the next level and ensure its sustainability.

Women's direct involvement in the Women's Council events enables them to become important actors in driving forward social cohesion but also positively impacts their civic participation in other activities organized in the frame of the project, such as fairs, awareness campaigns, and workshops. Women shared personal stories and exchanged experiences among themselves to raise their voice for resilience in dealing with social injustices. Sharing stories with other women often makes them agents of change.



Women Council, Mollas



Women Council, Kavajë



The way forward:

Promote Women Council's to local and central authorities to gain their recognition and support, expanding its accessibility and benefits.

•a) Introducing and fostering an understanding of women councils among other community members through artistic cultural events, fairs, and other similar events to discuss ways of cooperation and the expansion of councils in rural areas.

•b) Organizing trainings according to the needs addressed to increase their capacities to engage and implement necessary activities for the benefit of the community.

•c) Empower Women Council's by enhancing women's knowledge and skills on community actions that they may be able to take outside the family.

NOVELTY IN ENGAGING KEY COMMUNITY GATEKEEPERS: THE CASE OF WOMEN COUNCIL IN LESHNICA



Vladimir Lipo, Chief Elder of Leshnica

Leshnica is a village in Cerravë, Pogradec Municipality. The establishment of the Women Council in Leshnica was identified as a hot spot area where many men departed together with their families towards the conflict zones. In this village, the women have limited spaces to meet and, furthermore, to proactively engage. Being mentally abused by their spouses and family members, who, as the women referred to, "violate women's freedom and rights" by using basic economic support as a pretext to keep them within the four walls of the house under the dictates of men, which has been a driving factor for many other Albanian women to join men in conflict zones.

In the beginning, the idea for the organization of the activity was communicated to the Chief Elder of Leshnica. Of course, the work from the beginning was a challenge for all the actors involved.

Mr. Lipo, the Village Elder, in one of the interviews shared with WCDCA experts, giving his feedback on the program process, declared, "I would never have made it without a special woman, my wife, who was very cooperative when WCDCA first brought to Leshnica the proposal for the creation of Women's Councils."

Through encouragement and guidance on how to effectively approach the situation, we have today these women on our discussion's tables. The wife of the village elder has knocked "door to door" to invite other women to create an entity like WC, a structure that, in the following activities, has turned into a reality where women not only address their needs and problems but also express the great hope they have for support from local and municipal structures and their empowerment through projects.

Step by step and calmly, the situation improved gradually, and today we have at the table the women of Leshnica who, until three years ago, received permission to visit their relatives who live in the same neighborhood. I am confident that the work done so far will bring change not only in our municipality but also in surrounding municipalities and will serve as a positive example.

Now, the women of Leshnica know how to promote their handicrafts and culinary products. They have learned to write official requests through other women who work in the municipality and the municipal council, with whom they got to know in the WC, and now direct these requests on their behalf to the competent bodies according to their needs; however, there is still much work to do for the concretization of action and sustainability.

They believe that the story will not stop here. If, at the beginning of the program, these women and their families did not provide me with a glimmer of hope for achieving the main goal of "the inclusion of women in social life and, why not, their membership in the council of elders," today they not only sit at the table in the periodic meetings we hold through WC, but they also bring their voice to the municipality table to support women's rights and lobby for the creation of potential spaces for economic independence.

The initial motivation from the program and the determination to bring about change in the lives of Leshnica's women and their family members served as a wake-up call for us and the surrounding villages to send a message: *"Women are a true success story when they are visible, have a voice, a figure, and influence in the community."*

Challenges

1. Patriarchy remains a challenge ahead; involving and engaging women in the meetings organized was not an easy task. In many rural areas, such as Leshnice, Busimas, and Mollas, women were not allowed to go out of home without the permission of their husbands, fathers, and mothers-in-law.
2. Gender equality is another challenge and precondition for reducing the problematics referred to by women in 10 target areas of project implementation, where the right to equality is a priority for women's empowerment to grant a life with dignity and freedom from fear and violence.
3. Promotion and recognition of Women Councils contribution to advancing PVE action through women engagement and sharing the results with other women in rural areas.

GOOD PRACTICE 8

COMMUNITY MEETINGS

Area of intervention: Social Cohesion

30 Community meetings are organized in Tirana (Yzberisht and Unaza e Re, Kavajë), Korçë (Buçimas: Rëmenj & Gurras), and Leshnicë), Elbasan (Librazhd, Mollas), Dibër (Mat), (Kukës), and (Shkodër) Postribë) and contributed to increasing the cross-sectoral cooperation for community empowerment through learning on raising the public awareness of RFTF and understanding how to implement P/CVE approaches and practices to avoid problematic behaviors encountered before, leading to cases of violence.

