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for Women and Girls



Hedayah  
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*This report was developed by the Counseling Line for Women and Girls with the support of Hedayah and the European Union, as part of an initiative to preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism in Albania.*

# BASELINE REPORT

**Socio-economic  
Situation and  
Perceptions of  
Violent Extremism  
and Radicalization in  
the Municipalities of  
Pogradec, Bulqizë,  
Devoll, and Librazhd**



# **Baseline Report**

## **Socio-economic Situation and Perceptions of Violent Extremism and Radicalization in the Municipalities of Pogradec, Bulqizë, Devoll, and Librazhd**



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**Tirana, 2020**

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## Introduction

This baseline report provides data and information on the targeted areas, including the socio-economic situation of each municipality and citizens' perceptions on safety and security in their communities.

To better understand the potential impact of the project “Strengthening a culture of resilience and harmony in Albania” in the four targeted municipalities, it is essential to analyze in depth the context in which the intervention is taking place. Therefore, a review of existing information and data from a specifically designed questionnaire took place in the early stages of the project implementation.

Thus, a detailed profile for each of the municipalities is presented in this report, which assesses whether there is already a referral mechanism in place and which are the actors that could be a part of it. The questionnaire portion also provides a clear picture of the target group/community that is instrumental in preparing the training manual and resource packages to respond to their needs and constraints.

The analysis for each municipality provides:

- Socio-economic profile of the target communities because poverty and inequality of opportunities are among the main drivers of VE in Albania.
- Administrative data on crimes and criminality, which provide context for the communities where the intervention is happening, how much security concerns are present, and what is the prevalence of crime and if it is related in any way to the emergence of radicalization and violent extremism.
- Findings of the existing research into the targeted regions produced by the Institute for Democracy and Mediation and other organizations.
- Needs, constraints, and gaps of the target groups in terms of CVE.

The methods used to collect data were both quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire conducted with citizens in each of the municipalities. Samples and selection methods are explained in the analysis of each municipality, as they were designed based on population of each. Qualitative data were collected through desk research and official requests for information from different institutions at local and central levels, such as police, municipality, employment office, Institute of Statistics, etc. These were then combined to provide an overview of the socio-economic and security situation in each municipality. The quantitative data will be especially useful in conducting an end-line analysis at the end of the project implementation period.

## Key findings

The four municipalities where the baseline analysis is conducted display similar typologies and socio-economic profile, all four being relatively small municipalities, with a mostly rural population, high level of poverty and some presence of foreign fighter returnees. In terms of perceptions related to religious harmony, identification, concerns in the community and safety issues most present some key findings can be drawn for all four municipalities. Some of the commonalities and joint themes that emerge from the baseline are:

- 1- ***Lack of structured referral mechanisms for cases of VE.*** All four municipalities lack well structured referral mechanisms and methods for citizens to report and seek support. Despite the presence of Local Safety Councils in three municipalities, they are not funded and do not function as a regular oversight and advisory mechanism to local authorities. More efforts are needed to make these bodies operational and introduce referral mechanisms as well as support services
- 2- ***Schools are the best places to conduct P/CVE programming.*** For the vast majority of respondents schools are considered the best place to produce counter messaging and addressing VE in general. This creates an opportunity to engage more with school officials, parents and teachers to build a triangle that contributes towards community resilience and captures the vulnerabilities of youth towards VE.
- 3- ***Poverty is identified as a main push factor towards VE.*** The selected municipalities have seen a number of recruitments and foreign fighter returnees in recent years. There is a high level of accordance among respondents that the reasons pushing people to join extremism groups are not as much ideological or personal motivation, rather than economic reasons. This is consistent with the socio-economic typology of each municipalities that see a high level of unemployment, especially among youth, high level of poverty, few economic investments and opportunities and a lack of proper social support nets for those in need. Therefore, addressing this as one of the root causes and manifestations of VE in these communities is essential.
- 4- ***Religious harmony is viewed as widespread in the community.*** The majority of respondents in all four municipalities view the existence of religious harmony as an added value in their communities and do not think there is more intolerance than harmony in their own communities. This could be directly related to Albania's internalized rhetoric of religious peaceful co-existence that has often been taken as an example for other countries. This is however a cautionary tale to not disregard tensions with a religious background that could manifest themselves especially in small and rural communities.
- 5- ***Religious leaders play an important role and influence among their followers.*** There is a general consensus among those interviewed in all municipalities that religious leaders exert important influence among their followers. This puts them in a good position to serve as change-makers, initiators of important discussions on VE and use their influence to raise awareness of misconceptions around religion and discrimination and thought distortions stemming from them.

## Municipality of Pogradec

### Socio-economic profile of the municipality

The municipality of Pogradec has an area of 548.77 km<sup>2</sup> and is composed of 8 administrative units and 72 villages.

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Administrative Units</b>	<b>Cities and villages</b>
<i>Pogradec</i>	Pogradec	City: Pogradec
	Udenisht	Villages: Udenisht, Memlisht, Çervenakë, Piskupat, Lin, Buqez
	Bucimas	Villages: Buçimas, Tushemisht, Peshkëpi, Gurras, Gështënjas, Remenj, Vërdovë, Bahçallëk
	Cerrave	Villages: ; Çërravë, Blacë, Bletas, Alarup, Pretushë, Grabovicë, Nizhavec, Kodras, Leshnicë, Lumas, Qershizë
	Dardhas	Villages: Dardhas, Stropckë, Grunjas, Prenisht, Derdushë, Osnat, Lekas, Nicë, Stërkanj
	Trebinje	Villages: Trebinjë, Çezmë e Madhe, Çezmë e Vogël, Hondisht, Selcë e Sipërme, Llëngë, Plenisht, Hoshtecë, Zemcë, Potgozhan, Malinë, Kalivaç, Pevelan, Dunicë, Guri i Bardhë
	Proptisht	Villages: Proptisht, Rodokal Sipër, Rodokal Poshtë, Homezh, Slabinjë, Somotinë, Kriçkovë, Selcë e Poshtme, Homçan, Vërri, Golik, Slatinë, Baribardhë, Selishtë, Zalltore
	Verranje	Villages: Velçan, Buzahishtë, Shpellë, Bishnicë, Jollë, Losnik, Laktesh, Senishtë

### Demographics

According to the 2011 Census, the municipality of Pogradec has 61,530 inhabitants – of these, according to the civil registry, 17% of the population belongs to the 0-14 age group, 75% to the 15-64 age group, the work-active and 10% are above 65 years old. This division speaks to a potential of the municipality in terms of its active population that constitutes the vast majority of the population, compared to the non-active population.

Gender ratio is balanced in the municipality, where 51% are men and 49% women. The demographic trend has been at an increase in the last few years in the biggest city, due to internal migration from villages and rural areas. However, there is a negative growth rate of the population due to migration and immigration, which is evidenced by an increase in the age group of 65 and above in the municipality.

## Education

The municipality has a large number of elementary schools spread out in its territory (53 schools). However, many of them do not fulfill standards for m<sup>2</sup> per student, and as a result there is a need for larger learning spaces for students. In total, there are 38 high schools with 2412 students (as per 2019), and 53 elementary schools with 6763 students. The municipality does not have a university in its territory, and students pursuing university degrees must move to the capital or other cities with a university system.

## Economy and employment

In the past, the municipality of Pogradec was an important industrial epicenter. Today, the Ohrid Lake has turned into a reference point for the economy of the city, and several villages alongside the coast of the lake depend largely on tourism, fishing, and hospitality for their economic development. Women are also largely engaged in traditional crafting and sewing. According to data from 2018, there were 296 new businesses registered in Pogradec during that year, which shows a tendency for growth and new jobs. However, more investments are needed to make economic development sustainable. According to data from the civil registry, unemployment in the municipality stands at 35%. This figure could be exaggerated due to migration flows that could explain some part of this high percentage. Unemployment is especially high in rural areas and villages, where it could jump up to 60%.

Social services are seen as problematic as the municipality cannot cover all the needs of identified individuals. Most social services are offered by non-profit organizations financed through voluntary contributions or foreign donors and partners. These services are mostly present in urban areas (90%), and they constitute less than 4% of total funds dedicated to social protection.

## Data on violent extremism

In the case of Albania, two small areas in Pogradec and one particular mosque in Tirana have contributed to over two thirds of all Albanian foreign fighters (FFs).<sup>1</sup> According to research conducted by the Institute for Democracy and Mediation, 24 people, including women and children, from a cluster of three villages near Pogradec, have joined jihadist fighters in Syria. Several young males from this group are relatives or friends who joined the radical network built around a mosque in one of the villages.<sup>2</sup> The report also found that unruly and anti-social behavior of youth is perceived to be strong in the municipality of Pogradec, among others. Religious families are more supportive of family values and to some extent may inhibit the anti-social behavior of youth. Although religious identities are mostly transmitted through family to adolescents and young adults, peer groups and friends play a significant role in inducing a religious worldview. In the study, Pogradec also ranked among the municipalities with a higher percentage of respondents that believed Sharia law should be mandatory in their communities, compared to other municipalities in the country. Data on foreign fighters from Albania and the disrupted network of the nine recruiters sentenced by the Court of Serious Crimes in 2016 support the rationale of this driver, but only to a certain extent. While many of the foreign fighters and the

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Other\\_Resources/WB\\_PVE/CTR\\_CaseStudy4\\_Albania\\_e.pdf](https://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Other_Resources/WB_PVE/CTR_CaseStudy4_Albania_e.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://idmalbania.org/study-violent-extremism-in-albania-november-2018/>



convicted recruiters originate from more distant areas (rural areas of Librazhd, Pogradec, Diber, etc.), they were residing and operating also in the outskirts of main urban centers such as the capital Tirane. Presence of individuals engaged as foreign fighters or with violent extremism activities in general was relatively highly perceived in the municipality of Pogradec – whereby 1 in 5 individuals reported the presence of such individuals in their community.

Finally, the only present referral mechanism in the municipality of Pogradec deals with cases of domestic violence, and thus there is not a coordinated approach to working with returning FFs, vulnerable individuals, and those at risk of radicalization and involvement with violent extremism. A referral mechanism for VE is lacking and there are no strategies, except for the national strategy on countering violent extremism, to address this concern at the local level.

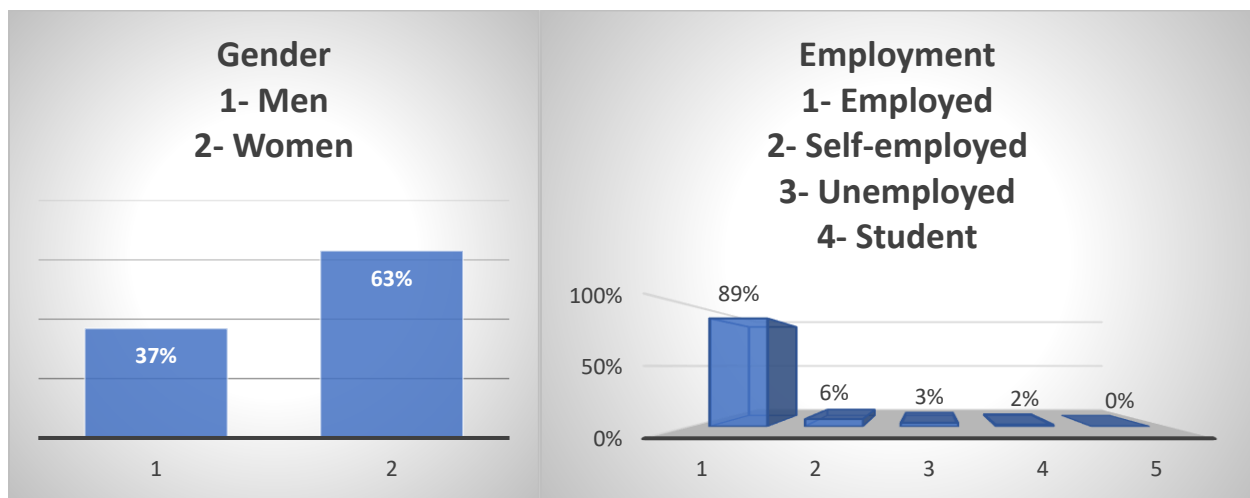
## Survey findings

### Demographic Data

As the graph below shows, the majority of respondents were women and obtained a university degree (63%). The vast majority of respondents are employed (89%), with a few that were unemployed and students. It is necessary to understand the context in which the survey was conducted, when Albania went under either full lockdown in some cities, or under severe restrictions and curfews in some other cities where the survey took place – which made it difficult to have access especially to those who are unemployed and students.

*Graph 1 – Gender of respondents*

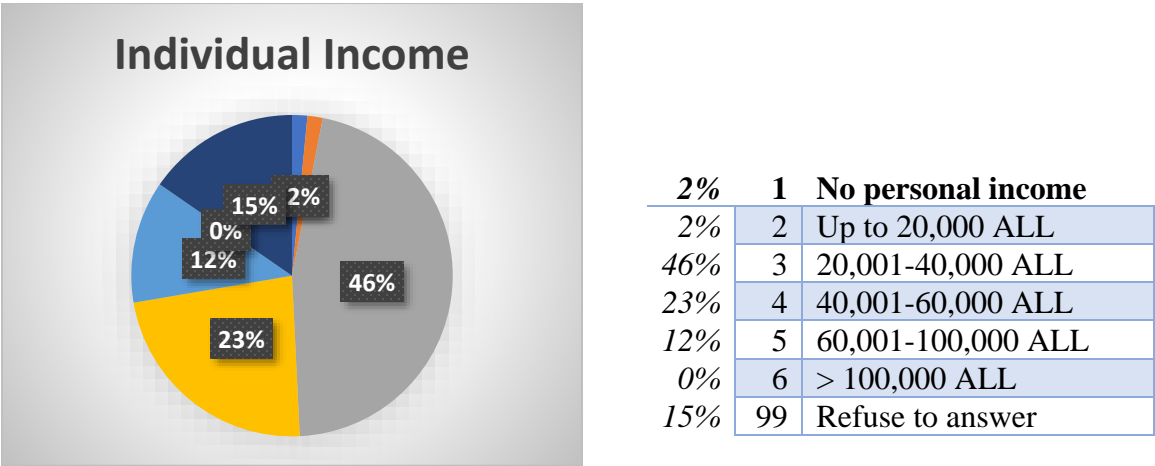
*Graph 2 – Employment Status*



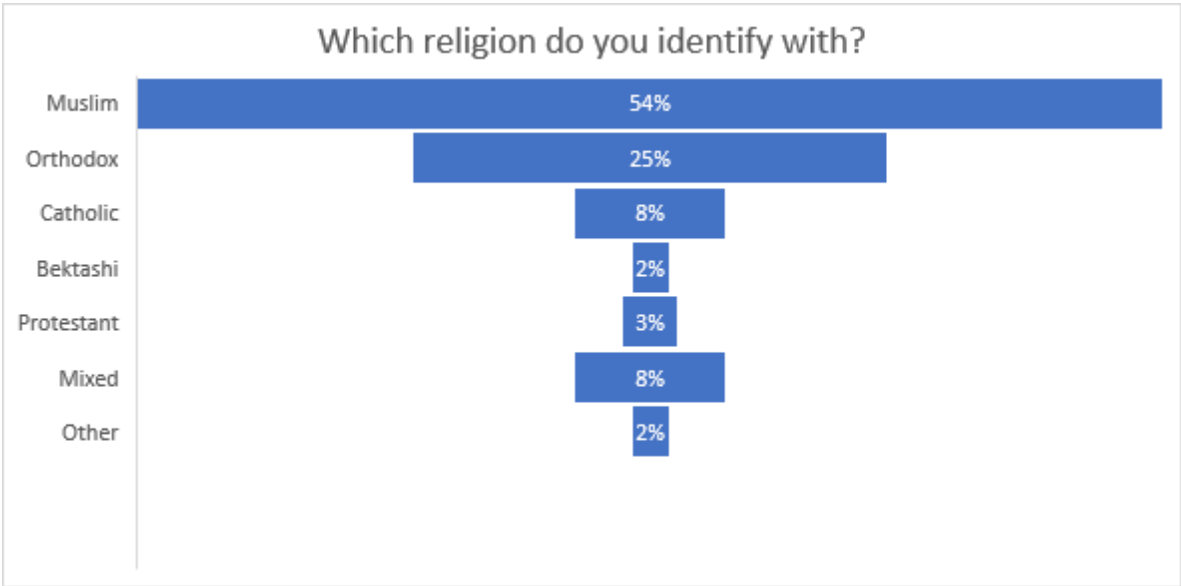
As graph 3 below shows, the vast majority of interviewed individuals (46%) earn between 20,000 ALL and 40,000 ALL – which is approximately 150-300 EUR, well within Albania's average income level. It should be noted that almost 15% of those interviewed refused to answer the question. Further, 23% made between 40,000 and 60,000 ALL and 4% made less than 20,000 (or had no personal income).

In terms of religious identification, the respondents largely reflect Albania's division, with 54% identifying as Muslims, 24% Orthodox, and 8% Catholic. Furthermore, 8% identified as mixed, which speaks to the degree of inter-faith marriages in the municipality of Pogradec.

Graph 3 – Individual income



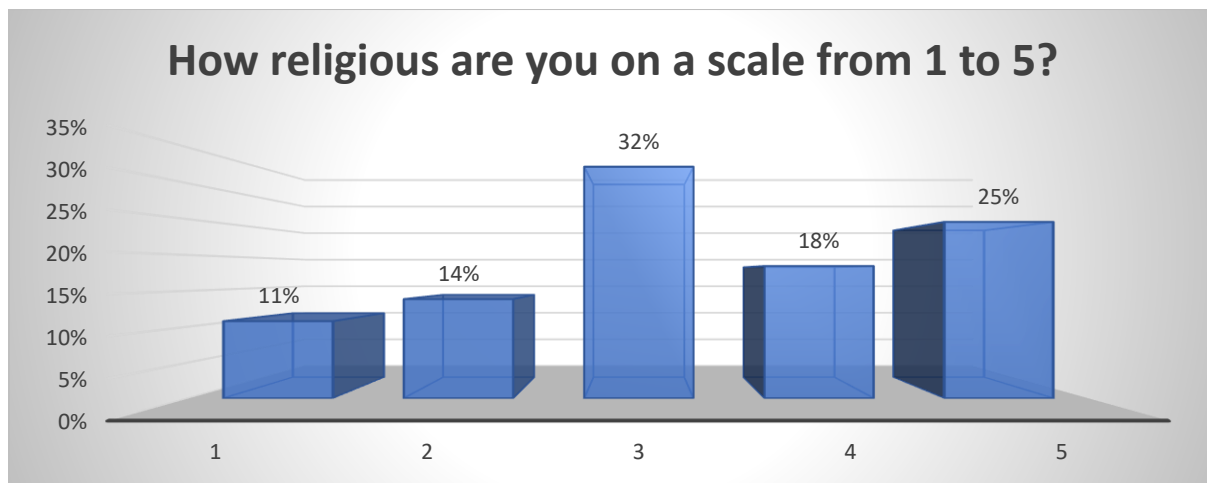
Graph 4 – Religious identification



Perceptions regarding religious faith

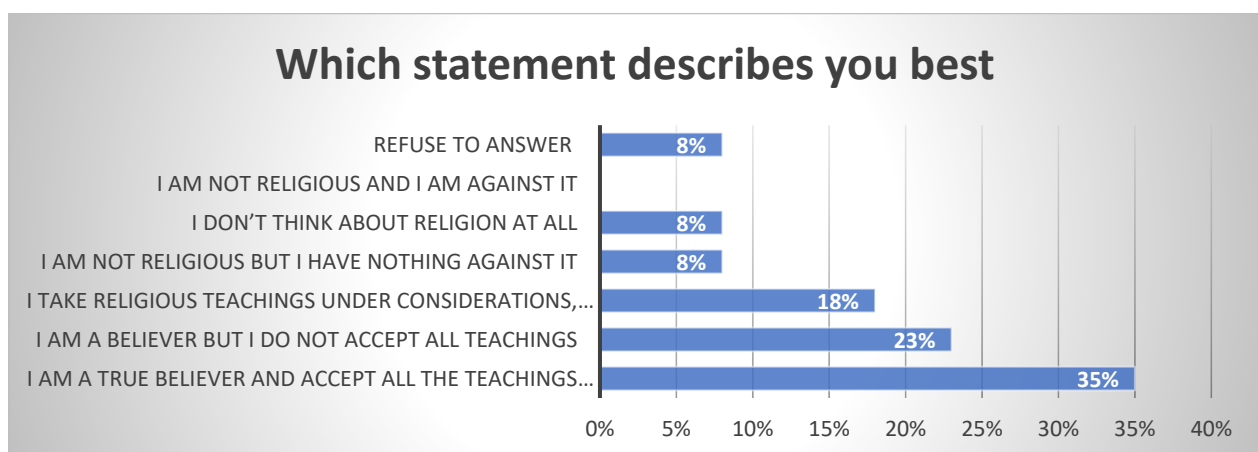
Survey respondents were asked a number of questions regarding their religious affiliations and beliefs. First, they were asked about the extent to which they were religious themselves on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is ‘not religious at all’ and 5 is ‘very religious’. As graph 5 below shows, the majority of respondents (32%) identify themselves as moderately religious. On the other hand, there are more who identify as very religious (25%) compared to those who do not identify as not religious (11%).

*Graph 5 – Extent of religiosity*



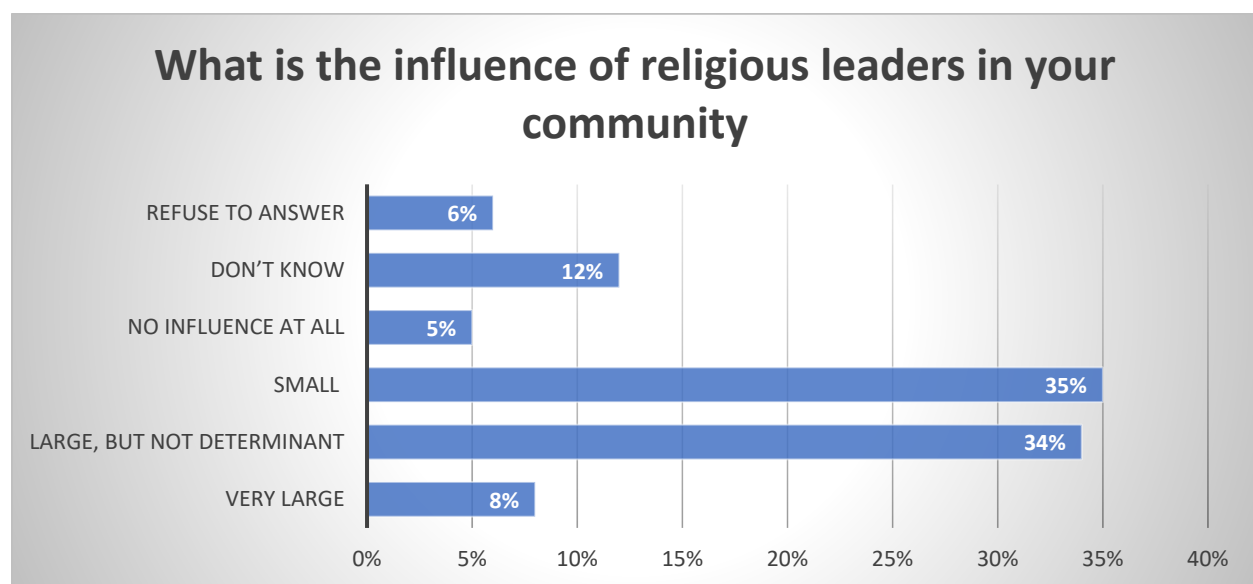
In addition to a self-identification and reflection on religiosity, respondents were asked about their perceptions and attitudes of religion in general, religious teachings in particular, and how they view themselves vis-à-vis these two. Graph 6 below shows that the majority of respondents consider themselves to accept all the teachings of their faith (35%), followed by those who believe themselves to be a believer but not accepting all the teachings of their religion. The more skeptical ones (18%) consider religion in general but do not believe in all the teachings and have a more distanced view. Only 8% declared to not think about religion at all, and even more telling is that none of the respondents consider themselves against religious teachings altogether. For a country that is largely believed to be indifferent to religion and religious teachings in general, these findings do shed light on how different communities see themselves and perhaps shows the increasing role that religion plays in communities around countries, especially relatively small-knit ones.