The host community has increased the level of acceptance of returnees and interaction to facilitate the integration of family members and returnees in collaboration with the other stakeholders involved in action.

Through important topics selected to be discussed during community meetings, the receiving communities developed a clear understanding of the role of women and the community in preventing violence and increasing security, including the importance of cooperation and partnership with local police authorities.

In addition, the active engagement and cooperation between actors of civil society and the religious community to familiarize young people with the legal and illegal aspects of emigration and religious practices helped to create stronger bridges of communication between community members and social service representatives for recognition of the law and services provided by relevant institutions.

How did the practice contributed to the project implementation?

The practice had a direct impact on building and strengthening trust among multiple stakeholders across an array of different sectors, including civil society, the private sector, academia, and regional and international institutions, enabling them to employ a holistic approach that involves engagement in coordination and cooperation in P/CVE.

In addition, the information delivered and shared through CM impacted the community members by raising awareness of the risks of extremist and radical ideologies, which contributed to building more resilient communities in VE.

Over the course of action within the frame of this project, it was proven that there is no one-size-fits-all way to achieve comprehensive programming. To make the action more efficient, different pathways were followed by WCDCA.

For raising the efficacy of action, some of the below approaches have been applied (the traditional approach and the targeted approach).

Pathway 1: The “traditional approach”

This approach is a linear, sequential process towards developing a comprehensive rehabilitation and reintegration program. Engagement with a multi-disciplinary team was essential for the development and implementation of the activities. (The case of Leshnica, Mollas, Bucimas, and Cerrave).

The needs assessment was an ongoing process conducted to identify the visions and needs of policymakers and practitioners at the local level and was reported periodically in the reports of the activities. The main purpose of the need’s assessment was to obtain a realistic overview of the different thematic contexts to guide future technical assistance activities. As a result of the evaluation of the needs, topics were updated, and priority was given to the main themes proposed by the community members participating in the meetings.

The results of the risk assessment also provide information for the adaptation of the program and for the development of complementary programs that will be created in the future. At the end of this process, the local multidisciplinary team managed to form a nucleus for the development of a comprehensive program that can be implemented and evaluated by other practitioners, where it is important to consult with CVE experts and the lead partner.

Pathway 2: Towards changing attitudes by experiencing

Community meetings organized by WCDCA are geared towards changing attitudes by experiencing results. This approach was rather adaptive, a non-linear process towards a comprehensive rehabilitation and reintegration program based on scientific research results. WCDCA has highlighted the importance of scientific research as an accompanying and informing element for the development of sustainable programs.



Community Meeting, Mat

How did WCDCA developed this pathway?

Starting from initial research and data collection through different methods and strategies according to the local context where the project was implemented. Selecting the topics for the community meeting discussions was a challenge, and we needed to check what was already held at the local level and if the target group was involved or not. Once the topic was selected, it was represented to the involved stakeholders in a broader need’s assessment process, where, thanks to continuous communication with CVE experts and IDM, they were led towards the development and implementation of a comprehensive rehabilitation and reintegration process.

Achievements as a result of the process.

During the process of engagement with the local coordinator, religious leaders, experts, local police officers, and other local authorities, as well as regional and international actors’ advice, during the periodic meetings held to discuss the project results, challenges, and plans, a unique environment of trust and cooperation was created on a very sensitive subject such as the reintegration of the returnees. Moreover, research-based information can be of added value for broader PVE and CVE work in the region.

30 community meetings were organized, and **588 women and men** in total participated in active discussions aimed at strengthening social cohesion, reducing stigmatization, and sustaining the fight against violent extremism.

GOOD PRACTICE 9

WOMEN COUNCIL INITIATIVES

Women Council Initiatives are implemented in 10 municipalities where WCDCA operates through the GCERF program to address the communities needs to P/CVE action through: the organizing of round table meetings, conferences, cultural fairs, workshops, and trainings; the establishment of the Book Club in Kukes; workshops for soft skills building for women in rural areas; and the organization of awareness-raising campaigns on gender-based violence, gender stereotypes, safety issues, and challenges at the local level, including the promotion of gender-responsive approaches and issues highlighted by the Women's Council, tailored to the needs of each community..

Who was involved?

The initiatives were made together by IDM and CVE representatives, security experts, representatives of the local level near the municipalities, front-line actors engaged in P/CVE in the local area, leaders and representatives of different religions (Muslim, Catholic, Orthodox, Evangelical), etc., representatives of local CSOs, teachers, psychologists, and representatives of local businesses.

In terms of implementation, coordinators from WCDCA have facilitated the steps to the development of the initiatives, and the monitoring specialist has ensured smooth implementation and monitoring.

Building upon the challenges and needs of women identified during meetings of the Women's Council in each target area, the members of these councils expressed their will and need for the implementation of a series of activities aiming to foster community resilience and prevent violent extremism through women's engagement as agents of change.

Why do we need WCI for P/CVE and R/R?

Women Council initiatives were designed to empower the previous action for the prevention of violent extremism in the frame of the project, aiming to include in activities discussions on key issues related to the role of women and the prevention of violent extremism (PVE). Many of the initiatives aimed to enable women to develop activities that serve to address the issues identified in previous meetings during Women's Councils, where challenges and gaps to women's empowerment were referred not only for development and social cohesion but also for protection and more security. One of the main challenges to overcome was women's inclusion and activation.

In addition, the activities planned were diverse and included practitioners and academics who are interested in understanding "why gender matters" in preventing violent extremism.

Main takeaways/ results:

Ø Engagement of women in awareness-raising activities and community engagement initiatives to prevent any form of extremism through the mobilization of women.

Ø Enhancement of women's awareness regarding their proactive role in local communities, raising awareness among community members about problems related to discrimination, and promoting an open dialogue on this issue.

Ø Promotion of an inclusive work environment for all individuals through promoting an equal and acceptable culture for all persons, including women, in combating discrimination and violence.

Building new networks and links between members of civil society organizations, public and private institutions, and other individuals to help develop policies and programs that support and improve the role and contribution of women in our communities.



Women Council Initiative Leshnice



Women Council initiative Yzberisht



Women Council Initiative Librazhd



Women Council initiative Kavaje



Women Council Initiative Mollas



Women Council Initiative Kashar



Women Council Initiative Kukës



Women Council Initiative Postribë



Women Council Initiative Bucimas



Women Council Initiative Mat

WOMEN COUNCIL INITIATIVES - KAVAJE

In this regard, the Women Council, in its work, aims to prevent violent extremism by conveying the message of how to build a community that accepts these women and communicates without using violent communication or language. The complete picture they bring from their experiences is crucial, preventing further recruitment and differentiating between choices made freely and those imposed with force.



Dhurata Sheme - Representative from Women Council, Kavajë.

For us, as the Women Council, the involvement of women returning from conflict zones in the integration process is crucial. We know that some of them are victims of the war and do not support the conflict. They are willing to risk their lives to protect the children already in these areas with them, and their return is a journey that cannot be realized solely with their desire but requires support.

Beyond their right to justice and human protection, it is much more important for us to appreciate the risks they took to leave these areas, to oppose the ongoing situation there, and, above all, to regain the peace society denied them and their children. It is important to work simultaneously between acceptance, integration, and the recovery of the consequences these women and children have experienced and left behind.

Another important element for the inclusion and integration of women returning from conflict zones is the role our community plays in accepting them into our lives and activities. It is important for us to build peaceful, secure, and tolerant social environments and communities that accept these women as part of them. In this regard, the Women Council, in its work, aims to prevent violent extremism by conveying the message of how to build a community that accepts these women and communicates without using violent communication or language. The complete picture they bring from their experiences is crucial, preventing further recruitment and differentiating between choices made freely and those imposed with force.

GOOD PRACTICE 10

VOCATIONAL EDUCATIONAL TRAINING AND COURSES

Vocational educational training and courses are provided to women and children returnees to enhance education on skills development for sustainable livelihoods, fostering collaborative partnerships for a safe workplace in the future. The desired impact of the WCDCA model is that the target beneficiaries have increased access to labor markets and gain improved incomes and security that contribute to their improved well-being and facilitate the process of integration. WCDCA, in collaboration with all the involved stakeholders, can work for standardizing this service and improving the results achieved by the project.

Why Vocational Trainings?

Vocational training programs are expected to improve the labor market prospects of jobs and employment for returners for various reasons, including:

Firstly, it directly contributes to reducing unemployment, which has been identified as a serious problem and a driving factor for some of the returnees to join their families and travel to conflict zones.