*Graph 6 – Attitudes about religious teachings*



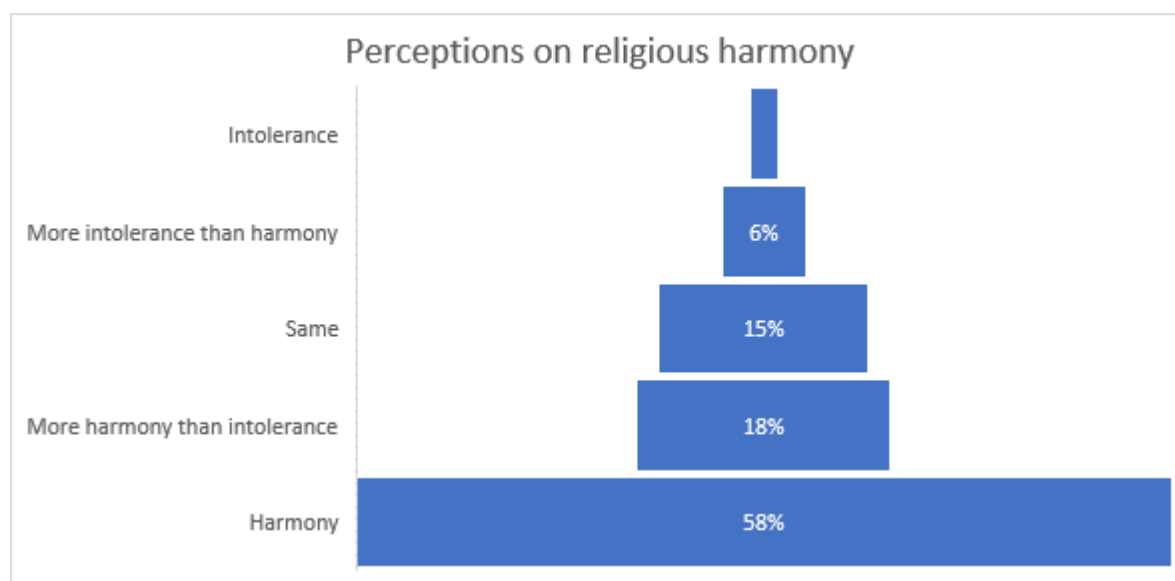
Respondents were also asked about their perception of the influence of the religious community in their city/place of residence. The question aims to understand the presence of religious leaders and their position within community representatives. As graph 7 below shows, there is an almost equal division between those who think that the influence of the religious community is high or very high and those who think that their influence is low or very low (42% and 40% respectively). It should be noted that a significant 12% of respondents are not aware about their influence. The answers to this question to a certain extent mirror the results in graph 5 regarding religiosity of respondents, where most identified themselves as moderately religious, but there were more who identified as very religious compared to those who do not identify as religious altogether.

*Graph 7 – Influence of religious community*



Lastly, religious tolerance and co-existence are repeated mantras in Albanian society, with some widespread beliefs on the importance of these values. As such, respondents were also asked about religious tolerance in their community. More than 1 in 2 respondents believe that there is religious harmony in their community, followed by another 18% who believe that there is more harmony than intolerance in their community. Only 8% in total believe that there is intolerance or at least more intolerance than harmony in their community.

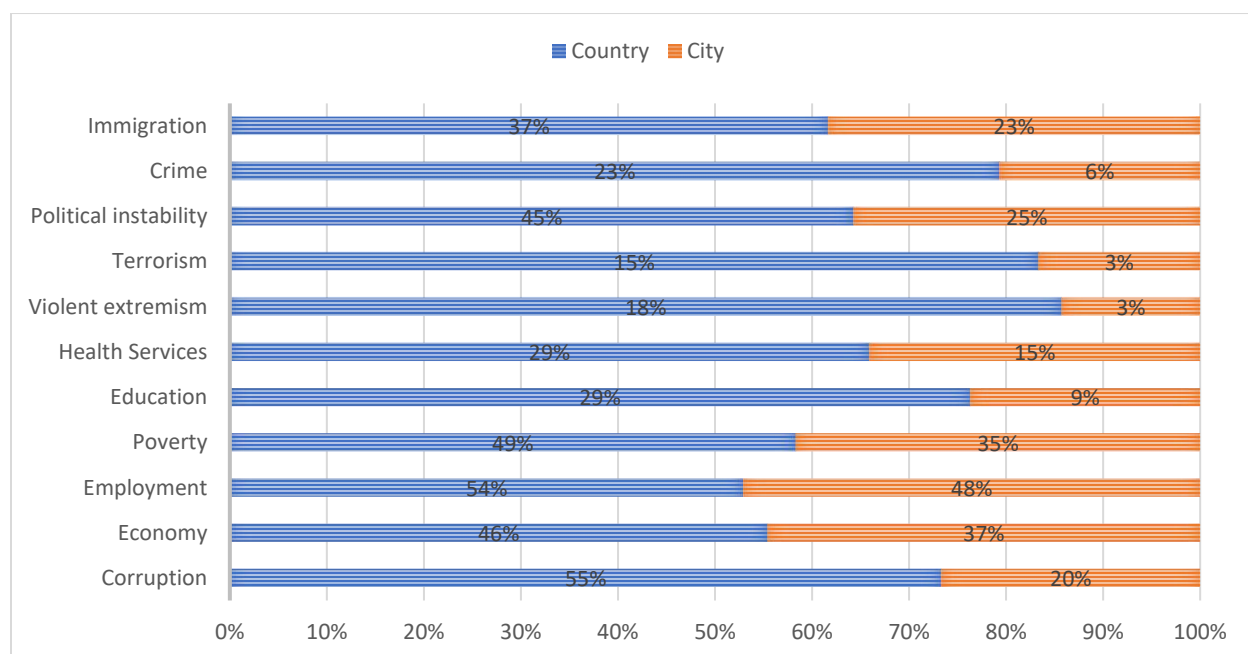
Graph 8 - Religious tolerance/harmony



#### Perceptions on concerns in the community

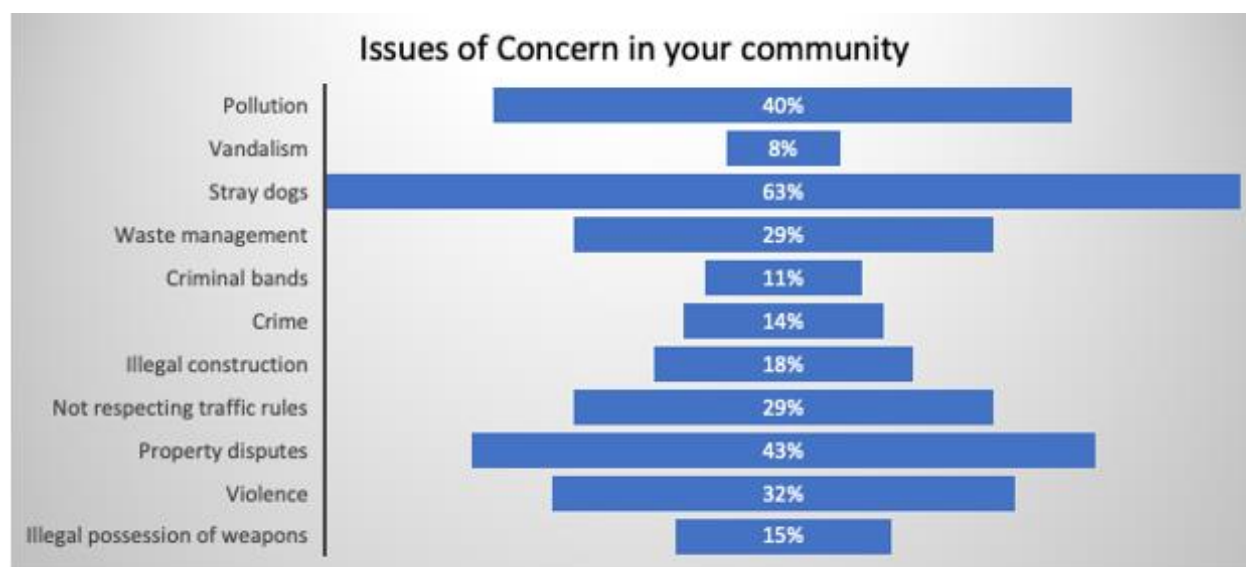
Respondents were asked about the most pressing issues facing both the country in general and their community more specifically. There are significant differences, as graph 8 below shows, on their perceptions regarding general issues of concern at the macro level, and what they believe their city and community are facing. For instance, more than half of respondents believe that corruption is the most important issue facing the country today (55%) followed by employment concerns (54%) and poverty (49%). The three most important issues facing the city they live in are employment (48%), economy (37%) and poverty (35%). Issues related to violent extremism and terrorism are identified as issues of concern by 3% of those who participated in the survey as to impact the city of Pogradec, while a higher percentage (18% and 15%) believe that violent extremism and terrorism are issues of concern for the country in general. The main concerns identified by respondents are further corroborated by over half of respondents who believe that there are many families in their cities that cannot afford basic necessities. A problematic finding was that 42% of respondents believe that families have little or no control over young people and their actions.

*Graph 9 – Most important issues facing the country and the community*



In addition to more general topics of concern, respondents were also asked about specific issues that relate to their community and city, and were asked to identify which ones are most problematic and of concern to them personally. As graph 9 below shows, the majority of respondents identify stray dogs, property disputes, and pollution as the most common issues troubling their communities. Criminal activity is seen as problematic by 11% (criminal bands) and 14% (crime in general) of all respondents. Furthermore, 1 in 3 respondents identified violence as a problem in their community, which, as explained to those who participated in the survey, related also to gender-based and domestic violence.

Graph 10 – Issues of concern to the community



Respondents were asked to assess how safe they felt in their surrounding area, in the city they live in, and in the country more generally. We see a tendency of feelings of safety decreasing when going from the neighborhood to the country, which shows that most respondents know their communities well, might have lived there for a long time, and are familiar with the community surrounding them. The majority is ambiguous when it comes to the country, whereby 68% feel neither safe nor unsafe living in Albania. A further 34% and 38% are also ambiguous on living in their neighborhood and city respectively.

Graph 11 – Feelings of safety in community, city, country

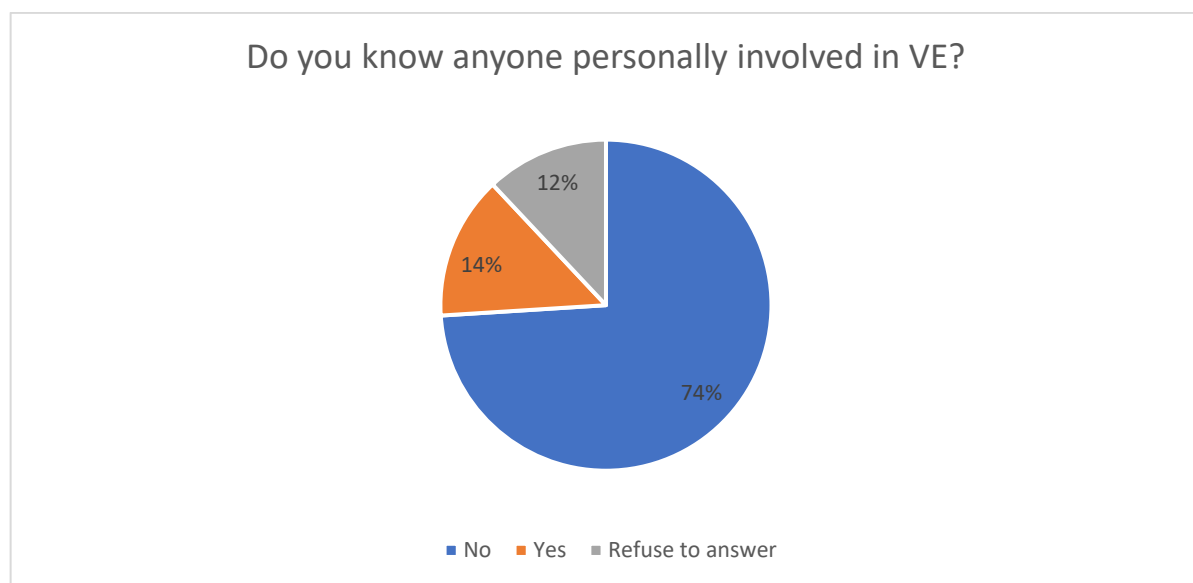




### Perceptions on violent extremism

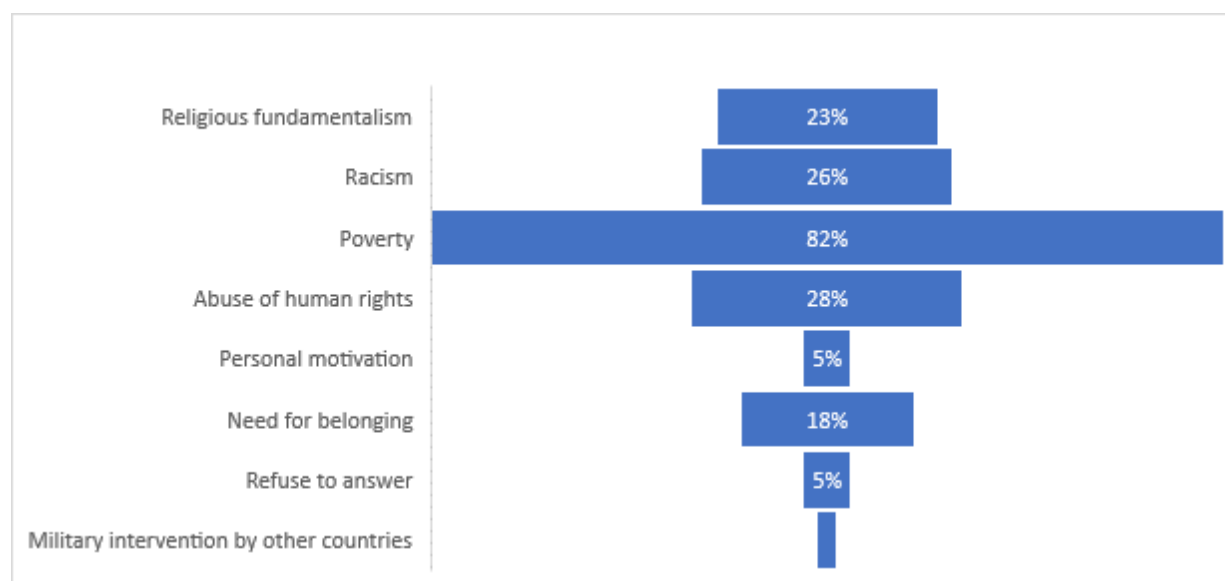
Finally, and most importantly, survey respondents were asked a number of questions regarding their perceptions on violent extremism in general, as well as concerning their communities and themselves. Survey respondents were asked whether they personally knew someone who had been or is currently engaged in any forms of violent extremism. Graph 11 below shows that the majority (74%) had no personal connection, while 14% declared to know someone previously connected to VE. The remaining respondents ( 12%) refused to make this fact known.

*Graph 12 – Personal acquaintance with someone involved in VE*



Understanding push and pull factors of violent extremism is an important step towards addressing its root causes and intervention methods. Therefore, respondents were asked to identify what they believed to be the main causes for engaging in VE. As graph 12 clearly shows, a vast majority identifies poverty as the main push factor (82%), followed by abuses of human rights and racism as pull factors (28% and 26% respectively). Personal motivation and a need for belonging were identified less as potential causes (5% and 18% respectively).

Graph 13 – Main causes of VE



Despite the belief that poverty pushes individuals towards VE, a majority of the respondents do not agree that it is impossible to steer individuals away from radicalization and violent extremism, while 40% further agrees that state institutions should work hard to return Albanian citizens engaged in conflicts in other countries.

In line with the respondents' agreement that state institutions should be engaged in the return of Albanian citizens involved in other countries' conflicts, they were asked to identify the main actors that should be involved in preventing violent extremism in Albania. It is clear from graph 14 below that respondents consider all actors identified as important in preventing and combating VE, showing the necessity for the whole community to approach the issue – which the literature largely views as an effective tool. Traditional security-based responses to VE have proven insufficient and countries are increasingly taking a broader approach to address the root causes, rather than the manifestations only. As such, states draw on the support of society in general, including civil society and businesses with an emphasis on dialogue, cooperation and partnerships between government sectors and non-government actors (such as academia, civil society, media and the private sector. This approach is known as a whole-of-society approach and has the potential to create a broad-based coalition to prevent, not only counter, violent extremism.<sup>3</sup>

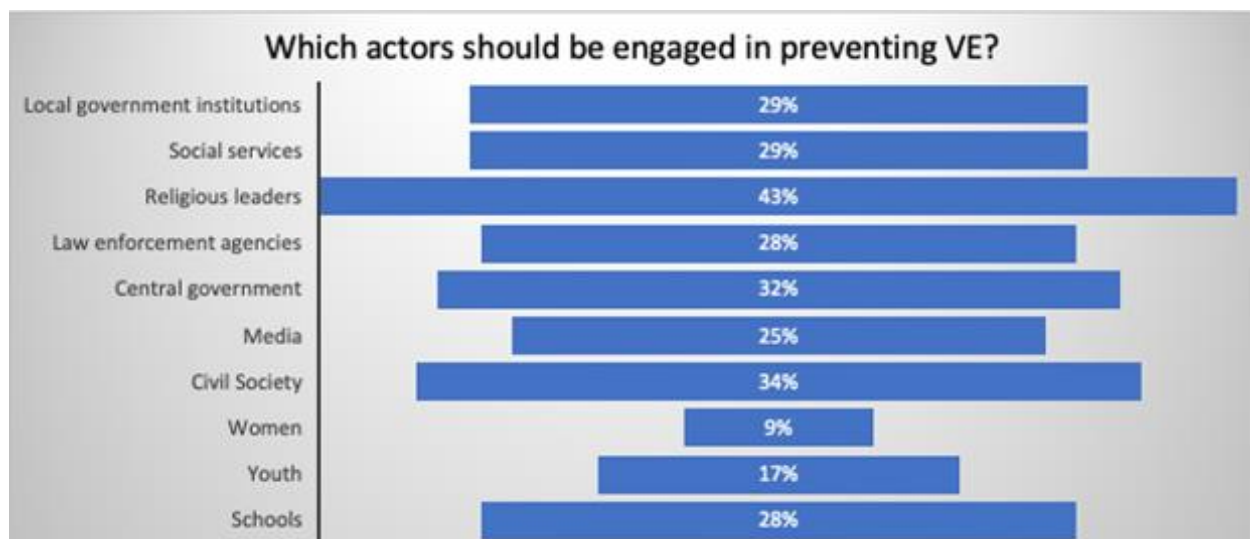
The effectiveness of this approach lies in the active and continued participation of a wide range of actors, including community members in designing and implementing policies that tackle VE. However, some actors are seen to play a more active role than others among those interviewed. Respondents identify religious leaders, central government, and civil society as the main actors that should be engaged in preventing and countering VE. Less importance is placed on women, youth, and the media. However, considering the importance of the media in changing and shifting perceptions, the vulnerability of many young people to VE and the potential of women to play a

<sup>3</sup> OSCE. A whole of society approach to preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism. Online: [https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/a/7/444340\\_0.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/a/7/444340_0.pdf)

key role in preventing VE within their families, it becomes essential then to educate citizens on the role that each actor and institution, as well as community, needs to play in order to holistically respond to challenges posed by VE in their communities and cities.

Building community resilience has also proven effective in addressing different types of violence as research points out. In this regard, social connections lie at the heart of resilient communities and any strategy to increase community resilience must both harness and enhance existing social connections.<sup>4</sup> This can be more easily achievable in small and tight knit communities, which is the case for the municipality of Pogradec, due to its small geographic spread and low population number which makes the community largely familiar with each other.

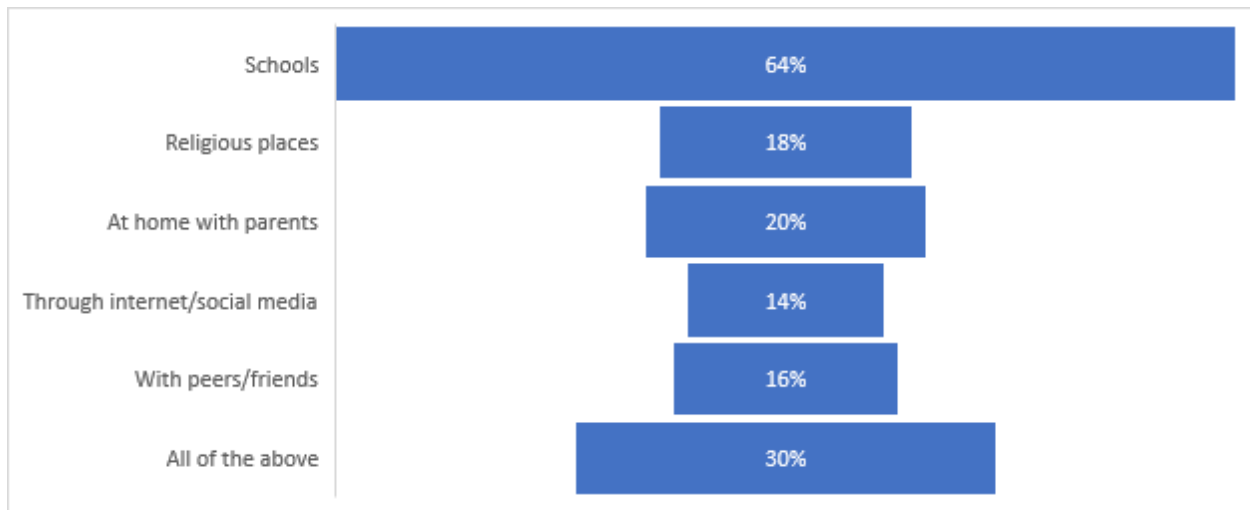
*Graph 14 – Main actors involved in preventing VE*



In addition to actions to prevent VE, it is also important to build counter-narratives, which is a focus of the current intervention. Thus, respondents were asked to identify the best tools and spaces where counter and alternative messaging should be conducted in their community. To this, the vast majority responded that schools are the best place to carry out these messages and reach especially vulnerable young people (64%). Furthermore, 1 in 3 respondents said that all of the options provided should be used as primary sources and places where messaging should be focused and P/CVE measures undertaken, which includes religious places, at home with parents, among youth peers, and using internet and social media. Therefore, it becomes clear that working with schools is essential to efforts to combat and prevent VE.