Secondly, they provide occupation-specific knowledge and job-related skills to participants, and the certificates are an important signaling device for potential employers.

Thirdly, the attendance of such courses is an opportunity to meet women in similar situations and to build networks that have been found to positively affect labor market opportunities (e.g., Calvo-Armengol and Jackson, 2004).

RESULTS:

24 (women and children) were beneficiaries of afterschool courses where 19 children attended foreign language courses (English, French, painting) and **3 children** were involved in **after school programs**, **2 women** followed **VET Training in culinary and tailoring courses**.



The way forward:

VET courses must be continued in order to further develop the success achieved so far, but also to make it a sustainable result, not only as a good practice implemented in this context but also as a good practice implemented to offer higher standards in educational systems, contributing to successful future education reforms.

Likewise, this practice, which has been successful up to the case we are discussing, should also be applied to the new cases of returnees that are expected to come. For these reasons, WCDCA recommends training for teachers and relevant stakeholders involved in the DRR process.

It is recommended to learn the Albanian language in addition to the foreign languages that are offered, because there are students who have little or no knowledge at all of reading and writing Albanian.

The result of the work so far should be published, promoted, and concretized in a success story of the returnees, not only as a success story of the organizations or persons working with the program as teachers or trainers. The result of the returnee's artistic work should be published as part of a public promotion attended by the target audience, mostly composed of those individuals who participated in their rehabilitation and reintegration process.

Reevaluation of women's needs for employment according to management cases and responding to those needs through individual professional training courses and lobbying for their employment in private and public institutions.

Vocational Educational Training for Children Returnees: WCDCA

VET Vocational Educational Training for Children Returnees is prioritized by WCDCA as a very important activity contributing to the reintegration of women and children returnees, starting with inclusion, activation, and education for reintegration. Education of returnees is selected as a top priority by WCDCA in the process of evaluation because it is a basic human right and the foundation for peace and sustainable development, which minimizes the risk and impact of the influence of ideologies that led to radicalization in the early phases.

While analysis research to assess the local labor and market needs of RFTFs and their families aims to identify potential job opportunities and skills required for RFTFs and their families to reintegrate into society, it may involve identifying training and education programs to help RFTFs and their families acquire the necessary skills.

The theory of change for the WCDCA model VET courses is based on the fundamental logic that:

- o Offers qualifications in technical and vocational skills that can facilitate access to labor markets, which in turn leads to improved incomes and security;
- o Learning can increase access to gaining such qualifications by increasing affordability and flexibility while enhancing relevance and the ability to achieve and demonstrate competence (quality).
- o Contributes to improving VET implementation practices in Albania in a new context, such as VET for returnees from conflict zones, whereas it has been offered for other categories as mentioned on vet-related documents provided by the Albanian Ministry of Education.

The importance of VET in returnee's context in Albania

Because other women and children are expected to return from the conflict zones in Albania, VET remains an activity that ranks among the good practices of reintegration.

- Involving the returnees in vet activities can compensate for linguistic barriers and the lack of knowledge that families may have of the education systems by offering additional education support. In doing so, the professionals should themselves be well equipped with strong abilities. This can help create greater collaboration bridges in the DRR process and help learners achieve higher qualifications by staying in education and training.
- Fostering inclusive and supportive work-based learning environments. It is important to establish mechanisms to prevent discrimination at entry and during the development of work-based learning. The standardization of application procedures for apprenticeships helps prevent discrimination against foreign-born children and young people.
- During the development of work-based learning, tutors or supervisors need to be alert to detect any discrimination situation as early as possible and act against it.
- Tailoring learning pathways to young people's and women's interests and learning styles, where there is a need for individualized education responses in some of the cases. This involves the development of individual learning or career plans based on an initial assessment of the young person's profile and existing skills. Such skills assessment is even more relevant in the case of young people with irregular learning pathways, for instance, newly arrived returnees' children who have been out of school for significant periods of time or who may have received little formal schooling before arriving in Albania.

- Validating non-formal and informal learning. Validation has the potential to bring wide benefits to children and young people who have dropped out of education. Finding opportunities to enable them to identify and recognize all the learning that happens outside of formal education can be significant. It can lead to a huge confidence boost, which is the first stepping stone towards a return to formal learning, finding a pathway to employment, or simply an understanding of their own competences and capabilities.

IMPORTANT TAKEAWAYS REGARDING VET:

VET courses contributed to raising prospects for economic empowerment, independence, and livelihoods for women returnees. In addition, children are offered more opportunities to reintegrate into the education system, which has enhanced their personal resilience.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATIONAL TRAINING

Dr. Xhuma Cupa is an education professional with a long career who graduated from the University of Tirana and was awarded the Naim Frasheri order of honor. She has effectively led the pre-university institute known as Celsi Magjik, or "Magic Key," since 2005. For about 5 months, she has been engaged in the framework of the GCERF program as an English teacher and shared with WCDCA her experience with the OG student.

Going on to tell her story, Dr. Xhuma says: The beginning was a challenge for me, since I had never met a child with such frozen emotions. I had my doubts regarding OG progress. At first, she only answered with yes or no. She never spoke about her parents or her family members, not a single word. But she was a good listener. I have tried to give her time, love, and affection as much as I could because her bright smile, which is so natural and innocent, blooming like a late spring rose, gave me hope and strength. I didn't tease her more, but I expected her to get involved and advance.

That's how her progress started with that smile; she started to communicate; she got involved in discussions; and it seems that the girl is intelligent. Then she has good achievements and results. There is no difference in progress compared to other children who follow the course. Today I am convinced that school and education are her future, not only to have a profession, but I see them as hope for rehabilitation and integration.

What will happen with her in the future? In a conversation with her friends, she said, "I wish they would subsidize me until the end." As far as I am concerned, I conclude that supporting the VET courses is definitely needed. Indeed, her education is a sensitive issue that requires special care because she lives with a grandmother and feels so lonely. This girl should be helped.

The work done with the children returnees should be continued because they can easily create stereotypes and are reluctant to return, regardless of the great work that has been done with the returnees. The continuity of the good practices implemented is a must. These children have to live their stolen lives; they are not just badly oriented, but they are abandoned by everyone except us, who work through this program. Isolation does not help.

Let's work together so that this well-started work progresses! It's not about us.

Her success story will be our real success story!



GOOD PRACTICES

BY



GOOD PRACTICE 11

NETWORKING EVENTS

Area of intervention: Recreative

Networking events aim to exchange experiences between local actors and front-line professionals, increasing cross-sectoral cooperation on identifying and reporting on community safety issues, case management, and providing services to children. The aim of these events is to establish synergies among front-liners and local stakeholders and provide peer-to-peer support on R&R management for RTFFs.

What was the impact? Main takeaways and results:

- National and local practices in identifying, reporting, and managing potential cases of extremism and radicalism.
- Responsive Case Management: Best practices enable precise and responsive interventions tailored to individual cases.
- Interagency Collaboration Enhancement: Stronger collaboration among agencies ensures a cohesive response to potential cases.

Feedback from beneficiaries

The effective handling of cases concerning children in need of protection necessitates the establishment of an integrated system wherein all institutional facets and elements of civil society engage collaboratively in formulating and executing individualized protection plans. Empirical evidence derived from practices associated with the management of mothers and children returning from conflict zones underscores that the crux of swift and high-quality integration lies in the manner in which institutions and civil society entities interact, a principle that is further reflected in specific cases and family units.

Who was involved? Key local actors and front-line professionals.

The way forward: The organization and promotion of local multi-actor, interdisciplinary “community of practice” networking events fosters continuous cooperation and the creation of ‘experts’ hubs’ among practitioners in the field.



Ms. Jonita Kabashi, Head of Sector, Child Protection Unit, Municipality of Tirana

GOOD PRACTICE 12

SCHOOL AS COMMUNITY CENTERS ACTIVITIES: CULTURAL, RECREATIONAL AND SPORTS ACTIVITIES WITH CHILDREN

Area of intervention: Education/ Recreative

School as Community Centers: This initiative transforms schools in the targeted municipalities into community centers, thus creating a space that serves the community and local state actors, helping them to grow into important partners in undertaking joint actions and shared responsibilities to prevent violent extremism locally. In addition, this intervention seeks to address the upcoming priorities related to reintegration and rehabilitation in accordance with the upcoming National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism and Reintegration and its Action Plan, as well as the relevant Action Plan of the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth.

To facilitate reintegration, particularly among youth and vulnerable children, the proposed intervention will also promote the development of a safe environment in schools that enables social cohesion and promotes acceptance.

The potential of this model for PVE measures is an immense effort to transform schools (pre-university level) into centers that serve the partnership of school, family, and community.

Its perspective relies on the level of engagement of other community players—local governments, civil society, communities of citizens, and other local actors—in building social cohesion and community resilience.