<sup>4</sup> American Psychology Association. Heidi Ellis and Saida Abdi. Building community resilience to violent extremism through genuine partnerships. Online: <https://content.apa.org/manuscript/2017-13879-009.pdf>

*Graph 15 – Places where CVE efforts should be placed*



## Conclusions and recommendations

- 1- There is a lack of referral mechanism/coordinated response to VE in the municipality of Pogradec.
  - The municipality of Pogradec has established a Local Safety Council, which seems to be relatively operational. A re-evaluation of the roles and responsibilities of the LSC could be carried out to determine the feasibility of adding referral responsibilities to the LSC. Conduct an assessment of the capacities of the municipality to budget a referral mechanism on VE and revise the LSC composition and duties to serve as a referral mechanism in the future.
- 2- There is a lack of frequent and regular data collection on safety and security, including issues related to VE that would contribute to informed decisions and policies on P/CVE.
  - Support the municipality of Pogradec to regularly collect data from local law enforcement institutions, especially police, on security and VE in particular and regularly share these data with the LSC members. Support the municipality of Pogradec with a data collection plan on security indicators.
- 3- Pogradec is one of the identified hotspots for VE in Albania, as data shows that a large number of FFs were recruited in several areas around Pogradec.
  - Support the municipality in investigating further the root causes of the emergence of foreign fighters in their area, which should be carried out by security institutions in collaboration with municipality officials and the CVE Center in Tirana.
  - Assist the municipality of Pogradec in developing local reintegration plans for returning fighters and their families and provide psychological support services for them and their families as well as the immediate communities around them
- 4- Schools are identified as the best places to produce counter messaging and PVE initiatives, together with religious places as well as the home.
  - Coordinate with the CVE Center and the Ministry of Education to develop curricula on the topic of P/CVE
  - Establish Parent Teacher Associations to discuss emerging issues in the school environment
  - Support the municipality to extend the School as Community Center model in the municipality of Pogradec, which is being piloted in several municipalities around the country.
- 5- Poverty is identified by far as the most important driver of VE and push factor for individuals to become foreign fighters, followed by abuses of human rights, and racism – which has important implications for future interventions.
  - Advocate for a clear local economic development plan for the municipality to address existing economic grievances among the population, especially those in rural areas
  - Extend economic aid programs (such as Ndihma Ekonomike) to the poorest households as identified through a transparent process, to alleviate poverty.

- 6- There is a perception of high influence for the religious community in the municipality of Pogradec according to survey findings.
  - Engage more religious leaders in the existing Local Safety Council through regular meetings, sharing of information and identification of challenges.
  - Coordinate with religious leaders in Tirana to identify problematic clusters and prevent the phenomenon of FFs from emerging in those clusters.
- 7- Among those participating in the survey, the majority is highly involved with their religion and gives it a high importance – which should drive any efforts to involve and include the religious community in P/CVE efforts.
  - Support municipality to identify and engage young religious leaders and followers in the community to serve as role models and engage their peers.
  - Support municipality to conduct a campaign in collaboration with religious leaders in their communities to counter and/or create new narratives of peace, harmony, collaboration and conflict resolution.

Based on the conclusions and recommendations above the following issues/topics should be addressed more specifically in the training:

- 1- A brainstorming session on the feasibility and efficiency of establishing a referral mechanism at the municipality level
- 2- A more detailed analysis of socio-economic factors that push individuals to engage in VE and as Foreign Fighters. As poverty was identified by far as the most significant cause of VE in respondents' perception, it would be important to address economic grievances, ways to address them and build dialogue between the community and local government representatives.
- 3- Engage religious leaders not only as active participants but contributors and partners in the training sessions and awareness raising.
- 4- Include a separate module on the role of schools in countering and preventing VE and especially the School as a Community Center model piloted in several municipalities of Albania.
- 5- Engage civil society organizations at the local level in delivering the training and map their activities as they relate to VE. Respondents identify civil society as the second most important actor, therefore their active participation and visibility during the training should be kept in mind.
- 6- Include a module on roots of perceived religious harmony in Albania. Majority of respondents believe there is religious harmony in their community, which together with the belief that religious leaders play an important role could be used as an advocacy tool against VE.
- 7- Conduct a brainstorming session and exercise on joint initiatives between participants and their religious leaders and support these initiatives through local public funding or through fundraising support.**

## Municipality of Bulqizë

### Socio-economic profile of the municipality

The municipality of Bulqize has an area of 678.51 km<sup>2</sup> and a density of 59.28 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> according to the civil registry. The municipality is composed of 8 administrative units, 2 cities, and 63 villages (as the table below suggests).

Table 1 - Administrative units

<i>Municipality</i>	<b>Administrative Units</b>	<b>Cities and villages</b>
<i>Bulqize</i>	Bulqize	City: Bulqize, Villages: Vajkal nr1, Vajkal nr 2
	Martanesh	City: Kraste, Villages: Gjon, Lenë, Peshk, Val, Stavec, Mëlcu, Ndërfushas
	Fushe Bulqize	Villages: Fushë - Bulqizë, Dushaj, Dragua, Koçaj
	Zerqan	Villages: Zerqan, Krajkë, Peladhi, Smollik, Sofraçan, Sopot, Strikçan, Tërnovë e Madhe, Tërnovë e Vogël, Valikardhë, ZallSopot, Zall-Strikçan, Godvi
	Shupenze	Villages: Shupenzë, Vlashaj, Boçevë, Homesh, Okshatinë, Kovashicë, Zogjaj, Shtushaj, Topojan, Mazhicë, Gjuras, Bllacë
	Gjorice	Villages: Gjoricë e Sipërme, Gjoricë e Poshtme, Çerenec i Sipërm, Çerenec i Poshtëm, Viçisht, Lubalesh
	Ostren	Villages: Ostren i Madh, Radovesh, Kojavec, Lejçan, Orzhanovë, Okshatun i Madh, Oreshnjë, Okshtun i Vogël, Ostren i Vogël, Tuçep, Lladomericë, Pasinkë, Tërbaç
	Trebishte	Villages: Klenjë, Gjinovec, Trebisht- Balaj, Trebisht-Çelebi, Trebisht- Mucinë, Vërnice

### Demographics

According to the 2011 Census, Bulqiza has a population of 31,210 inhabitants; meanwhile, according to the city's civil registry, the city has 40,223 inhabitants, with a density of 59.28 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>. The vast majority of the municipality identifies as Muslim, with a minor presence of other religious communities. One of the areas of the municipality contains a small community of Macedonian ethnicity (19 people). However, it is believed that the number is higher than official statistics. 26% of the population is composed of the 0-14 age group, and 65.6% are in the 15-64 age group, with the elderly comprising a little over 8% of the total population.<sup>5</sup>

Women represent 49.6% of the total population and 12.8% of the families are female-headed households. There has been a downward trend in population growth as a result of internal migration flows, but also immigration with a depopulation of 27.36%.

<sup>5</sup> According to INSTAT Census.

## Education

The municipality shows low levels of indicators when it comes to different levels of education compared to the country and the whole region. Approximately 22.7% of the population that is 15 years old and above have concluded middle education, while 4% have a university degree. There are a little over 4,000 students in lower and middle schools, of which 45.4% are girls and 54.6% boys. At the high school level, there are a little over 1,000 students, of which 48.7% are girls and 51.3% are boys.

## Economy

The geographical position and composition of the municipality determines that economic development depends largely on agriculture as well as extraction of chrome, for which the region of Bulqiza is widely known in the country. Another resource for economic development in the municipality is considered mountainous tourism as well as collection of medicinal herbs, which are widespread in the area.

Several major projects were undertaken in efforts to boost the economic development of the municipality, including several infrastructure projects to extend road connections between different parts of the region and the building of the highway connecting Bulqize to the capital – which would significantly shorten distances.

The municipality boasts a number of companies that are mainly extracting chrome from the natural resources of the city, while the number of those employed in this sector has increased in recent decades. Since 2002, the number of non-agriculture factories has increased. For instance, in 2010, Bulqiza had only 601 businesses, or 19 enterprises per 1000 inhabitants. In 2015 only, 108 new subjects were registered, of which 32 were public, and 76 were in the private sector. Trade and services hold the majority of the burden.

In the last few years, economic activity has been slightly redirected to include tourism as an opportunity for economic development. However, the sector is in its first steps and needs investment, human capital, and resources to be able to attract domestic and foreign visitors to the extent that it becomes an important sector and field of employment.

Data from the past 5 years shows that there has been a downward trend in employment rate for the region. Whereas in the first quarter of 2016 employment rate was 52%, in the first quarter of 2019 employment rate was 44%. The same trend is seen in other quarters throughout the years.

## Data on Violent Extremism

The Municipality of Bulqize has several established structures that directly or indirectly connect to efforts to prevent and counter VE. For instance, in 2018, the municipality with the support of USAID established a Local Safety Council in Bulqize, comprised of a number of local actors and institutions, including municipality officials, police, civil society, religious leaders, school officials, etc. The purpose of the LSC is to serve as an advisory body to the Mayor of the city in all areas related to security and safety, including VE.<sup>67</sup> USAID has also supported the

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<sup>6</sup>[http://databaza.instat.gov.al/pxweb/sq/DST/START\\_TP\\_LFS\\_LFSQ/NewLFSQ003/table/tableViewLayout2/?xid=40d7069e-7da4-4873-8a4e-18ce9972a2d6](http://databaza.instat.gov.al/pxweb/sq/DST/START_TP_LFS_LFSQ/NewLFSQ003/table/tableViewLayout2/?xid=40d7069e-7da4-4873-8a4e-18ce9972a2d6)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.plgp.al/local-security-council-established-in-bulqiza/>



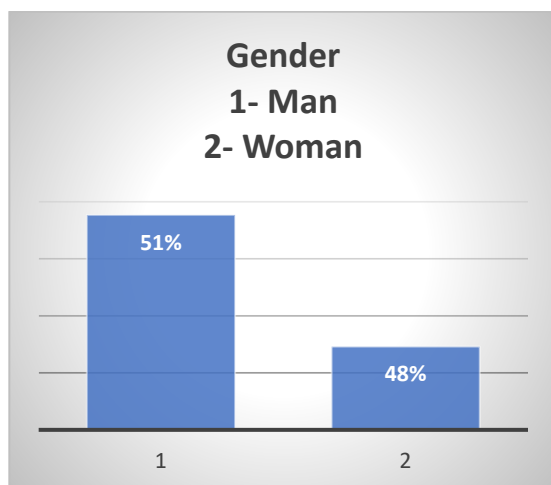
establishment of a youth board in the city, which also serves as an advisory body to the mayor and as a tool to engage youngsters in different aspects of public and social life. The youth council has also included in its activities and interventions counter-messaging to VE, training with youth on bullying and VE in schools, etc. Therefore, structures do exist that could enable referral of cases, but more efforts are needed to establish a better coordination mechanism to refer cases of VE by different actors.

## Survey findings

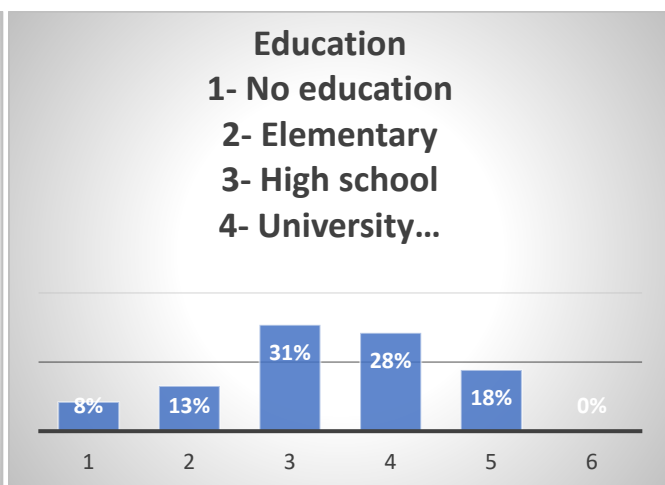
### Demographic data

Graph 1 and 2, displayed below, show the gender distribution of the sample and level of educational attainment of the respondents of the survey. There is a balanced representation between men and women in the sample, whereby 51% are men and 48% women. Regarding educational attainment, the majority of respondents have a high school degree (31%), with the second largest group having a university degree (28%).

*Graph 1 – Gender distribution*

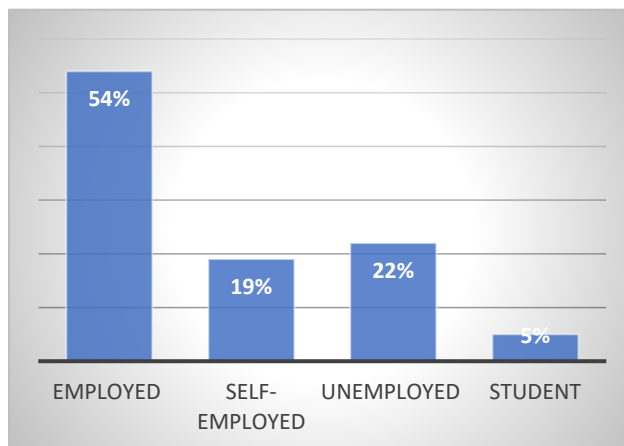


*Graph 2 – Education level*

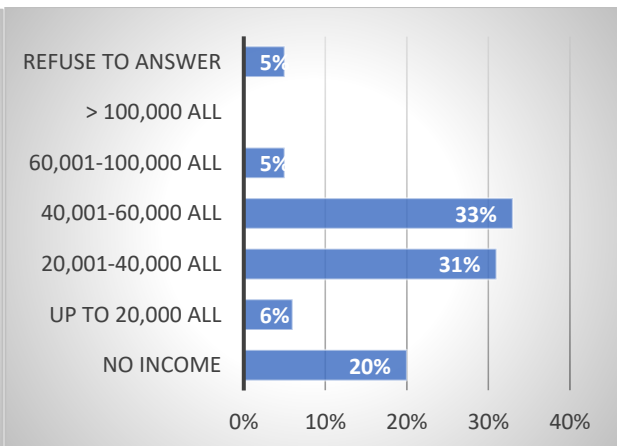


Furthermore, a little over 1 in 2 respondents reports to be employed, followed by 1 in 5 who report to be unemployed at the moment. 5% of those interviewed were currently students. When asked to report their personal income, 5% of respondents refused to answer. The majority is split between those in the 20,000-40,000 ALL category and those in the 40,000-60,000 ALL category of income, with the fewest reporting up to 100,000 ALL income (approximately 800 EUR).

*Graph 3 – Employment status*

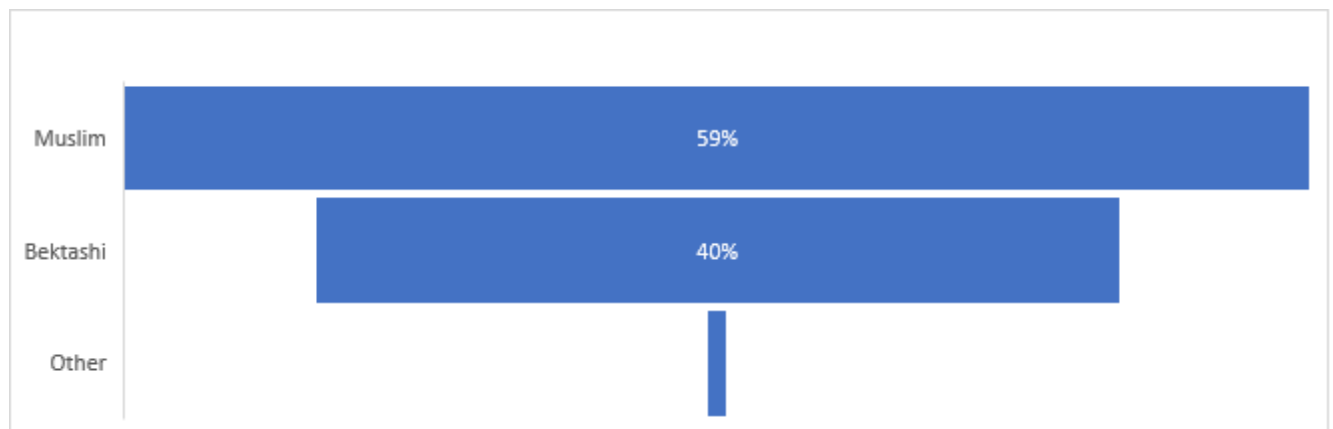


*Graph 4 – Personal income*



Desk research in the previous section of the baseline for the municipality of Bulqize revealed that the vast majority of the city inhabitants belong to Islam. The graph below corroborates these findings to reveal that almost all those interviewed identify either as Muslim or Bektashi, both within Islam. It should be noted that there are no reported cases of mixed religious identification, making the inhabitants of the city widely homogenous in their religious identity.

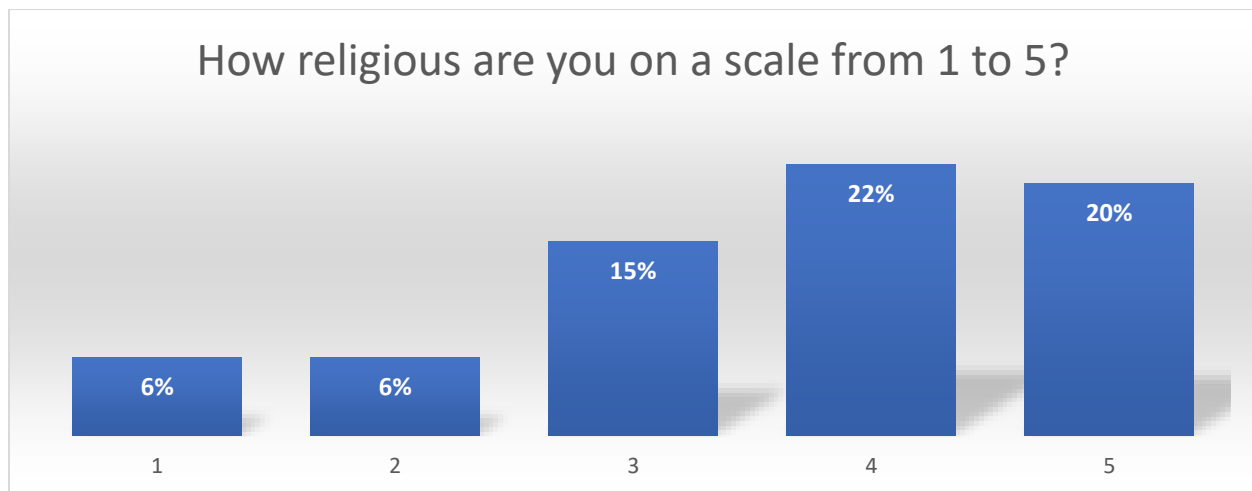
*Graph 5 – Religious identification*



#### *Perceptions regarding religious faith*

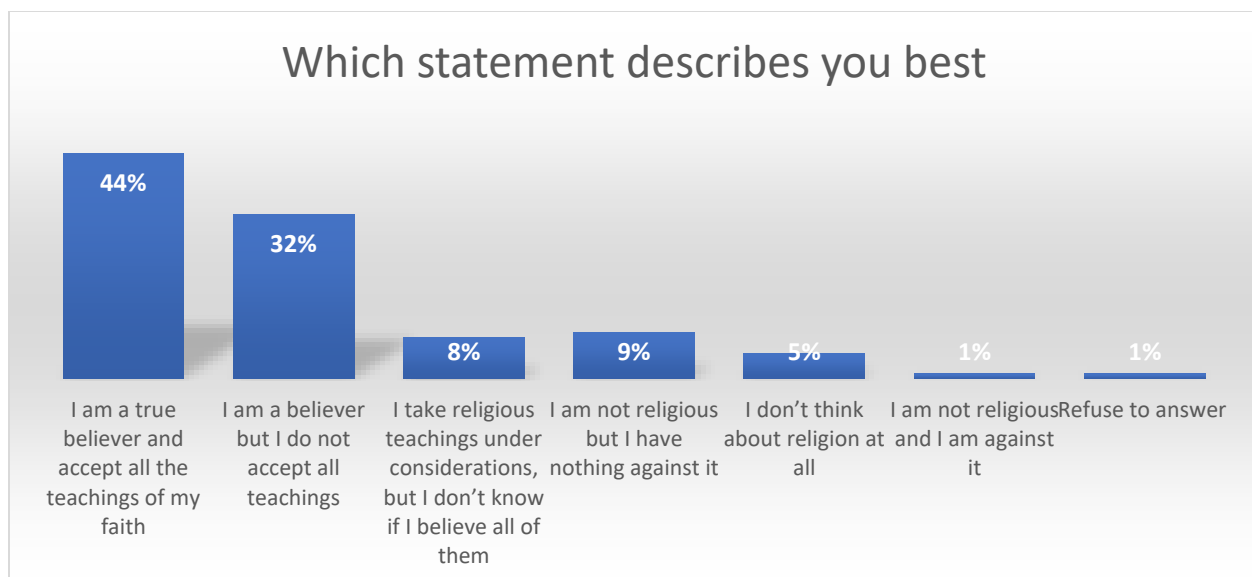
Survey respondents were asked a number of questions regarding their religious affiliations and beliefs. First, they were asked of the extent to which they were religious themselves on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is 'not religious at all' and 5 is 'very religious'. As graph 5 below shows, the majority of respondents identify themselves as very religious standing on the 4 and 5, religious and very religious at the rate of 42%. Only 12% identify themselves as little to not religious.