A series of carefully curated activities designed to cultivate a secure and inclusive environment, promoting social cohesion and acceptance among returning children.

1. Mindful Engagement Workshops:

Empower children with an understanding of the importance of sports and psychosocial relaxation techniques. These workshops not only enhance concentration but also provide effective tools for releasing negative emotions, fostering positive mental well-being.

2. Games and Outdoor Resilience Activities:

Immerse children in interactive games and outdoor activities geared toward building resilience skills. These experiences aim to instill strength, adaptability, and perseverance, empowering children to confidently navigate challenges.

3. Social Resilience Building:

Through targeted activities, we aim to strengthen children's social resilience, fostering closer ties with schools and community centers. This initiative acts as a protective factor, steering them away from harmful practices and promoting a sense of belonging.

4. Cultural Awareness Initiatives:

Our activities focus on raising awareness about cultural diversity, intercultural issues, and the importance of respect. By creating an inclusive environment that celebrates differences, we contribute to a school atmosphere where every child feels valued and understood.

5. Multifunctional Classes (IDM)

Children and youth require adequate infrastructure to organize activities and initiatives that bring them closer together. IDM has refurbished three schools with assets, computers, books, school didactics, and sports materials. Students were encouraged to use the premises through their engagement in computer courses, literature meetings, or other relevant activities.

What was the impact?

Activities with returned children to promote the development of a safe environment in schools that enables social cohesion and encourage acceptance.

Main takeaways/ results:

- Awareness raising of children regarding the importance of sport activities and psychosocial relaxing techniques to increase their concentration and release negative emotions;
- Games and outdoor activities helped build resilience skills.
- Enhanced social resilience to bring children closer to institutions such as schools and community centres and to keep them away from harmful practices.
- Raising awareness on cultural diversity, intercultural issues and respect.
- Sports and other physical activity provide outlets for aggression, tools to channel negative energy, opportunities to practice social and communication skills on a team, and a sense of self-worth or identity
- Children are more open to understand differences and control their behaviour towards others.
- Enhanced social resilience to bring children closer to institutions such as schools and community centres and to keep them away from harmful practices.

Who was involved?

Children frequenting community center “Te Qendrojme Se Bashku” and Community Centre “Multidisciplinare”.

The way forward: The School as Community Center has a vast replicability potential, and the establishment and functioning of children’s clubs will continue after the project ends.



“Te Qendrojme Se Bashku” Center and Community Centre “Multidisciplinare”

GOOD PRACTICE 13

SUMMER CAMPS

Area of intervention: Education/ Recreative

Targeting children returned from Syria, three summer camps were organized, 2 in 2022 and 1 in 2023. These camps lasted for around 1 week and were organized in collaboration with Community centres in Tirana. In the camps participated children frequenting the centres and returned children.

What was the impact?

The summer camp received positive feedback from the children, who expressed satisfaction with both the visited locations and the activities conducted. Notably, returning children from a family that had participated in the camp the previous year exhibited increased sociability and openness in forming new friendships.

Additionally, following the after-school program in the center, those who might not have had the opportunity for summer vacations were able to engage in enjoyable activities through the youth camps. This outcome provided them with a chance for recreation and enrichment during the summer period.

Feedback from beneficiaries

Children expressed positive feedback regarding the youth camps, the places visited, and the activities realized.

Who was involved?

Children frequenting community center “Multisiplinary” and “Te Qendrojme Se Bashku”, and children returning from Syria members of 2 different families.



“Te Qendrojme Se Bashku” Center and Community Centre “Multidisiplinare”

GOOD PRACTICE 14

EDUCATIONAL TRAINING COURSES

Area of intervention: Educational

Supporting teachers offered after-school programs for returning kids on several school subjects. Teachers drafted a plan for an extracurricular teaching program in collaboration with CVE, school psychosocial staff, and other teachers. The reports show that the kid is doing better in school and in the tests. Due to her background as a theologian, Bukurie provides advice to the kid in general on the role of education, the importance of consistency, self-efficacy, and other life skills, which are part of soft skill development.

What was the impact?

Returned children are reintegrated into the education system. Children have better educational performance on several subjects.



Bukurie Selimaj, assistant teacher

Feedback from beneficiaries

“Of course, the work is not so easy with the children, who came from a completely different reality and ought to have started school at a relatively earlier age. They have just started sitting on the school benches at a later, considerable age, after returning from places of conflict”.





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