Graph 6 – Extent of religiosity



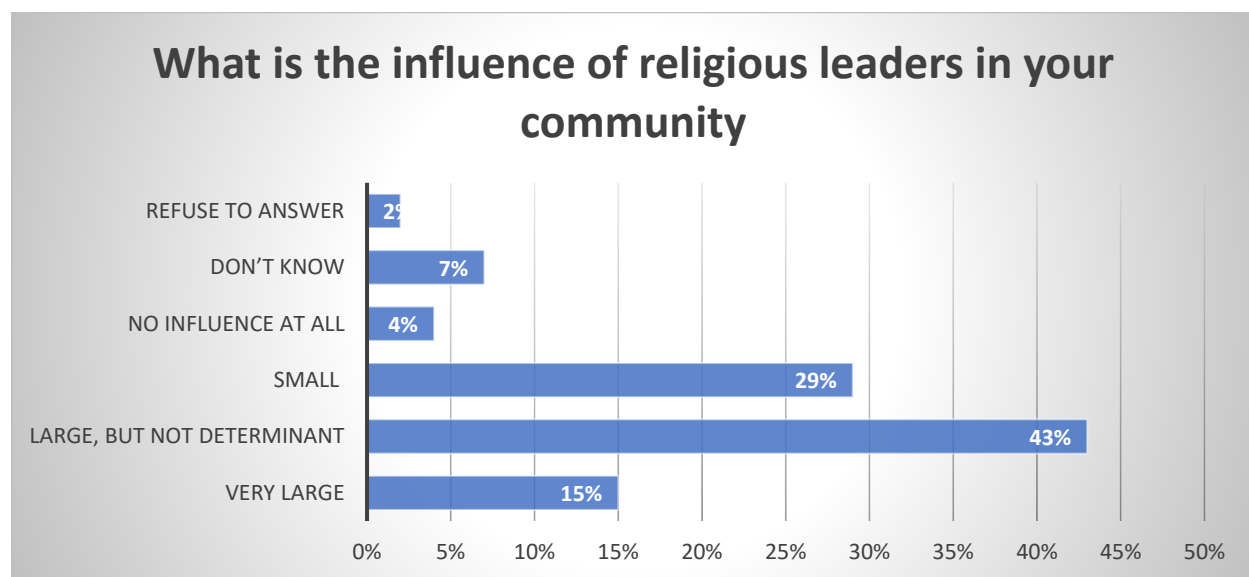
In addition to a self-identification and reflection on religiosity, respondents were asked about their perceptions and attitudes of religion in general, as well as religious teachings in particular and how they view themselves vis-à-vis these two. Graph 6 below shows that the majority of respondents consider themselves to accept all the teachings of their faith (44%), followed by those who believe themselves to be a believer but not accepting all the teachings of their religion (32%). The more skeptical ones who consider religion in general but do not believe in all the teachings and have a more distanced view are at a minority (8%). Only 6% declared to not think about religion at all, and even more telling is that none of the respondents consider themselves against religious teachings altogether. These figures show a population that is highly religious. This creates both opportunities and risks. Divisiveness along religious lines can exacerbate existing grievances. On the other hand, engagement of religious leaders as one of the most important actors in any P/CVE related efforts can have a greater impact in this community.

Graph 7 - Attitudes about religious teachings



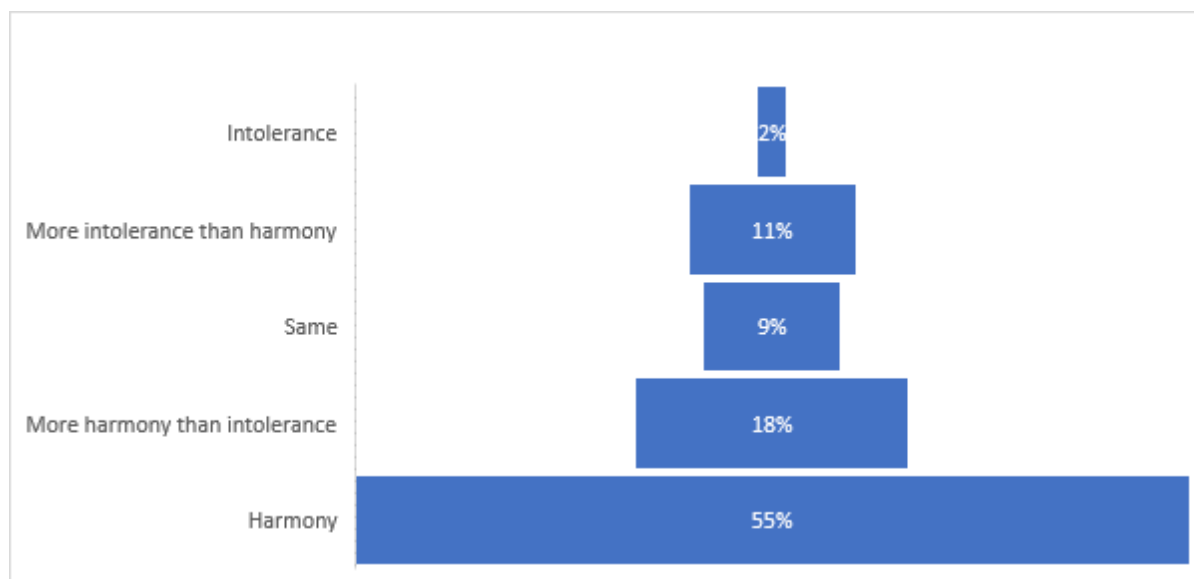
Respondents were also asked about their perception on the influence of the religious community in their city/place of residence. The question aims to understand the presence of religious leaders and their position within community representatives. As graph 7 below shows almost 1 in 2 respondents believe that their influence is large but not determinant, followed by those who believe their influence to be small in their communities (29%). Further, 15% believe their influence to be large, but only a small portion believes it to have no influence at all (4%). To an extent the answers to this question mirror those given in the previous graph regarding religiosity, as the majority of respondents believe that religious communities and their leaders have a significant influence, even if not determinant in different spheres of public life. As analyzed above, the relative influence and respect that religious leaders enjoy in the community can become a significant point of reference for any initiative in this area.

*Graph 8 – Influence of religious community*



Lastly, religious tolerance and co-existence are repeated mantras in Albanian society, with some widespread beliefs on the importance of these values. As such, respondents were also asked about religious tolerance in their community. More than 1 in 2 respondents believe that there is religious harmony in their community, followed by another 18% who believe that there is more harmony than intolerance in their community. Only 13% in total believe that there is intolerance or at least more intolerance than harmony in their community.

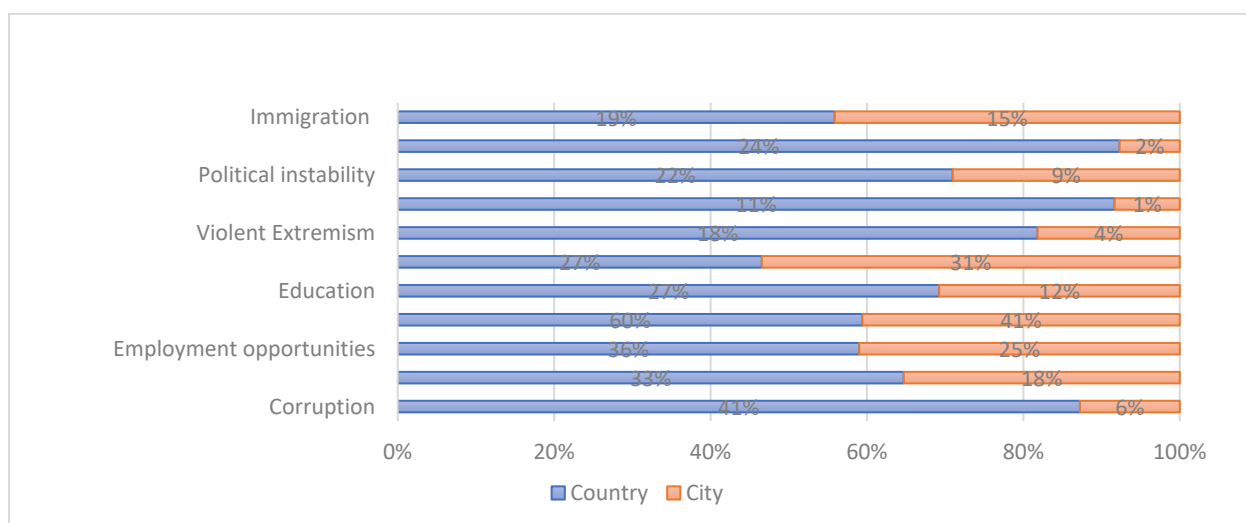
Graph 9 - Religious tolerance/harmony



#### Perceptions on concerns in the community

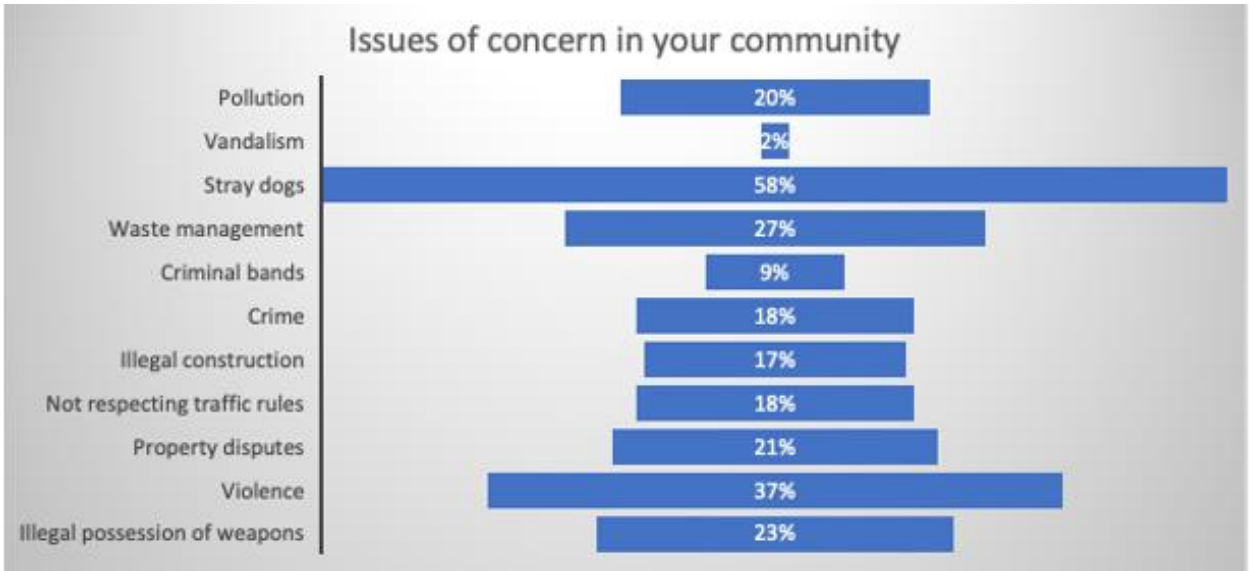
Respondents were asked about the most pressing issues facing both the country in general and their community more specifically. There are some differences, as graph 8 below shows, on their perceptions regarding general issues of concern at the macro level, and what they believe their city and community are facing. For instance, more than half of the respondents believe that poverty is the most important issue facing the country today (60%) followed by corruption concerns (41%) and employment (36%). The three most important issues facing the city they live in are poverty (41%), health services (31%) and employment (25%). Issues related to violent extremism and terrorism are identified as issues of concern by 5% of those who participated in the survey as to impact the city of Bulqize, while a significantly higher percentage (18% and 11%) believe that violent extremism and terrorism are issues of concern for the country in general.

Graph 10 – Most important issues facing the country and the community



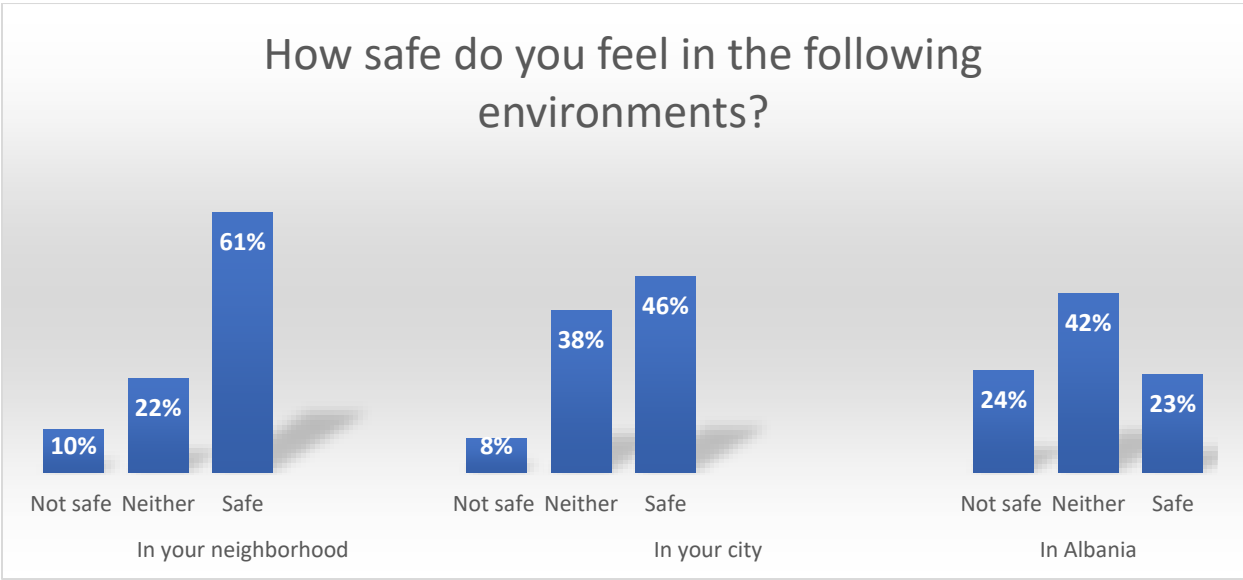
In addition to more general topics of concern, respondents were also asked about specific issues that relate to their community and their city, and they were asked to identify which ones are most problematic and of concern to them personally. As graph 11 below shows, the majority of respondents identify stray dogs, violence, and waste management as the most common issues troubling their communities. Criminal activity is seen as problematic by 9% (criminal bands) and 18% (crime in general) of all respondents. Illegal possession of weapons further seems to worry more than 1 in 5 respondents.

Graph 11 – Issues of concern to the community



Respondents feel safest in their surrounding neighborhood. This is consistent with the fact that the city itself is quite small (as the administrative and geographic data above suggests) and therefore more often than not communities have been in place for a long time and people know each other well. The level of safety however significantly falls when one moves from the neighborhood to the city and even further to the country. The majority feels neither safe nor unsafe when asked about the country in general. This should be further analyzed as it could also be related to the city’s relative isolation from other cities, especially the capital Tirana, despite its geographical proximity.

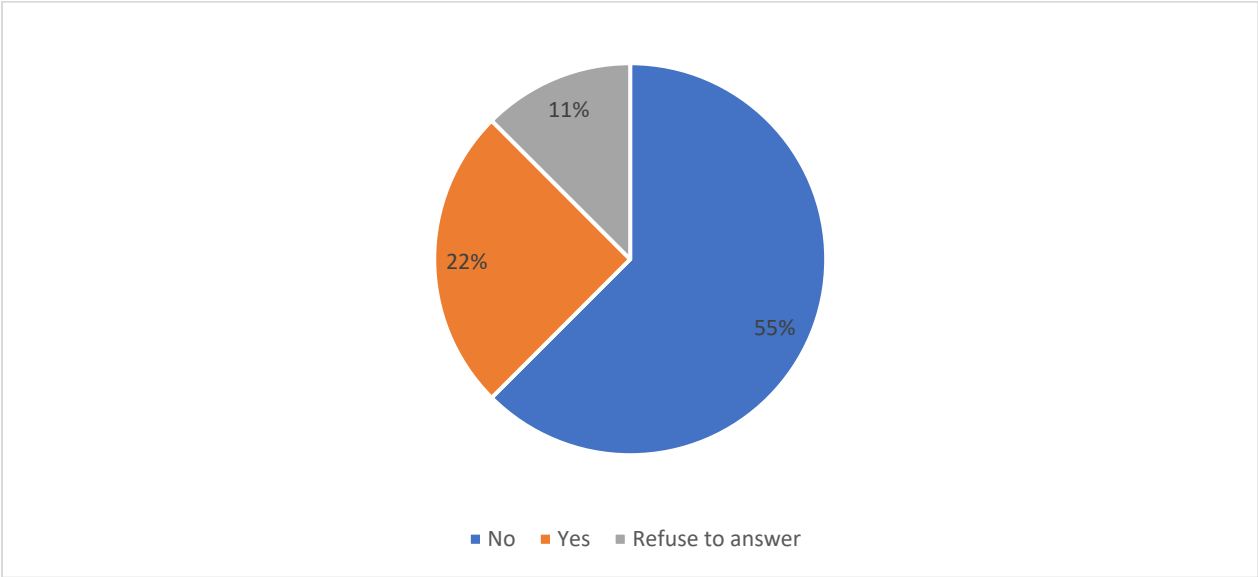
Graph 12 - Feelings of safety in community, city, country



Perceptions on violent extremism

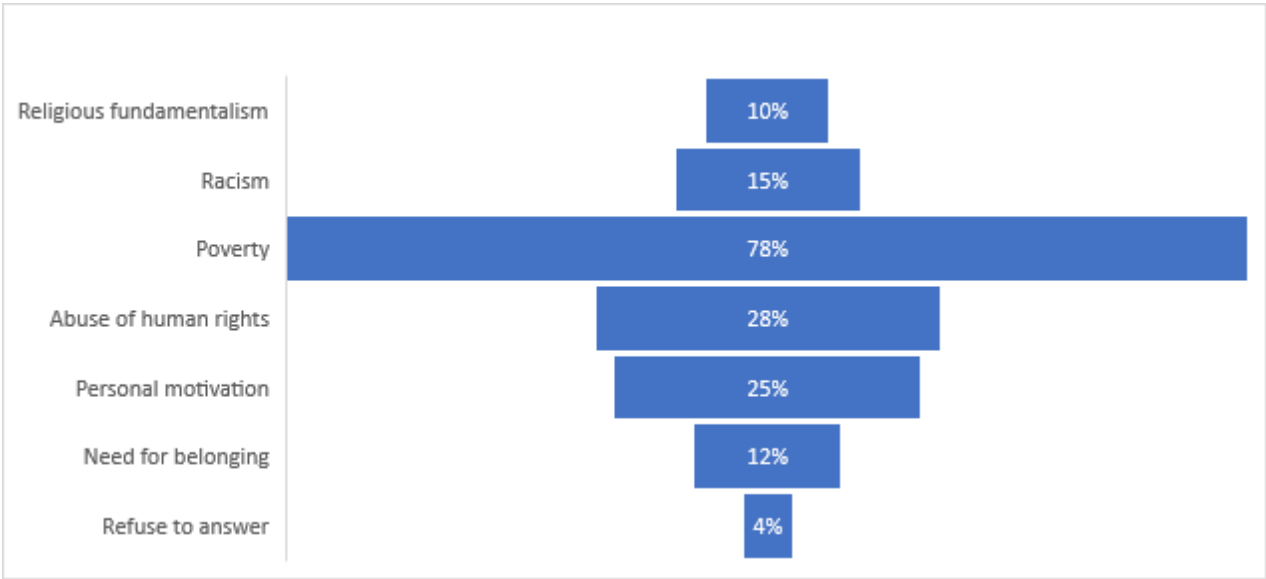
Finally, and most importantly, survey respondents were asked a number of questions regarding their perceptions on violent extremism in general, as well as regarding their communities and themselves. Survey respondents were asked whether they personally knew someone who had been or is currently engaged in any forms of violent extremism. The graph below shows that the majority (55%) had no personal connection, however, 1 in 5 do know someone, and 11% refused to answer this question – which together forms a high percentage. The percentage of those who know someone personally is higher than other municipalities, such as Pogradec (7% higher).

Graph 13 – Personal acquaintance with someone involved in VE



Understanding push and pull factors of violent extremism is an important step towards addressing its root causes and intervention methods. Therefore, respondents were asked to identify what they believed to be the main causes for engaging in VE. As graph 14 clearly shows, a vast majority identify poverty as the main push factor (78%), followed by abuses of human rights, and personal motivations as pull factors (28% and 26% respectively). It should be noted here that personal motivations were identified as a cause by a much larger portion of respondents in this municipality compared to the municipality of Pogradec for instance (where the number was 5%). The fact that abuse of human rights and personal motivations rank second and third might be an indication of a more ideological perspective and underlined grievances that should be addressed in any intervention, policies and training sessions with different members of the community.

*Graph 14 – Main causes of VE*

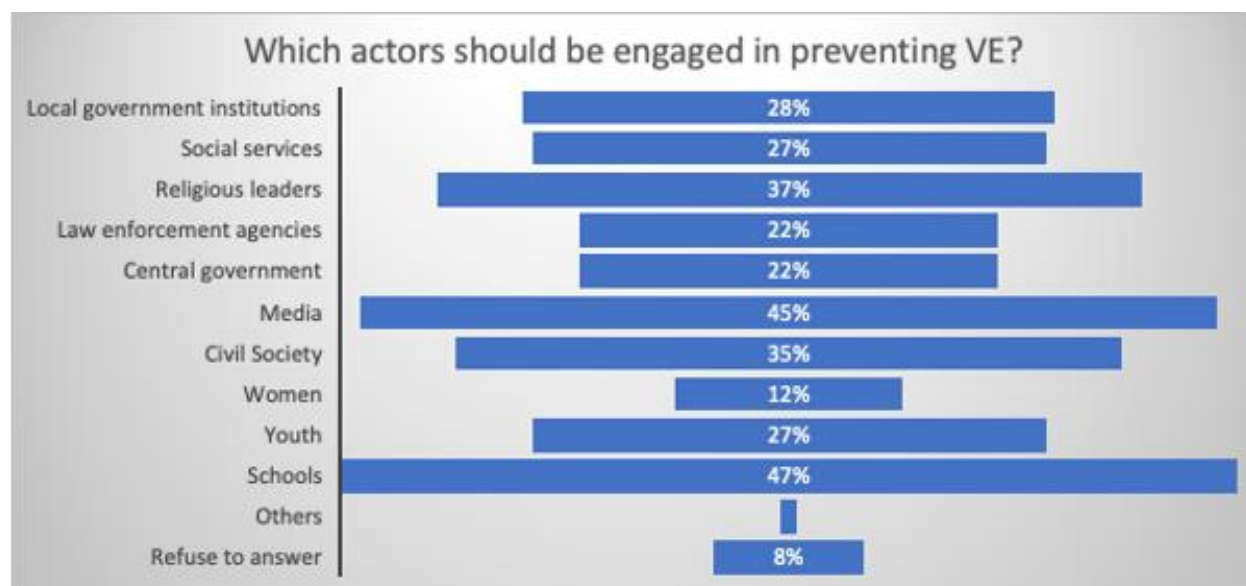


Despite the belief that poverty pushes individuals towards VE, a majority of the respondents do not agree that it is impossible to steer individuals away from radicalization and violent extremism. The majority of respondents do not agree that returning citizens from conflict areas pose a significant risk for society. Furthermore, they believe that Albanian institutions should work to return and reintegrate these citizens.

In line with the respondents’ agreement that state institutions should be engaged in the return of Albanian citizens involved in other countries’ conflicts, they were asked to identify the main actors that should be involved in preventing violent extremism in Albania. It is clear from graph 15 (shown below) that respondents consider all actors identified as important in preventing and combating VE – showing the necessity for the whole community to approach the issue – which the literature largely views it as an effective tool. However, some actors are seen to play a more active role than others. Respondents identify schools, media and religious leaders as the main actors that should be engaged in preventing and countering VE. Less importance is placed on women, law enforcement and central government.

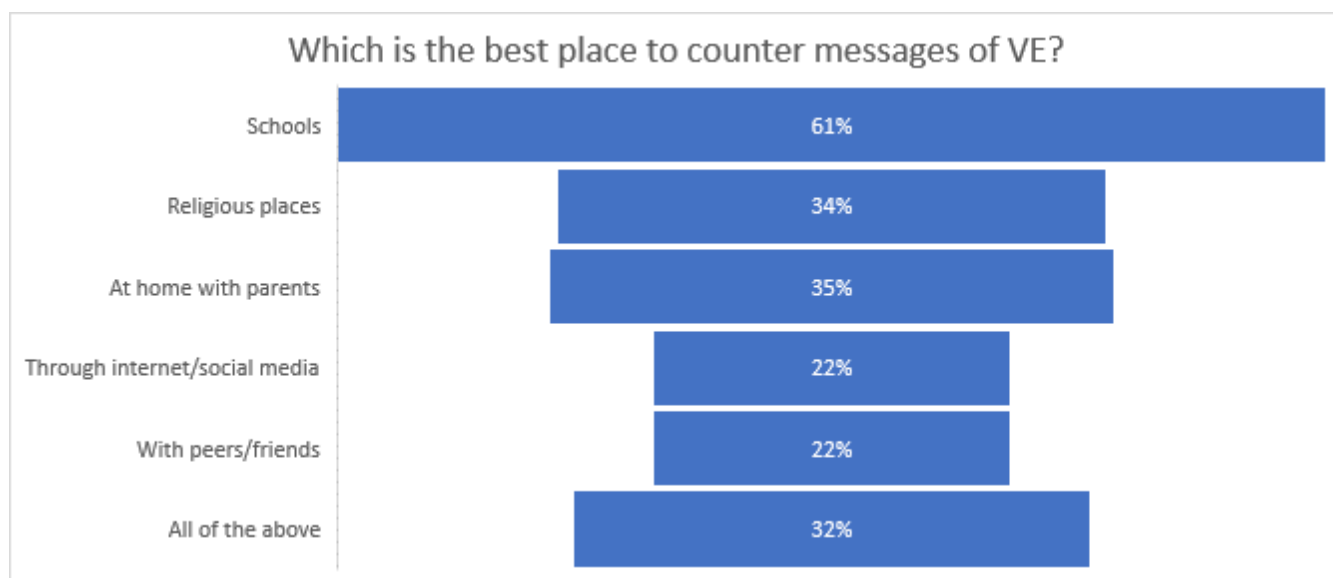


Graph 15 – Main actors involved in preventing VE



In addition to actions to prevent VE, it is important to build counter-narratives – which is also a focus of the current intervention. Thus, respondents were asked to identify the best tools and spaces where counter and alternative messaging should be conducted in their community. To this, the vast majority responded that schools are the best place to carry out these messages and reach especially vulnerable young people (61%). Furthermore, 1 in 3 respondents said that all of the options provided should be used as primary sources and places where messaging should be focused and P/CVE measures undertaken, which includes religious places, at home with parents, among youth peers, and using internet and social media. Therefore, it becomes clear that working with schools is essential in the efforts to combat and prevent VE.

Graph 16 – Places where CVE efforts should be placed



## Conclusions

- 1- The municipality of Bulqize, similar to Pogradec, has established a Local Safety Council, which functions as an advisory body to the municipality on matters of security and safety in the city.
  - While the LSC is not properly resourced to conduct its duties, it could serve as the building block for a larger referral mechanism to be established in the municipality
  - In order to engage youth in security issues, the Youth Advisory Group, a platform of local youngsters serving as advisory body to the municipality on youth issues, could be actively involved in the LSC through a representative to voice concerns of young people around the municipality on issues related to VE
- 2- There is a lack of frequent and regular data collection on safety and security, including issues related to VE which would contribute to informed decisions and policies on P/CVE.
  - Support the municipality to establish a data collection system and regular sharing of information during LSC meetings, especially from law enforcement agencies, such as police and prosecution.
  - During the training conduct a session on the importance of data collection and analysis in programming for P/CVE.
- 3- Schools are identified as the best places to produce counter messaging and PVE initiatives, together with religious places and the home.
  - Support the municipality of Bulqize, through its advisory group to hold meetings, information sessions and discussions with youth in schools with different members of the LSC and other officials engaged in P/CVE efforts at the local and central level.
  - Support the municipality of Bulqize to increase the role of parents in school decision-making through parent-teacher associations. Create an enabling environment for discussions between students, teachers and parents on issues related to VE to identify grievances, trends and challenges and find joint solutions.
  - Support municipality to increase participation and role of religious leaders in the LSC and in local efforts to address VE among communities, especially in rural areas.
  - Identify young religious followers and engage them as community leaders to engage other peers in P/CVE efforts and initiatives.
- 4- Schools and media are identified as two of the key actors at the local level that should take the lead on addressing VE in the community or where messaging needs to happen.
  - The municipality of Bulqize does not have a strong local media presence. However, engagement of local journalists through training and mentoring on reporting about security issues and VE is essential.
  - Support journalists to increase programming and reporting on local security and safety issues that concern the municipality. Identify recent journalism graduates and offer mentoring and training on ethical reporting and analysis of VE.

- 5- Poverty is identified by far as the most important driver of VE and push factor for individuals to become foreign fighters, followed by abuses of human rights, and racism – which has important implications for future interventions.
  - Assist the municipality of Bulqize in developing local reintegration plans for returning fighters and their families and provide psychological support services for them and their families, as well as the immediate communities around them.
  - Assist the municipality of Buqize to develop local socio-economic development plans.
  - Conduct participatory budgeting to include the voices of the most vulnerable and marginalized as a tool to alleviate poverty.
  - Identify most at needs populations and collaborate with other actors, such as civil society and businesses, to support their economic recovery.
- 6- There is a perception of high influence for the religious community in the municipality of Bulqize according to survey findings. Among those participating in the survey, a majority is highly involved with their religion and gives it a high importance, which should drive any efforts to involve and include the religious community in P/CVE efforts.
  - Tap into the privileged position of the religious community to engage them in CVE efforts and reach out to a wider number of people they have access to.
  - Engage religious leaders at local level in ongoing local policies and efforts/initiatives to counter VE.
  - Support municipality in conducting dialogue, public discussions facilitated by religious leaders and with participation of their followers.

Based on the conclusions and recommendations above the following issues/topics should be addressed more specifically in the training:

- 1- Conduct a session on role of families, especially their influence in young people, to prevent VE, address grievances and build community resilience
- 2- Include a session on referral mechanisms for VE with identification of best practices and conduct an exercise/brainstorming session with participants to identify feasibility of establishing a referral mechanism in the municipality of Bulqize
- 3- Conduct a session on data collection methods, tools, and assessment of information for decision-making in the area of P/CVE
- 4- Conduct a session on role of schools as community centers and their role in countering and preventing VE among youngsters
- 5- Conduct a session on push and pull factors, focusing on socio-economic factors and engage participants in active discussions through exercises and brainstorming to identify the main factors for the municipality of Bulqize.

## Municipality of Devoll

### Socio-economic profile of the municipality

The area of the municipality is 453.27 km<sup>2</sup>. The municipality is comprised of 5 administrative units respectively: Bilisht, Qender Bilisht, Proger, and Miras. All these administrative units are currently part of the region (qark) of Korce. The new municipality (stemming from the 2015 territorial reform) administers 1 city and 44 villages.

<i>Municipality</i>	<b>Administrative Units</b>	<b>Cities and villages</b>
<i>Devoll</i>	Bilisht	City: Bilisht
	Qender Bilisht	Villages: Bitinckë, Tren, Buzliqen, Vërnik, Vishocicë, Kuç, Poloskë, Kapshticë, Trestenik, Kurilë
	Hocisht	Villages: Hoçisht, Grace, Baban, Stropan, Eçmenik, Përparimaj, Grapsh, Çipan, Borsh, Bradvicë
	Proger	Villages: Progër, Mançurisht, Cangonj, Pilur, Vranisht, Bickë, Rakickë, Shyec
	Miras	Villages: Miras, Vidohovë, Arrëz, Çetë, Qytezë, Sinicë, Nikolicë, Menkulas, Ponçarë, Braçanj, Koshnicë, Dobranj, Fitore, Ziçisht, Gjyres, Sul

### Demographics

According to the 2011 Census, the municipality of Devoll has 26,716 inhabitants, while 42,388 are registered in the Civil Registry.

The municipality has a generally low population density, whereas only the city of Bilisht has a medium density. The population is mostly rural, while the urban population is mostly found in the city of Bilisht (99.2%), and 5.5% are located in the administrative unit of Qender Bilisht. Working age population (15-64 years old) comprises 68% of the population. On the other hand, 17.8% are children up to 15 years old, and 11.3% are above 65 years old. In terms of religious identification, 72.1% self-identify as Muslims, 5.8% Orthodox and the rest is divided between Catholics and Bektashi. While 89% of the population identify as Albanian, there are at least two ethnic minorities present – specifically 1% Greek and 0.7% Macedonian.

According to data from the Institute of Statistics, only 6.7% of the population declares to have access to Internet. In addition, only 14.3% own a computer.

### Economy<sup>8</sup>

The majority of the population in the municipality of Devoll lives in rural areas, which means income depends largely on agricultural activities or remittances from those in immigration. The latter is emphasized due to the proximity of the municipality with the Greek border, bringing about both seasonal and permanent immigration. Thus, the economic situation of the municipality has been largely affected by the Greek economic crisis, which has shrunk remittances considerably. In addition, there has been significant internal migration, emptying thus rural and remote villages in

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<sup>8</sup> Data gathered from: <http://web.uri.org.al/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/LDOP-Bashkia-Devoll.pdf>

favor of areas closer to the city. According to data from 2016, there were 8,300 farms in the territory of the municipality with an average area of 1 ha. The total agriculture land is 12,642 ha, of which 1,920 ha are not used for produce; this means that land is used at an 85% capacity – a satisfactory rate considering the national average.

In recent years, there have been infrastructure investments, however there are still many secondary roads to be built in order to help farmers transport their produce to the city, connect rural and urban areas, and increase interconnectivity between villages. As a result, farmers have frequently expressed concerns that their produce remains in stock and they sell it under market value. The most important economic infrastructure project in the municipality has been the passage of the Trans Adriatic Pipeline, which brought employment and several investments in the area, such as rebuilding of several schools.

One of the major challenges faced by the municipality is tourism development, where promotion of mountainous villages would provide an excellent opportunity for ecotourism and mountainous tourism.

According to municipality statistics, the main source of income in the municipality stems from family income. Therefore, approximately 62% of inhabitants (in 2016) lived on employment or self-employment, while only 6.1% receive Economic Assistance (Ndihma Ekonomike), a relatively low percentage compared to the national average. On the other hand, pensions in all their forms are a relatively high source of income for families (standing at 39%). Unemployment, according to Census data, stands at 15.9%, but among youth this goes up to 33%. Net wages in the municipality stand at approximately 270 Euros, which is below the national average.

The Institute of Statistics reports that there are around 100 registered and active enterprises in the municipality, with almost 85% owned and operated by men.

### Education

Devoll municipality has a total of 27 schools, with every two villages sharing one. There is no vocational education, and elementary and middle schools are offered in 73 and 84 classes respectively. School infrastructure is not efficiently maintained and there exists the phenomenon of collective classes due to the low number of students and teachers. This means that students from different ages and levels study together as there are insufficient teachers and students. The closest university is found in the city of Korce, where the majority of those who seek higher education go to study.

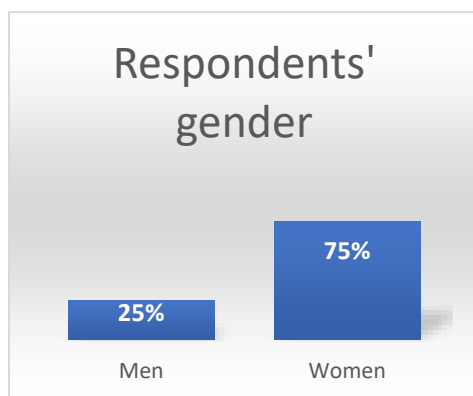
The majority of inhabitants have a lower education attainment (elementary and middle schools), 65%, while 25.5% have a lower secondary education. Finally, only 7.3% have a university degree.

## Survey findings

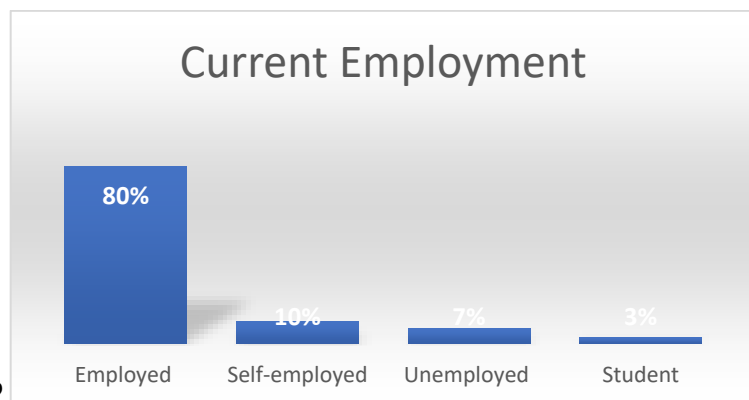
### Demographic data

As the graph below shows, the majority of respondents were women. The vast majority of respondents are employed (80%), with a few that were unemployed and students. It is necessary to understand the context in which the survey was conducted, when Albania went under either full lockdown in some cities or under severe restrictions and curfews in some other cities where the survey took place – which made it difficult to have access, especially to those who are unemployed and students.

*Graph 1 – Gender of respondents*

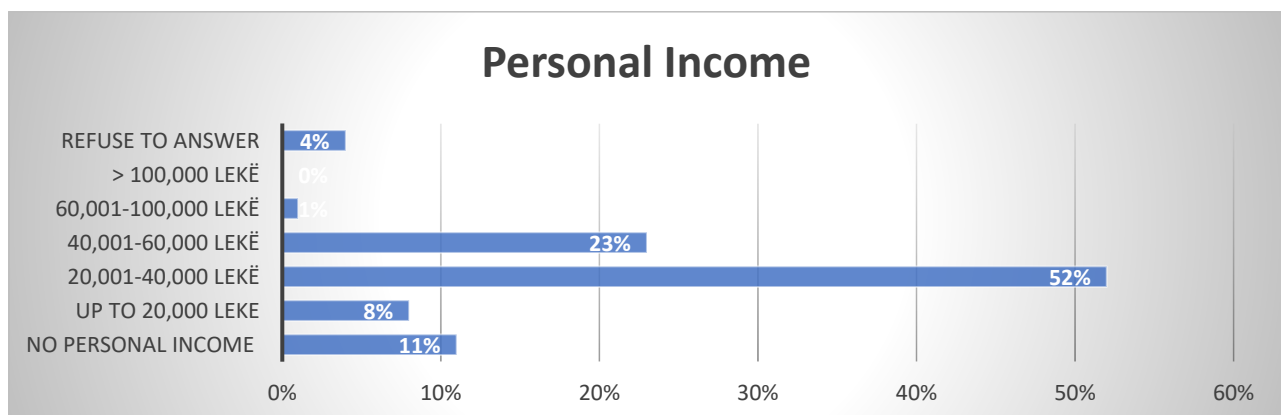


*Graph 2 – Employment Status*



Graph 3 below shows that the majority of respondents earn between 20,000 ALL and 60,000 ALL (170 – 500 Eur), which is within the average income reported by the Institute of Statistics. Furthermore, 11% report no personal income and 8% earned below 20,000 ALL, which is even below the minimum wage as recognized by the government.

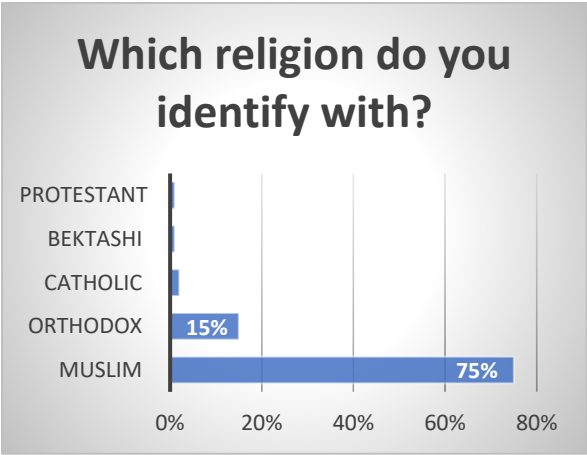
*Graph 3 – Individual Income*



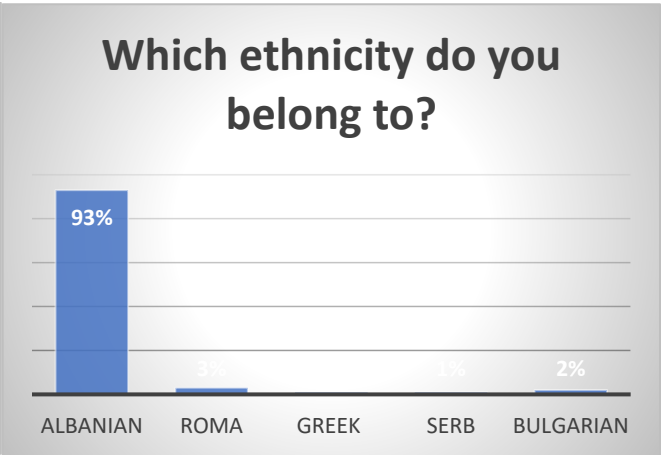
<sup>9</sup> Due to cultural aspects of the location and the timing of the survey it was impossible to engage more men in the survey

In terms of religious identification, the respondents largely mirror the religious composition of the municipality as presented in the first section. Graph 4 below shows that the vast majority (75%) identify as Muslims, followed by 15% Orthodox and the rest divided between Bektashi and Protestant. In terms of ethnicity, graph 5 below shows that 93% are Albanian, followed by 3% Roma/Egyptian and 2% of Bulgarian ethnicity.

Graph 4 – Religious identification



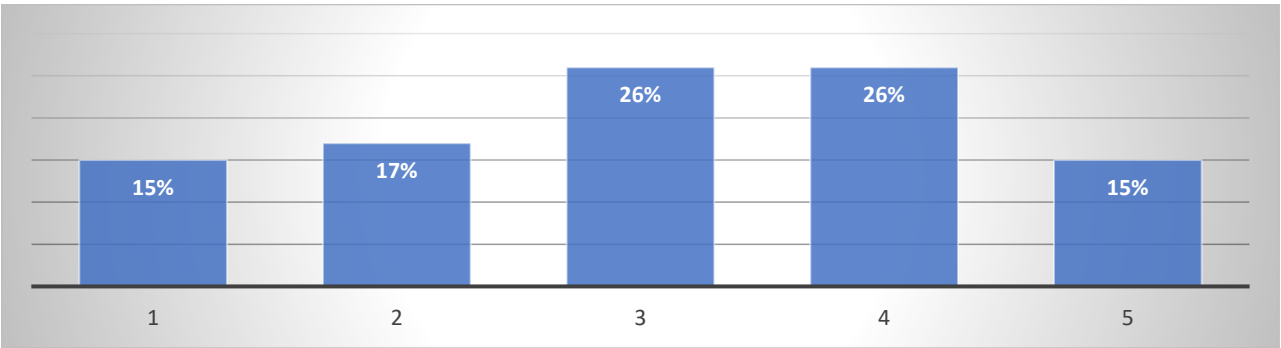
Graph 5 – Ethnicity



Perceptions regarding religious faith

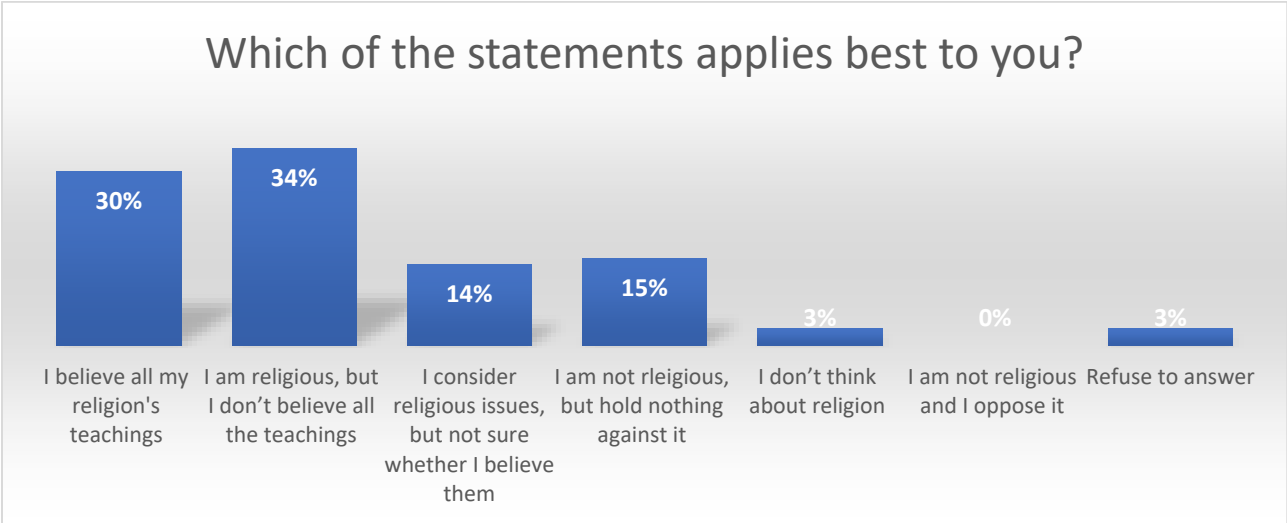
Survey respondents were asked a number of questions regarding their religious affiliations and beliefs. First, they were asked about the extent to which they were religious themselves on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is ‘not religious at all’ and 5 is ‘very religious’. As graph 5 below shows, the majority of respondents identify themselves between moderately religious and religious standing on the 3 and 4, moderate and religious at the rate of 26% each. Only 15% identify themselves as little to not religious.

Graph 6 – Extent of religiosity



In addition to a self-identification and reflection on religiosity, respondents were asked regarding their perceptions and attitudes of religion in general, religious teachings in particular, and how they view themselves vis-à-vis these two. Graph 7 below shows that the majority of respondents are religious but do not accept all the teachings of their religion (34%), closely followed by those who accept all the teachings of their religion. Interestingly, none of the respondents report to be opposed to religion and very few declared that they do not think about religion at all. For a country that is largely believed to be indifferent to religion and religious teachings in general these findings do shed light on how different communities see themselves and shows perhaps the increasing role that religion plays in communities around the countries, especially relatively small-knit ones.

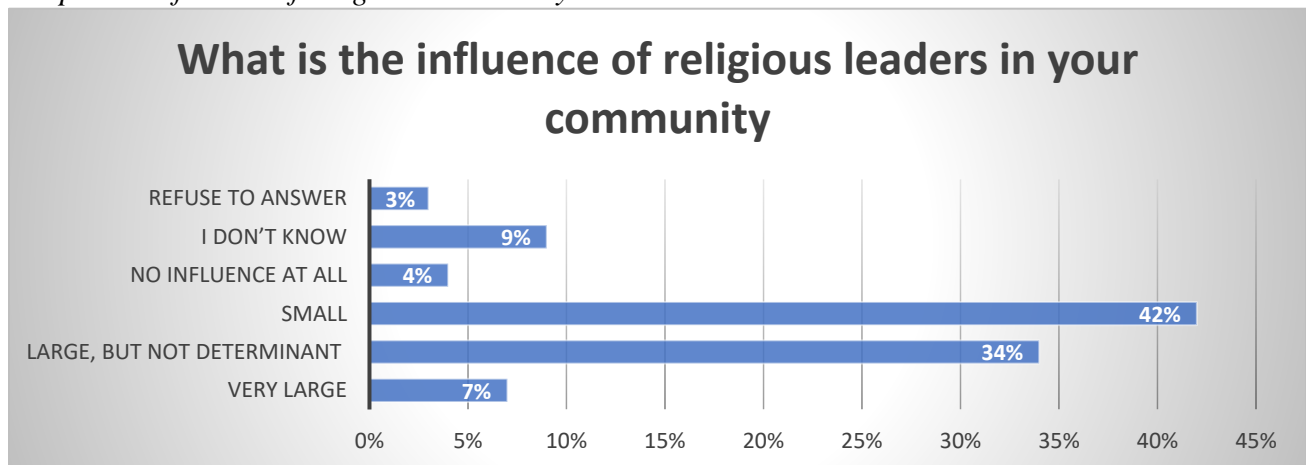
Graph 7 - Attitudes about religious teachings



Respondents were also asked about their perception on the influence of the religious community in their city/place of residence. The question aims to understand the presence of religious leaders and their position within community representatives. As graph 8 below shows, almost 1 in 2 respondents believe that their influence is small, followed by those who believe their influence to be large, but not determinant (34%). Only few believe that their influence is very small or very large. To an extent the answers to this question mirror those given in the previous graph regarding religiosity, as the majority of respondents believe that religious communities and their leaders have a small or moderate influence.

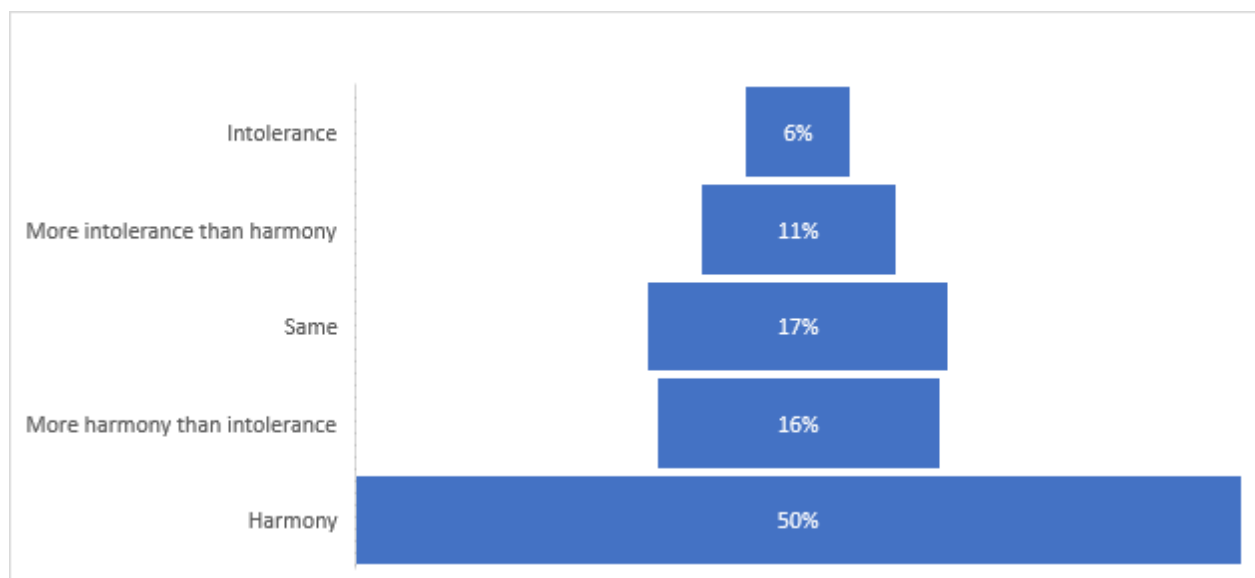


Graph 8 – Influence of religious community



Lastly, religious tolerance and co-existence are repeated mantras in Albanian society, with some widespread beliefs on the importance of these values. As such, respondents were also asked about religious tolerance in their community. As graph 9 below shows, 1 in 2 respondents believe that there is religious harmony in Albania, followed by 16% who believe there is more harmony than intolerance, and 17% are ambivalent as to whether there is more harmony or more intolerance.

Graph 9 - Religious tolerance/harmony

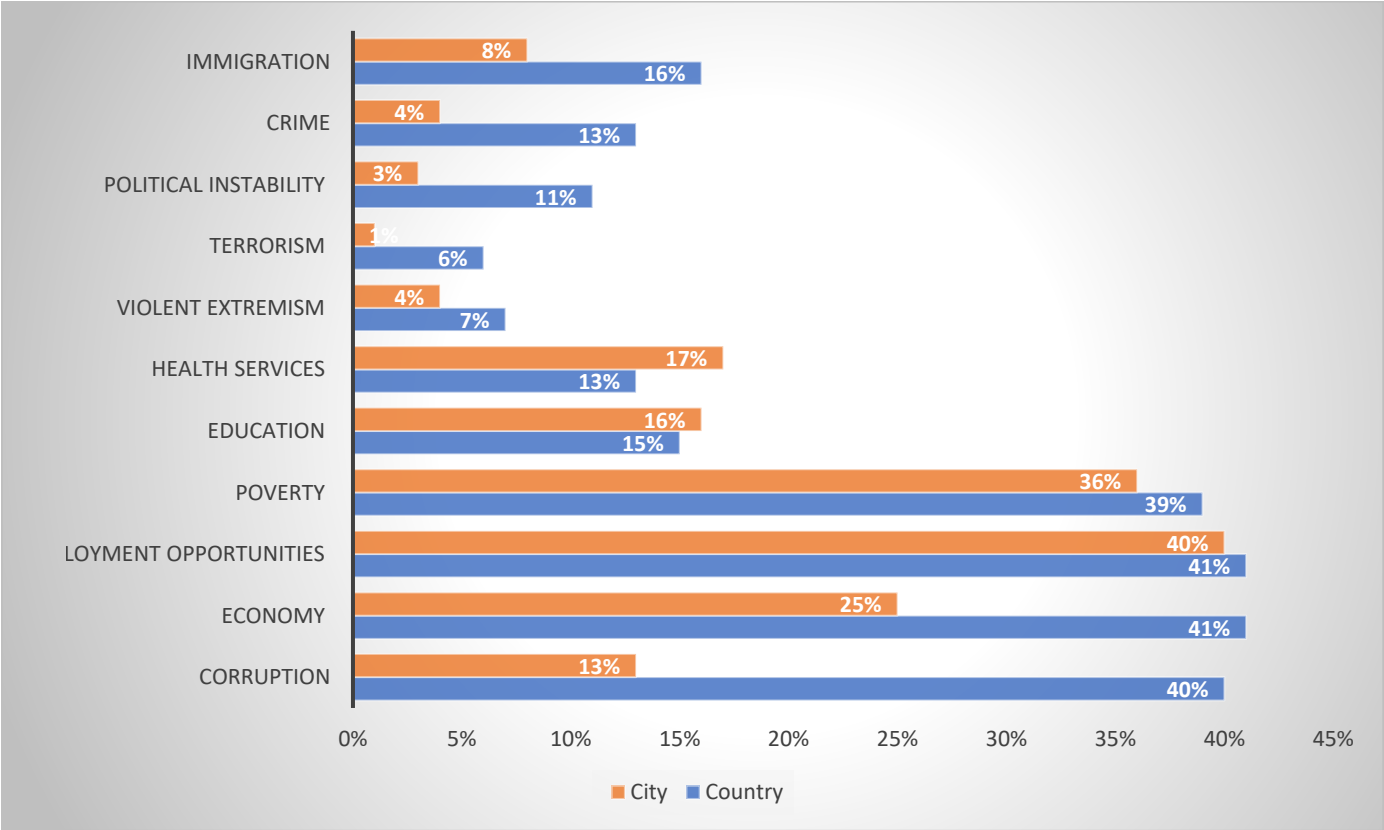


#### Perceptions on concerns in the community

Respondents were asked on the most pressing issues facing both the country in general and their community more specifically. There are some differences, as graph 10 below shows, on their perceptions regarding general issues of concern at the macro level, and what they believe their city and community are facing. The three most important issues facing the city they live in are employment, economy, and poverty. Respondents have a more pessimistic view of the country's situation in general. The three issues that are most problematic according to them are corruption, economy, and employment, closely followed by poverty. Issues related to violent extremism and

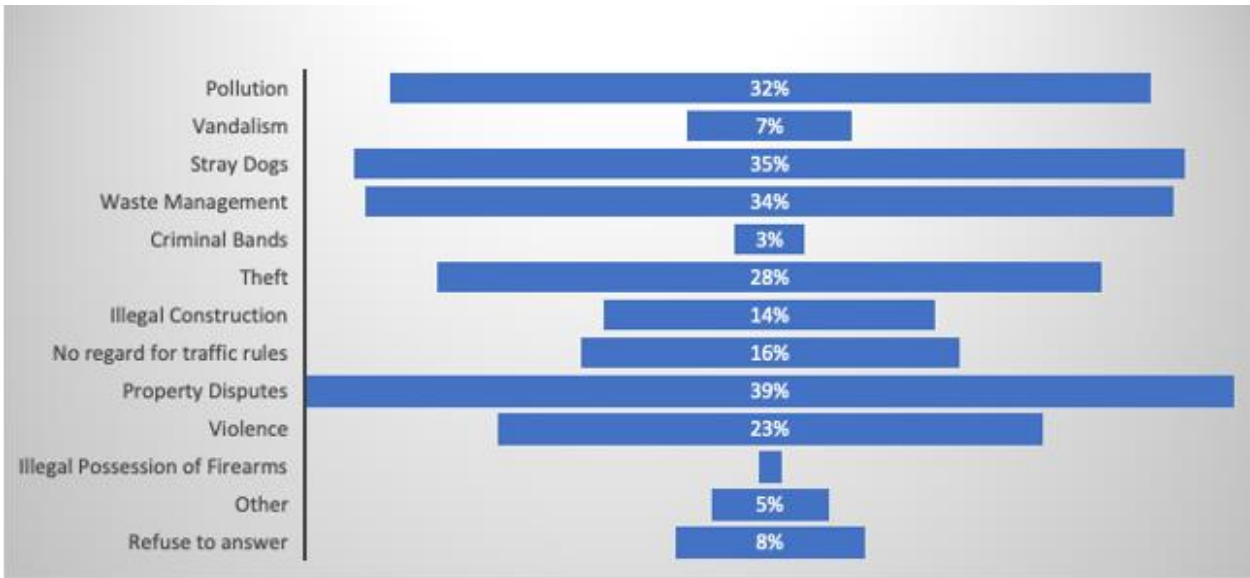
terrorism are identified as issues of concern by 5% of those who participated in the survey as to impact the municipality, while 6% and 7% believe terrorism and violent extremism are issues of concern for the country respectively.

Graph 10 – Most important issues facing the country and the community



In addition to more general topics of concern, respondents were also asked about specific issues that relate to their community and city and were asked to identify which ones are most problematic and of concern to them personally. As graph 11 below shows, the majority of respondents identify stray dogs, property disputes, and waste management as the most common issues troubling their communities. Criminal activity is also seen as problematic by a considerable number of respondents. For instance, 28% consider theft a problem in their community and 23% consider violence widespread. Pollution also ranks high in the list of community concerns that respondents expressed.

Graph 11 – Issues of concern to the community



Respondents were asked to assess how safe they felt in their surrounding area, in the city they live in, and in the country more generally. We see the tendency of feelings of safety decreasing when going from the neighborhood to the country, which shows that most respondents know their communities well, might have lived there for a long time, and are familiar with the community surrounding them. The majority is ambiguous when it comes to the country, whereby 48% feel neither safe nor unsafe of living in Albania. Furthermore, 34% are also ambiguous on living in their city. The feeling of safety is relatively high in the neighborhood, as 81% declare to feel safe in their surrounding communities. As the municipality is a small and compact one, this finding is consistent with the characteristics of the community.

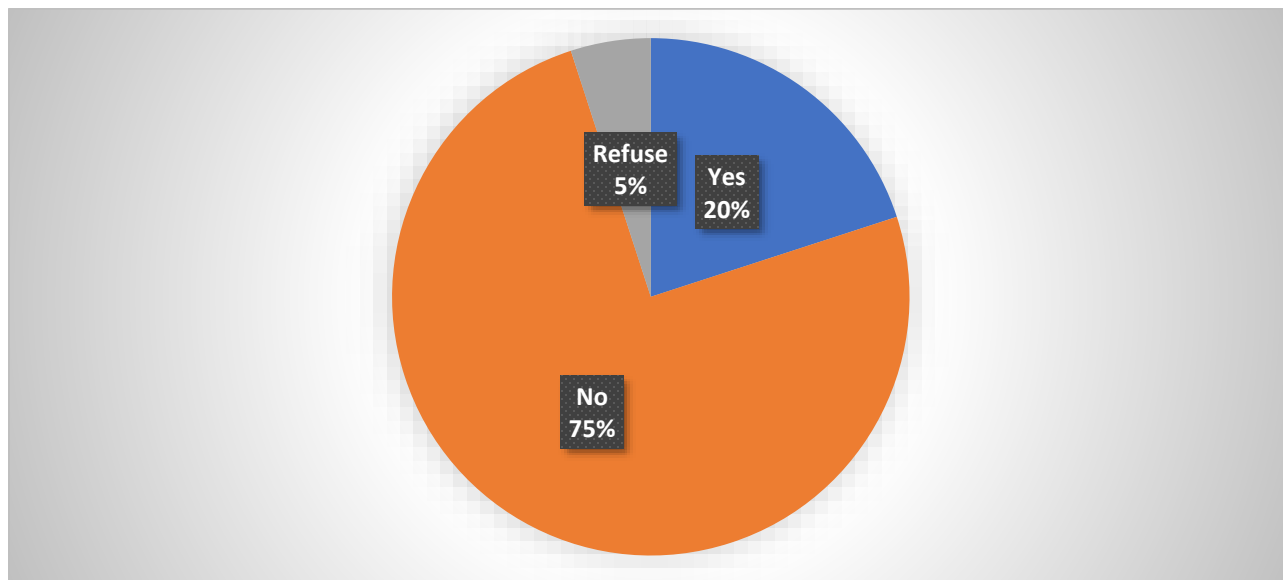
Graph 12 - Feelings of safety in community, city, country



### Perceptions on violent extremism

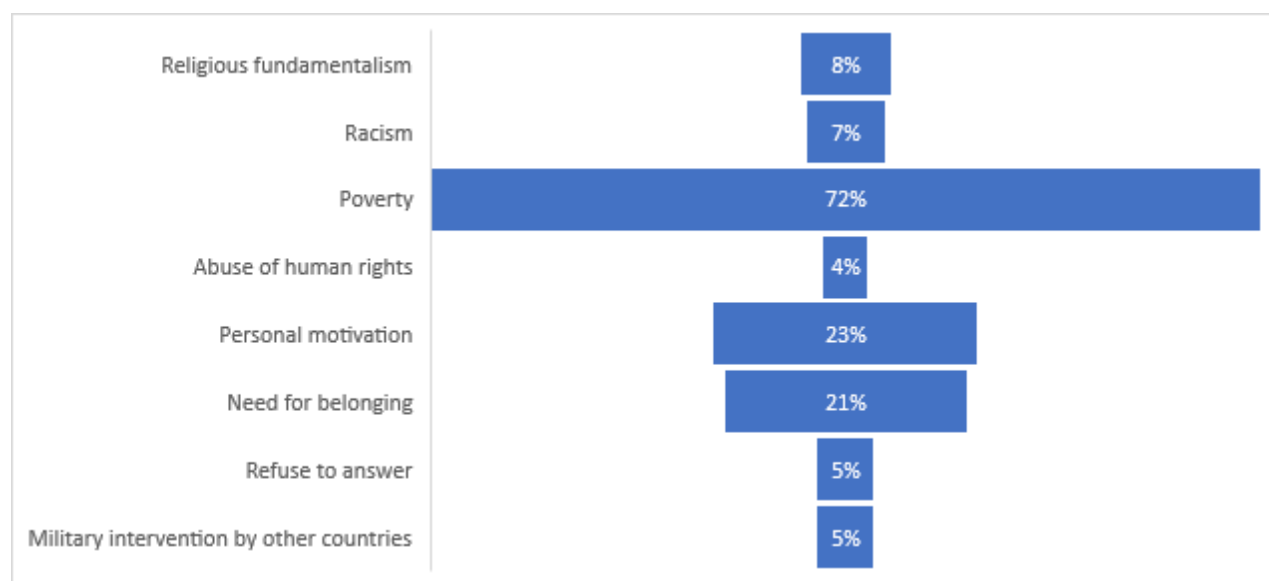
Finally, and most importantly, survey respondents were asked a number of questions regarding their perceptions on violent extremism in general, as well as regarding their communities and themselves. Survey respondents were asked whether they personally knew someone who had been or is currently engaged in any forms of violent extremism. The graph below shows that the majority (75%) had no personal connection, however 1 in 5 do know someone, and 5% refused to answer this question – which together forms a high percentage.

*Graph 13 – Personal acquaintance with someone involved in VE*



Understanding push and pull factors of violent extremism is an important step towards addressing its root causes and intervention methods. Therefore, respondents were asked to identify what they believed to be the main causes for engaging in VE. As graph 14 shows, a vast majority identify poverty as the main push factor (72%), followed by abuses of human rights and personal motivations as pull factors (23% and 21% respectively). Very few consider religious fundamentalism and a need for belonging as a reason for engaging in violent extremism as evidenced by graph 14 below.

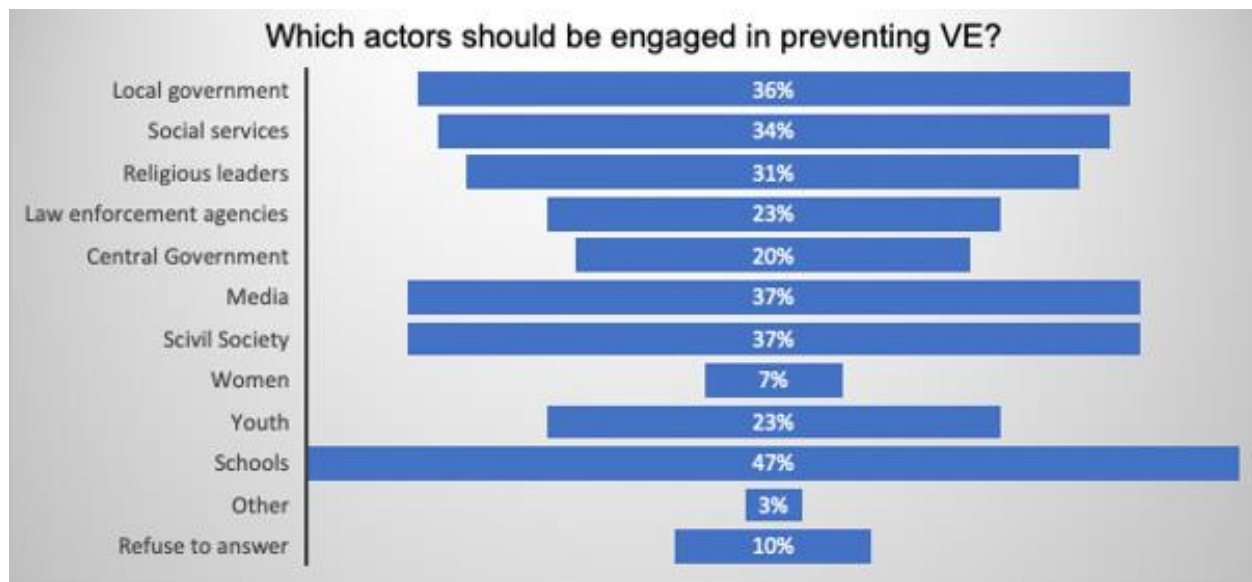
Graph 14 – Main causes of VE



Despite the belief that poverty pushes individuals towards VE, a majority of the respondents do not agree that it is impossible to steer individuals away from radicalization and violent extremism. The majority of respondents do not agree that returning citizens from conflict areas pose a significant risk for society. Further, they believe that Albanian institutions should work to return and reintegrate these citizens.

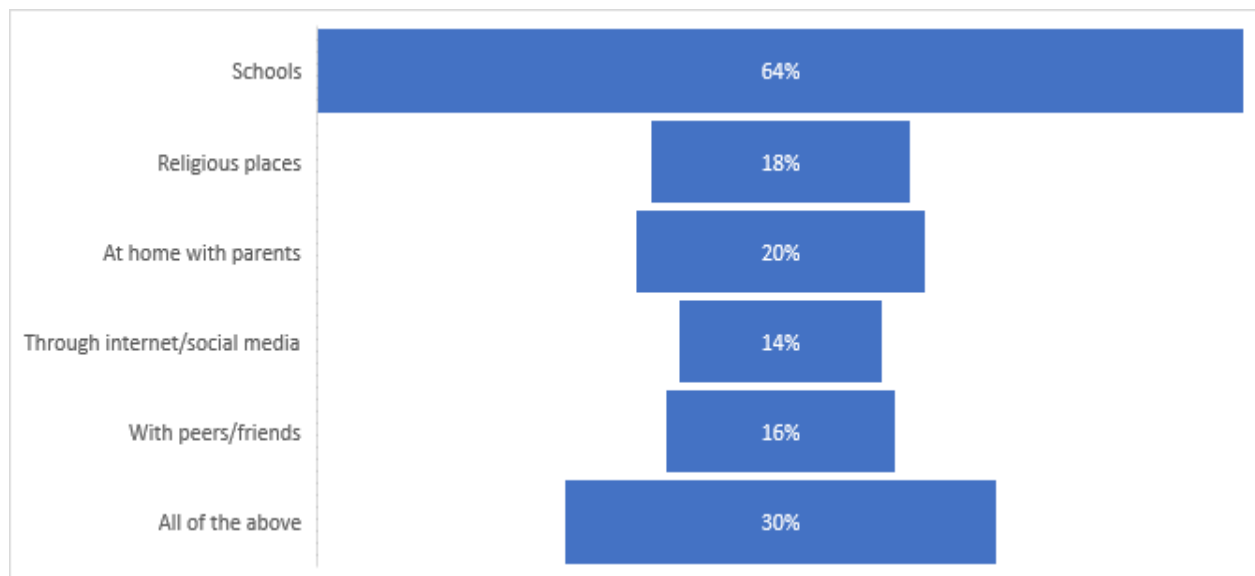
In line with the respondents' agreement that state institutions should be engaged in the return of Albanian citizens involved in other countries' conflicts, they were asked to identify the main actors that should be involved in preventing violent extremism in Albania. It is clear from graph 15 below that respondents consider almost all actors identified as important in preventing and combating VE, showing the necessity of the whole of community to approach the issue, which the literature largely views as an effective tool. However, some actors are seen to play a more active role than others. Respondents identify schools, media, and civil society as the main actors that should be engaged in preventing and countering VE. Less importance is placed on women, youth, and central government. Local government is also seen high in the list of actors that should be actively involved, which provides an avenue for engaging with the local government to conduct intervention programs.

Graph 15 – Main actors involved in preventing VE



Respondents were asked to identify the best tools and spaces where counter and alternative messaging should be conducted in their community. To this, the vast majority responded that schools are the best place to carry out these messages and reach especially vulnerable young people (64%). Furthermore, 1 in 3 respondents said that all of the options provided should be used as primary sources and places where messaging should be focused and P/CVE measures undertaken, which includes religious places, at home with parents, among youth peers, and using internet and social media.

Graph 16 – Places where CVE efforts should be placed



## Conclusions and recommendations

- 1- There are no institutional mechanisms in place in the municipality of Devoll to efficiently tackle the issue of violent extremism.
  - Support the municipality to establish a Local Safety Council, similar to those piloted in Pogradec and Bulqize to serve as an advisory body to the municipality on security and safety issues, especially on VE
  - Support municipality of Devoll to identify and map the main actors that could be engaged in P/CVE efforts at the local level
- 2- There is a lack of frequent and regular data collection on safety and security, including issues related to VE that would contribute to informed decisions and policies on P/CVE.
  - Support the municipality of Devoll to collect information and analyze data received from law enforcement agencies at the local level to identify early potential cases of concern
  - Support regular coordination and information sharing between different local institutions and actors, such as police, municipality, local administration units, civil society and religious leaders
- 3- Schools are identified as the best places to produce counter messaging and PVE initiatives, together with religious places and the home, however youth are seen less as actors of change, but rather recipients of these interventions.
  - Conduct an assessment of situation of VE in schools to identify potential hotspots in the municipality
  - Support municipality to establish a youth council to serve as advisory body on youth issues in general and security ones in particular
  - Support municipality to conduct a mapping of religious places, their role and presence in the community to serve as a tool for building partnerships as well as identifying challenges and problems
- 4- Schools and civil society are identified as two of the key actors at the local level that should take the lead on addressing VE in the community or where messaging needs to happen.
  - Support the municipality to organize parent teacher associations within schools so that the latter can have a greater presence and voice in decision making and be better informed on issues of concern within school environments.
  - Work closely with schools, train staff, and conduct awareness with students, parents, and other community members on creating a safe space and environment in schools and in the community.
  - Conduct awareness activities, training and engage school staff, parents, and students in building counter narratives to VE and radicalization.
  - Build local coalitions that would be more engaged in local decision-making in different socio-economic policies, to increase participation and voice of local communities.
- 5- Poverty is identified by far as the most important driver of VE and push factor for individuals to become foreign fighters, followed by abuses of human rights and racism, which has important implications for future interventions.

- Advocate for a clear local economic development plan for the municipality to address existing economic grievances among the population, especially those in rural areas.
  - Support the municipality in developing local reintegration plans for returnees and their families
  - Support municipality in conducting an analysis of the socio-economic situation in the municipality to identify the most vulnerable and marginalized and budget for their needs
- 6- The religious community is not perceived as highly influential, but there is space to work with religious leaders as they are seen as some of the key actors for dealing with P/CVE and building counter narratives.
- Engage religious leaders at local level in ongoing local policies and efforts/initiatives to counter VE through consultation of policies related to VE
- 7- Less importance is placed on women, youth, and central government as important actors in combatting VE
- Conduct awareness campaigns to engage more women and youth and make clear their contributions and potentials for change and building narratives.
- 8- Compared to other municipalities there is a heightened concern related to criminal activity in the community
- Support the municipality to prepare a profile related to main security challenges and address them in local development plans.

Based on the conclusions and recommendations above the following issues/topics should be addressed more specifically in the training:

- 1- Include a module on the role of women and youth in P/CVE efforts, their potential to serve as leaders in the community and build community resilience.
- 2- Include a module on the importance of data collection for decision-making in the area of security in general, and VE in particular
- 3- Include a module on socio-economic push factors for VE and conduct brainstorming on concrete actions to address them in the community after the training
- 4- Include a session on creating narratives to VE in the community and the role of each identified actor in the survey in creating these narratives
- 5- Include a session on building community resilience and the triangle parents-teachers-students
- 6- Include a session on role of youth in P/CVE and discuss concrete actions in groups to conduct at the conclusion of the training.



## Municipality of Librazhd

### Profile of the municipality

The municipality was formed at the 2015 local government reform by the merger of the former municipalities Hotolisht, Librazhd, Lunik, Orenjë, Polis, Qendër Librazhd and Steblevë that became municipal units. The total population is 31,892 (2011 census), in a total area of 793.36 km<sup>2</sup>. Librazhd is the nearest town to the Shebenik-Jabllanice National Park. It is also a cross border region with Northern Macedonia. With the reform there is an elevated need in addressing innovation and environment. The municipality is located in the region (qark) of Elbasan and is composed of 1 city and 52 villages.

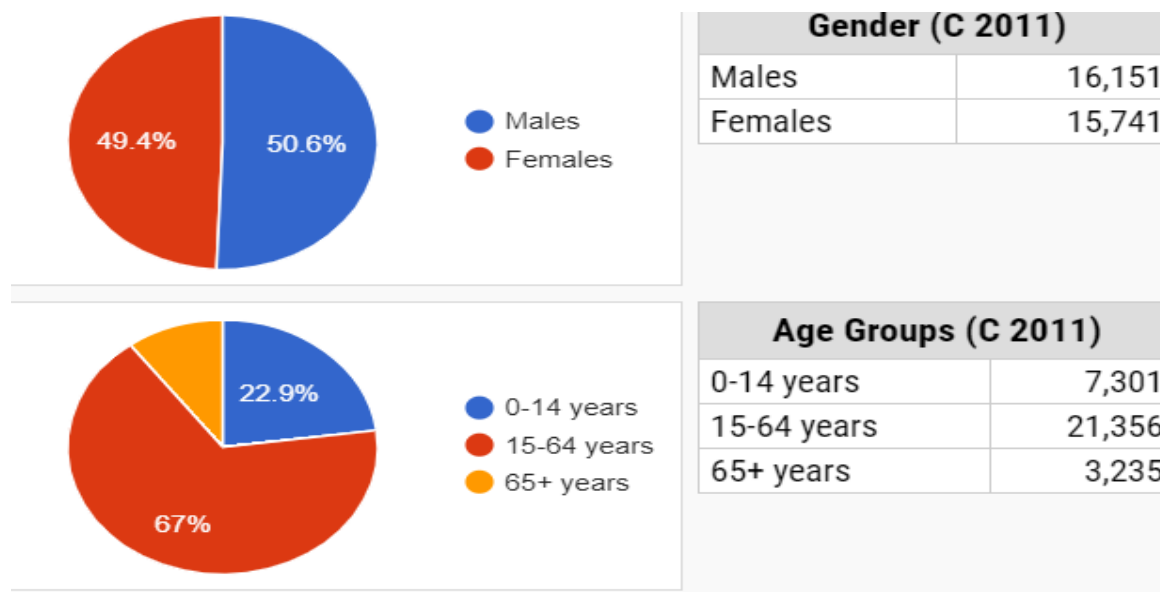
<i>Municipality</i>	<b>Administrative Units</b>	<b>Cities and villages</b>
<i>Librazhd</i>	Librazhd	City: Librazhd
	Qender Librazhd	Villages: Librazhd Qëndër, Arrëz, Babje, Dorëz, Dragostunjë, Kutturman, Gizavesh, Librazhd Katund, Marinaj, Qarrishtë, Spathar, Togëz, Merqizë, Semes
	Hotolisht	Villages: Hotolisht, Dardhë, Vulçan, Buzgarë, Kokrevë, Vehçan, Xhyrë, Çerçan
	Lunik	Villages: Lunik, Prevall, Dranovicë, Kostenjë, Letëm, Zgosht, Koshorisht
	Stebleve	Villages: Stëblevë, Zabzun, Borovë, Llangë, Sebisht, Moglicë, Prodan
	Polis	Villages: Polis, Mirakë, Gostimë, Sheh, Gurëshpatë, Vilan
	Orenje	Villages: Orenjë, Floq, Gurakuq, Ballgjin, Rinas, Zdrajsh Verri, Zdrajsh, Neshtë, Mëxixë, Funarës

### Demographics

According to the 2011 Census, Librazhd has a population of 31,892 inhabitants, while the Civil Registry contains 44,181 inhabitants. The municipality has an area of 793.36 km<sup>2</sup> and a density of 55.68 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> whereas according to the census, the density is 40 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>.

Table 1: Population distribution

<i>Name</i>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Population</b>
<i>Librazhd</i>	Municipality	31,892
<i>Hotolisht</i>	Municipal Unit	5,706
<i>Librazhd</i>	Municipal Unit	6,937
<i>Lunik</i>	Municipal Unit	2,621
<i>Orenje</i>	Municipal Unit	3,883
<i>Polis</i>	Municipal Unit	3,385
<i>Qender</i>	Municipal Unit	8,551
<i>Stebleve</i>	Municipal Unit	809



Source: [https://www.citypopulation.de/en/albania/admin/046\\_librazhd/](https://www.citypopulation.de/en/albania/admin/046_librazhd/)

67% of the population is of working age (15-64 years old), while 10% are above 65 and 23% are below the age of 15 – all close to the national average. In terms of religious composition, 83.6% self-identify as Muslims and 0.6% as Orthodox. Finally, 95% are of Albanian ethnicity and 0.06% as Roma.

### Economy

The municipality of Librazhd is located in the east of Albania, an area rich in vegetation, hydro resources, and wide forest space. Since its creation in 1958, the city was a center of food industry and forest use.

The economy of the municipality is divided between services in the city and agriculture in rural areas. However, poor infrastructure and lack of investment in the past two decades has kept rural areas in a vicious cycle of poverty. There is potential for development of mountainous tourism, however, few resources have been dedicated to this endeavor.

According to data from the Institute of Statistics, 58.3% of income comes from employment, while 23.1% from social assistance – which is a relatively high reliance on government assistance. Furthermore, 31% rely on pensions, and a little over 10% on remittances from abroad.

The percentage of the population with declared access to Internet in Librazhd stands at 4.7%, a very low number, which reflects the rural and remote nature of the area and poverty evidenced from sources of income above. A little more have access to a computer (9%).

Of the total working population, over 62% are employed in the agriculture sector, followed by 30% in the services sector, and those remaining are employed in industry. Youth unemployment rate is much higher than the national average, standing at 40%. Finally, monthly average wage stands at approximately 350 Euro, slightly below the national average.

### Data on violent extremism

The municipality of Librazhd is one of the early hotspot areas identified in Albania with many of the foreign fighters originating from rural areas of the municipality. According to a national survey on VE<sup>10</sup>, respondents in Librazhd showed problematic tendencies and attitudes to support both religious and non-religious VE narratives. The study also identified significant percentages of respondents in Librazhd, both religious and non-religious, who show a tendency to favor radical actions or other extremist narratives.

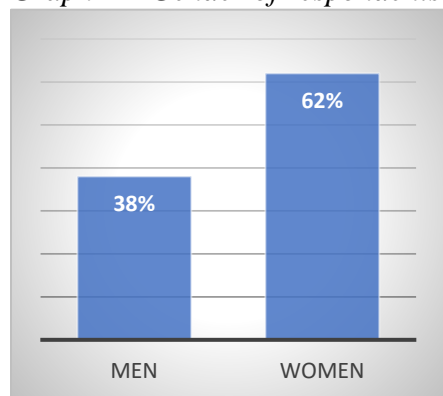
Librazhd is also one of the first municipalities to establish a Local Safety Council, which serves as an advisory body to the Mayor of the city on issues pertaining to security and safety; it is comprised of police, religious communities, municipality officials, social services, civil society organizations, school representatives, etc. While the LSC in Librazhd has been relatively active in its functions, lack of funding and proper resources, both financial and human, hamper its efficient functioning, relying mostly on external support.

### Survey findings

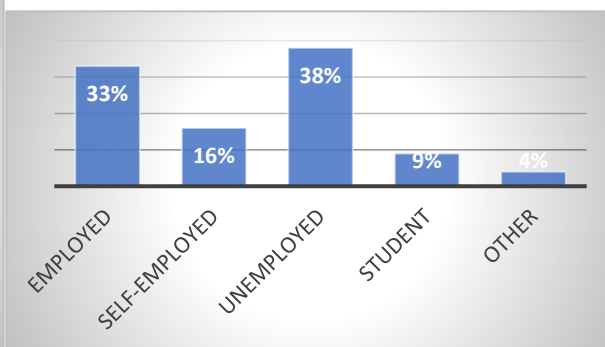
#### Demographic data

As the graph below shows, the majority of respondents were women. The majority of those interviewed were currently unemployed (38%), followed by employed respondents (33%) and self-employed (16%). Only 9% were students. Only 4% were in other categories.

*Graph 1 – Gender of respondents*



*Graph 2 – Employment Status*



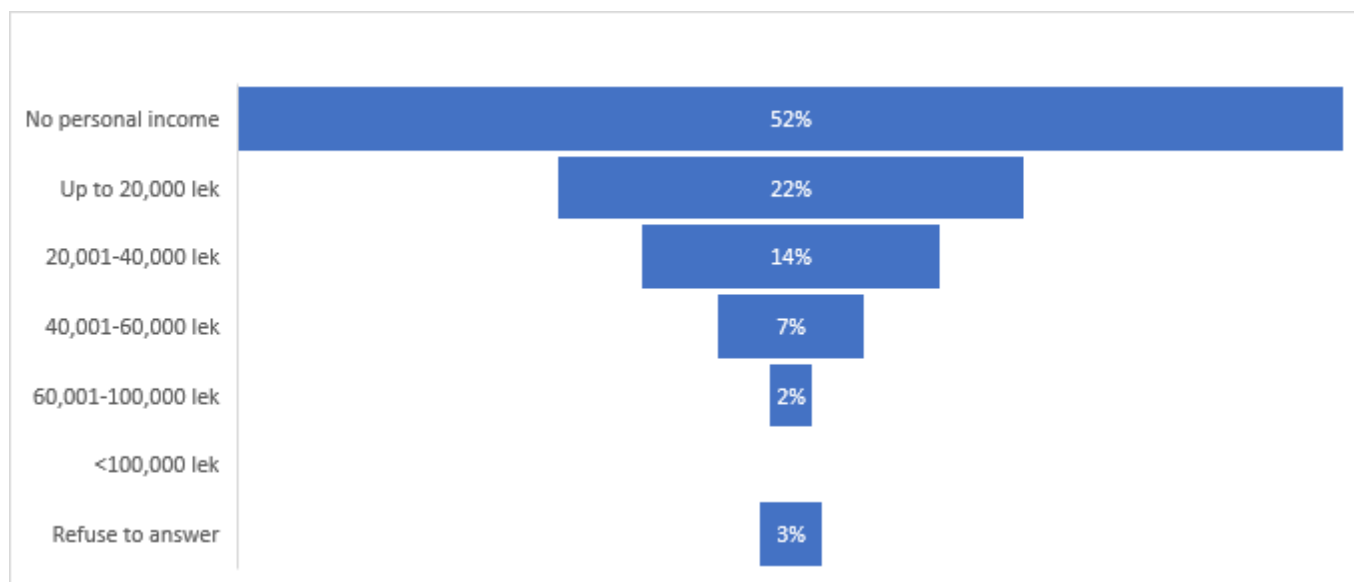
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Graph 3 below shows that the majority of respondents do not have a personal income, which accounts for the unemployed ones, students, and other – who were identified as pensioners but did not receive pension benefits. The second biggest group earns less than 20,000 leke (less than 150 Eur). Only 2% earned between 60,000 and 100,000 Lek (above 500 Eur).

<sup>10</sup> Institute for Democracy and Mediation. 2018. Study on violent extremism in Albania. Online: <https://idmalbania.org/study-violent-extremism-in-albania-november-2018/>

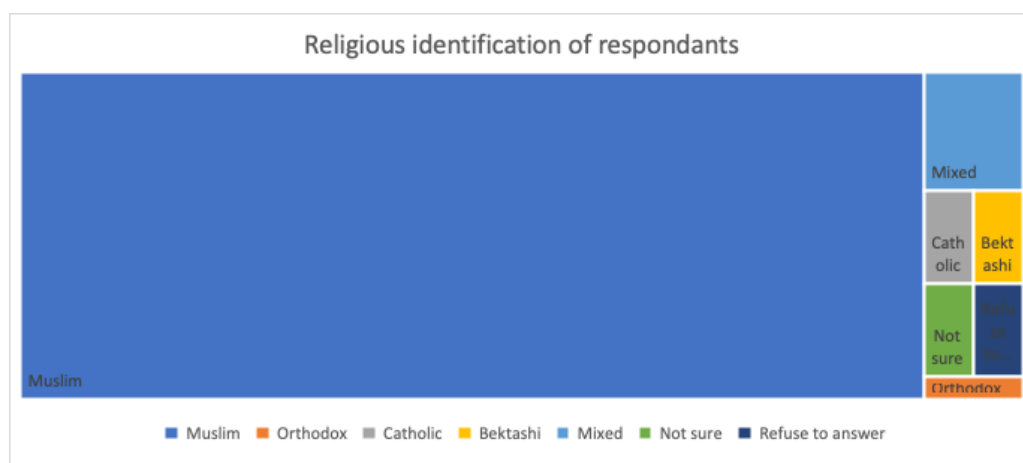
<sup>11</sup> Due to cultural aspects of the location and the timing of the survey it was impossible to engage more men in the survey

*Graph 3 – Individual Income*



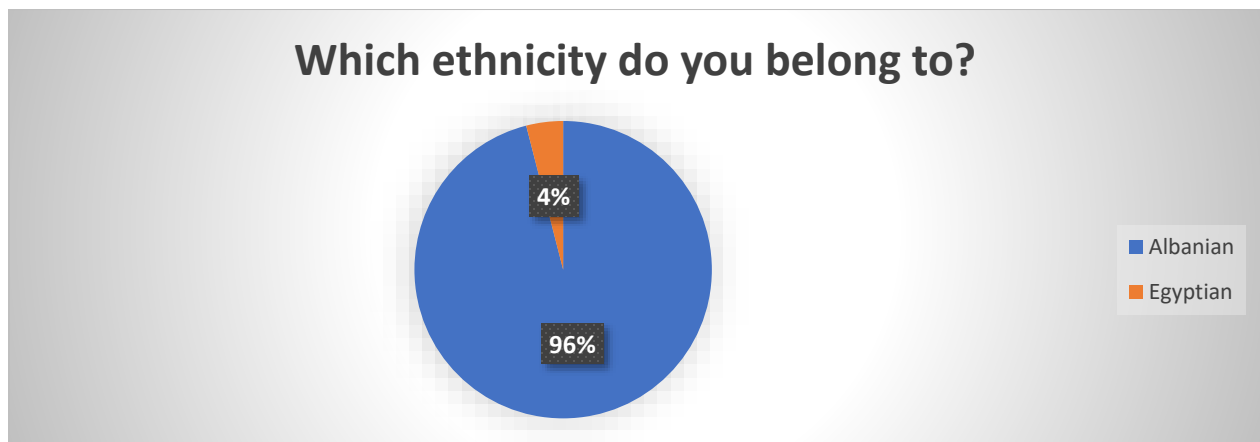
In terms of religious identification, the respondents largely mirror the religious composition of the municipality as presented in the first section. Graph 4 below shows that the vast majority (90%) identify as Muslims, followed by 3.6% mixed, and the rest equally divided among other religions.

*Graph 4 – Religious identification*



The vast majority of respondents, as shown in graph 5 below, are of Albanian origin, while 4% identify as Roma/Egyptian.

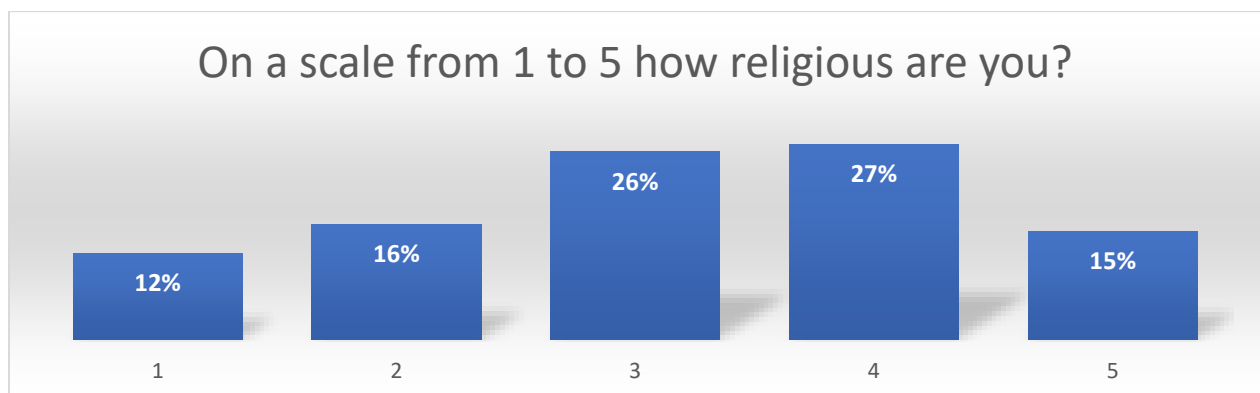
*Graph 5 – Ethnicity*



#### Perceptions regarding religious faith

Survey respondents were asked a number of questions regarding their religious affiliations and beliefs. First, they were asked about the extent to which they were religious themselves on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is 'not religious at all' and 5 is 'very religious'. As graph 6 below shows, the majority of respondents identify themselves between moderately religious and religious (standing on the 3 and 4 scale), the rate of 26% and 27% each. Only 12% identify themselves as little to not religious and a further 15% are highly religious.

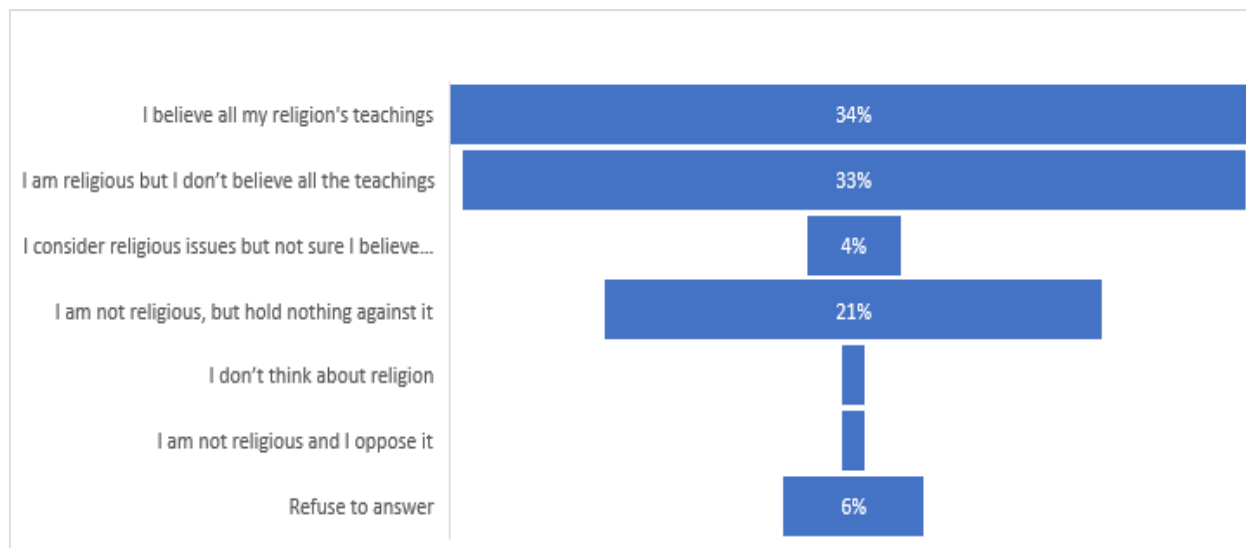
*Graph 6 – Extent of religiosity*



In addition to self-identification and reflection on religiosity, respondents were asked about their perceptions and attitudes of religion in general, religious teachings in particular, and how they view themselves vis-à-vis these two. Graph 7 below shows that the majority of respondents are split equally between those who are religious but do not accept all the teachings of their religion

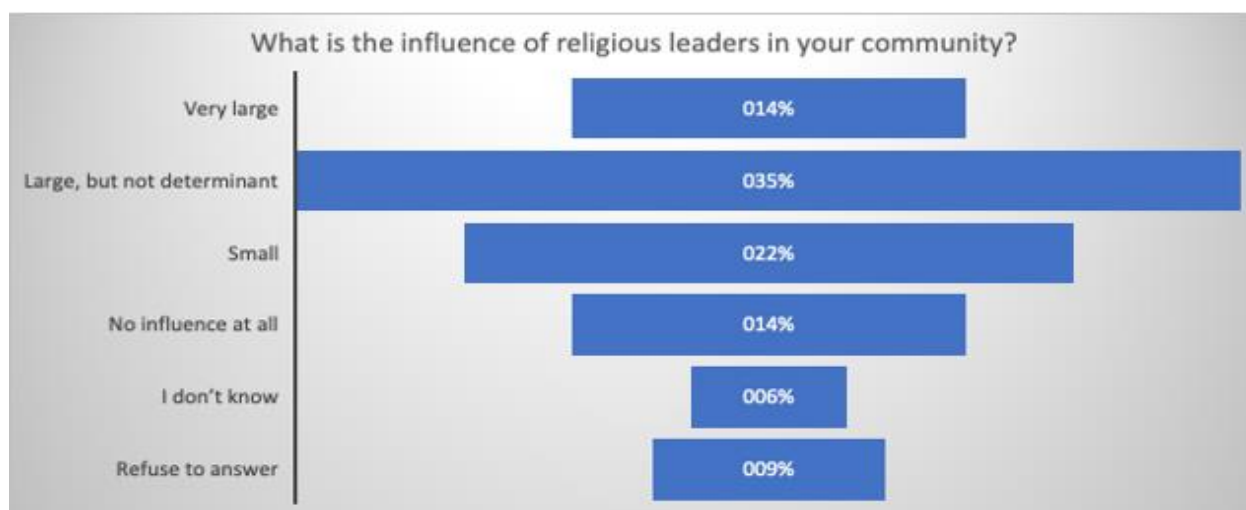
(33%), closely followed by those who accept all the teachings of their religion (34%). 21% further declare to not be religious but having nothing against it, and the number of those who don't think about religion or oppose to it is insignificant.

*Graph 7 - Attitudes about religious teachings*



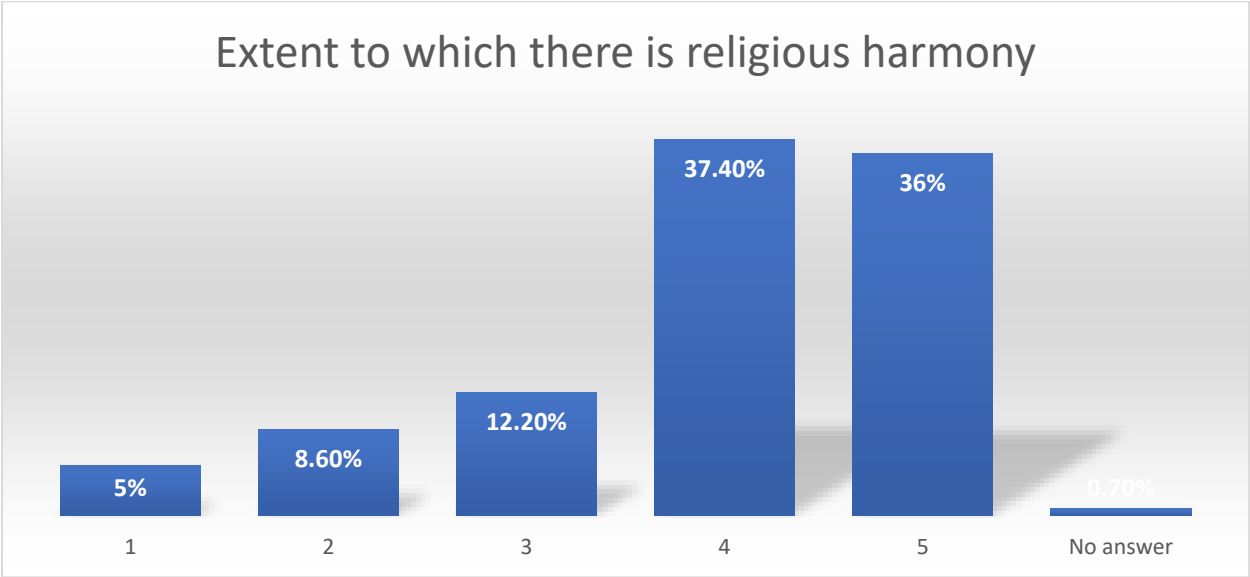
Respondents were also asked about their perception on the influence of the religious community in their city/place of residence. The question aims to understand the presence of religious leaders and their position within community representatives. As graph 8 below shows, the majority of respondents believe that their influence is large but not determinant, followed by those who believe their influence to be small (22.3%). The rest is equally divided between those who think their influence is very large, and that there is no influence at all (14.4% each).

*Graph 8 – Influence of religious community*



Lastly, religious tolerance and co-existence are repeated mantras in Albanian society, with some widespread beliefs on the importance of these values. As such, respondents were also asked about religious tolerance in their community, ranking it from 1 to 5 where 1 is ‘religious intolerance’ and 5 is ‘religious harmony’. As graph 9 below shows, the majority of respondents (36% and 37.4%) believe there is religious harmony in Albania, or at least more religious harmony than intolerance. Only 5% believe there is complete religious intolerance in the country, while 12.2% are ambivalent about it.

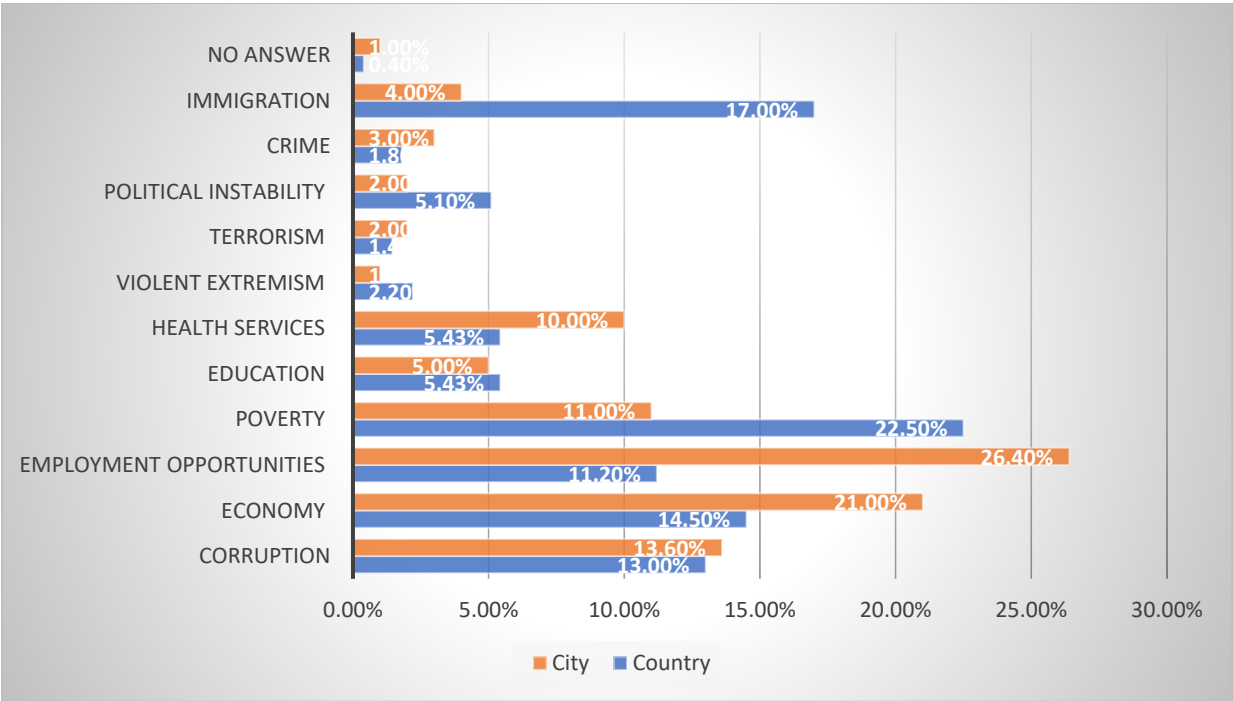
Graph 9 - Religious tolerance/harmony



Perceptions on concerns in the community

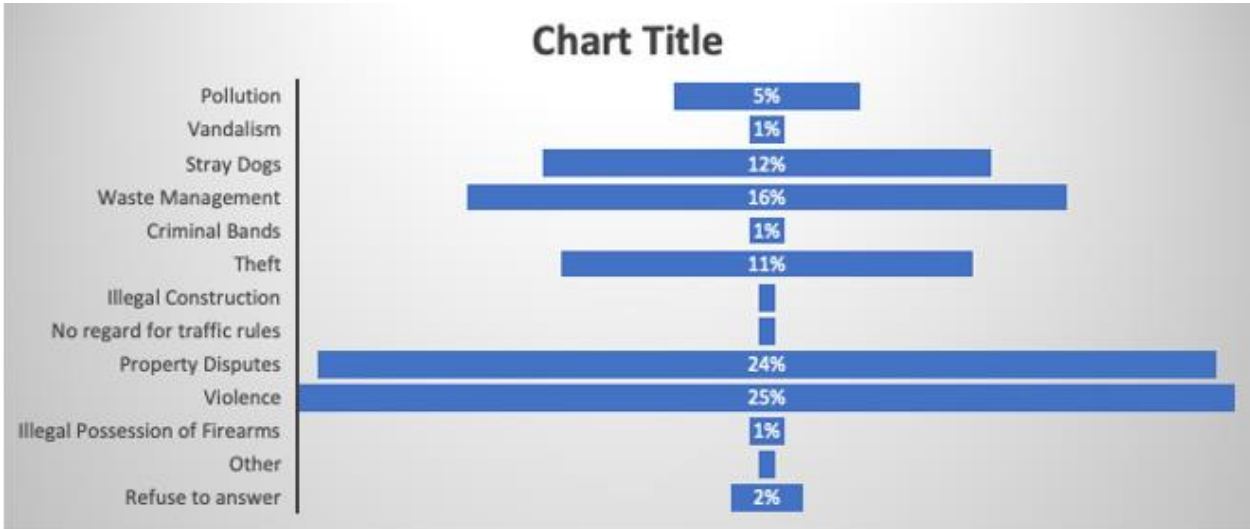
Respondents were asked about the most pressing issues facing both the country in general and their community more specifically. There are some differences, as graph 10 below shows, on their perceptions regarding general issues of concern at the macro level, and what they believe their city and community are facing. The three most important issues facing the city they live in are employment, economy, and corruption. Respondents have a more pessimistic view of the city’s situation in general compared to that of the country. The three issues that are most problematic according to them are poverty, immigration, and economy. Very few believe that violent extremism is a concern either for the country or for their community. Health services are also seen as problematic in the community, at a higher degree compared to the country in general. The biggest differences between concerns in the country and their own communities are related to immigration and poverty, whereas respondents view these two issues with much more concern for the country in general as for their own community.

Graph 10 – Most important issues facing the country and the community



In addition to more general topics of concern, respondents were also asked about specific issues that relate to their community and city, and were asked to identify which ones are most problematic and of concern to them personally. As graph 11 below shows, the majority of respondents identify violence, property disputes, and waste management as the most common issues troubling their communities. Criminal activity is also seen as problematic by a considerable number of respondents. For instance, 11% consider theft a problem in their community.

Graph 11 – Issues of concern to the community

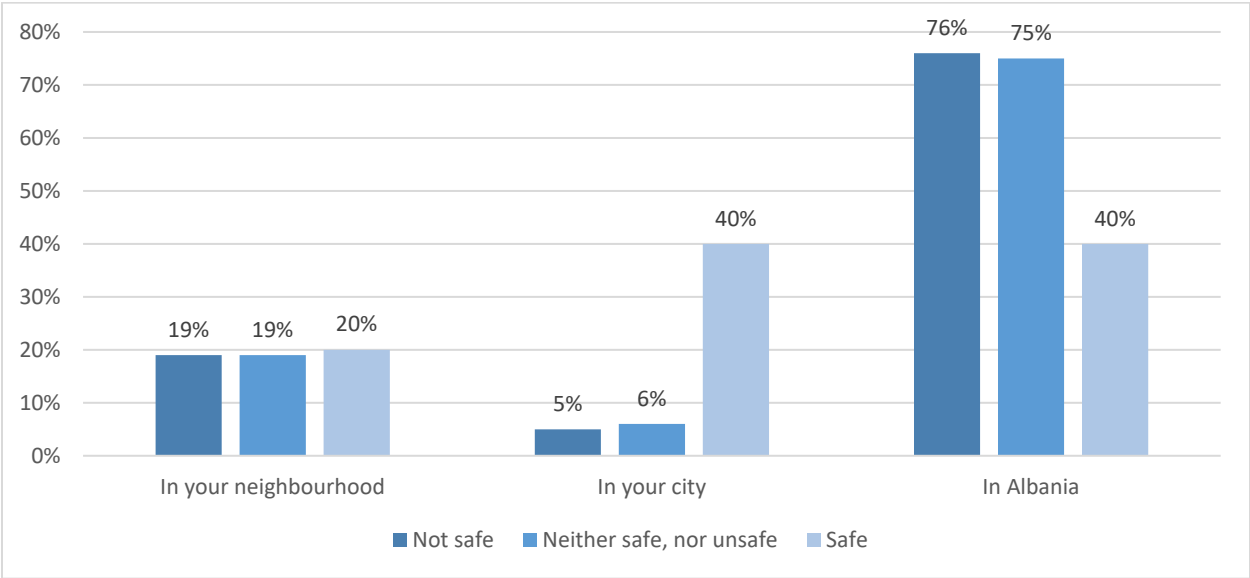


Respondents were asked to assess how safe they felt in their surrounding area, in the city they live in, and in the country more generally. We see the tendency of feeling safe decreasing when going



from the neighborhood to the country, which shows that most respondents know their communities well, might have lived there for a long time, and are familiar with the community surrounding them. The majority is ambiguous when it comes to the country, whereas 40% feel neither safe nor unsafe of living in Albania. The feeling of safety is relatively high in the neighborhood, as 76% declare to feel safe in their surrounding communities. As the municipality is a small and compact one, this finding is consistent with the characteristics of the community.

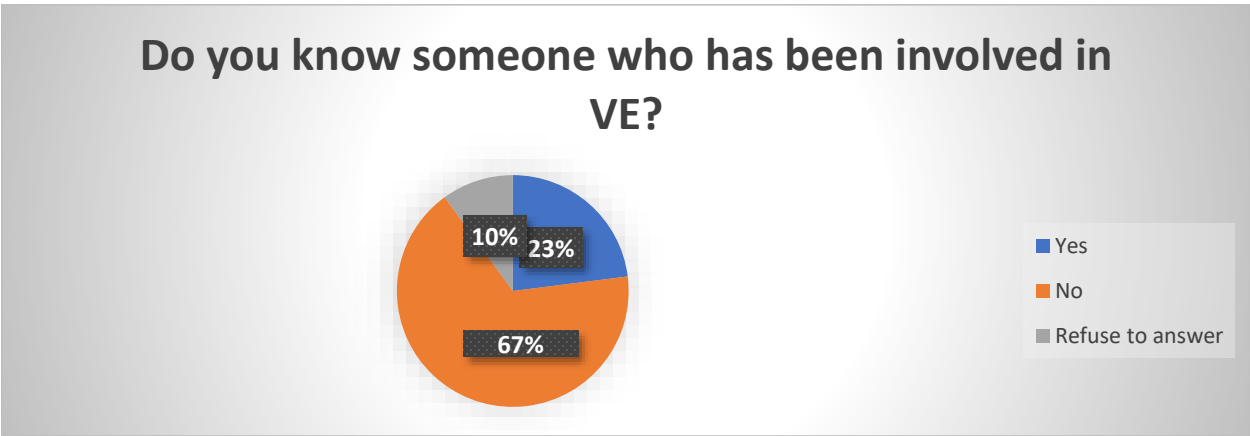
Graph 12 - Feelings of safety in community, city, country



Perceptions on violent extremism

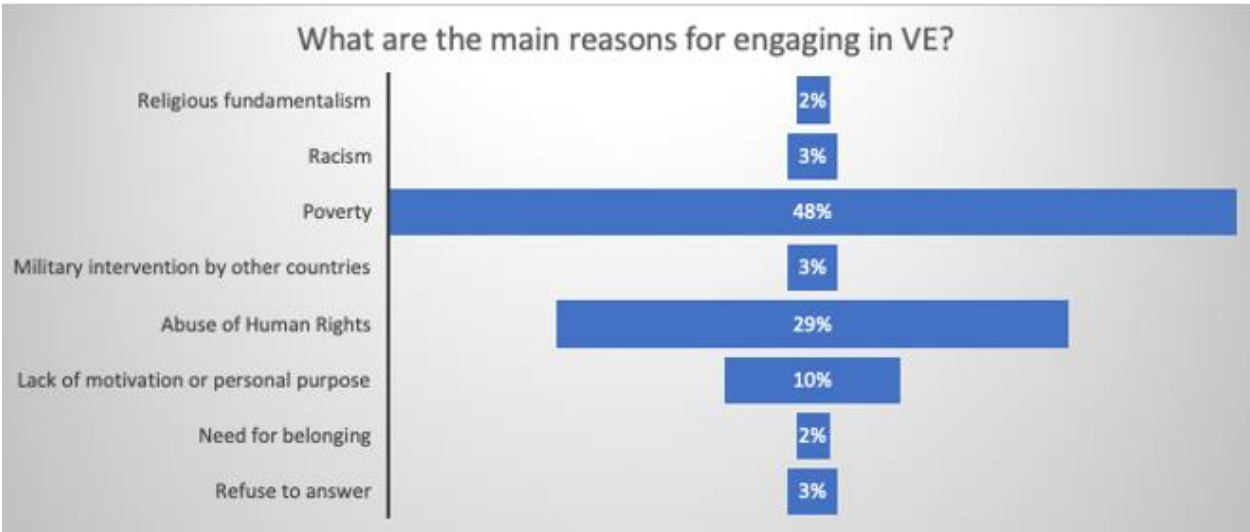
Finally, and most importantly, survey respondents were asked a number of questions regarding their perceptions on violent extremism in general, as well as regarding their communities and themselves. Survey respondents were asked whether they personally knew someone who had been or is currently engaged in any forms of violent extremism. The graph below shows that the majority (67%) had no personal connection, however, more than 1 in 5 do know someone and 10% refused to answer this question – which together forms a high percentage.

Graph 13 – Personal acquaintance with someone involved in VE



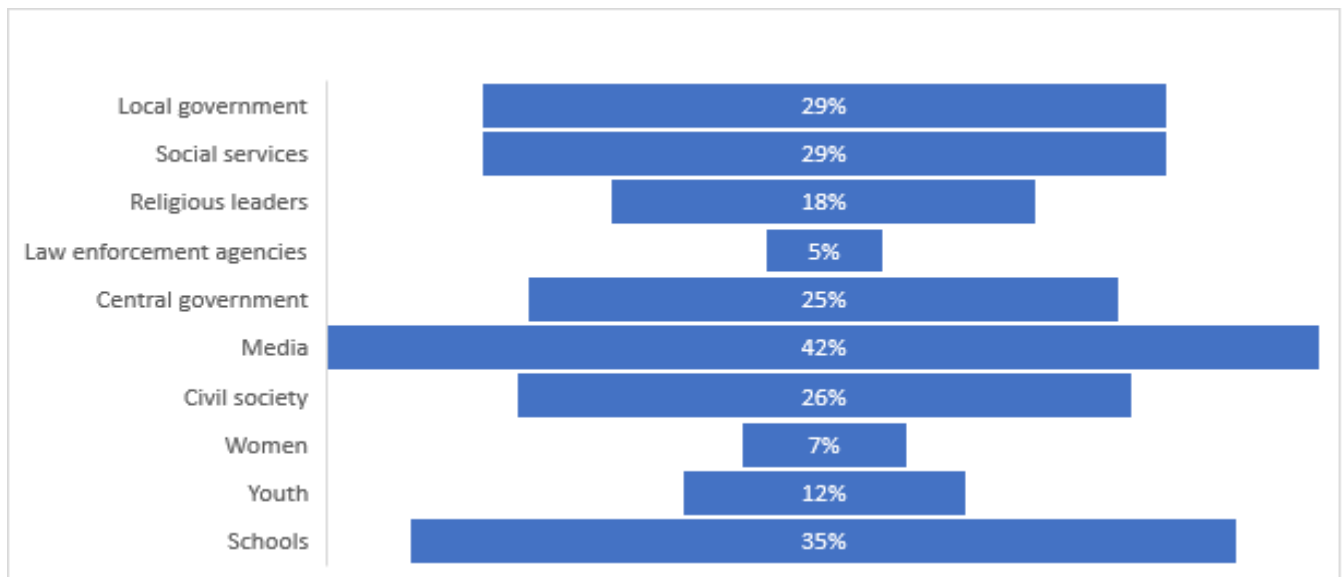
Understanding push and pull factors of violent extremism is an important step towards addressing its root causes and intervention methods. Therefore, respondents were asked to identify what they believed to be the main causes for engaging in VE. As graph 14 shows, a vast majority identifies poverty as the main push factor (48%), followed by abuses of human rights and personal motivations as pull factors (29% and 10% respectively). Very few consider religious fundamentalism and a need for belonging as a reason for engaging in violent extremism, as shown in graph 14 below.

Graph 14 – Main causes of VE



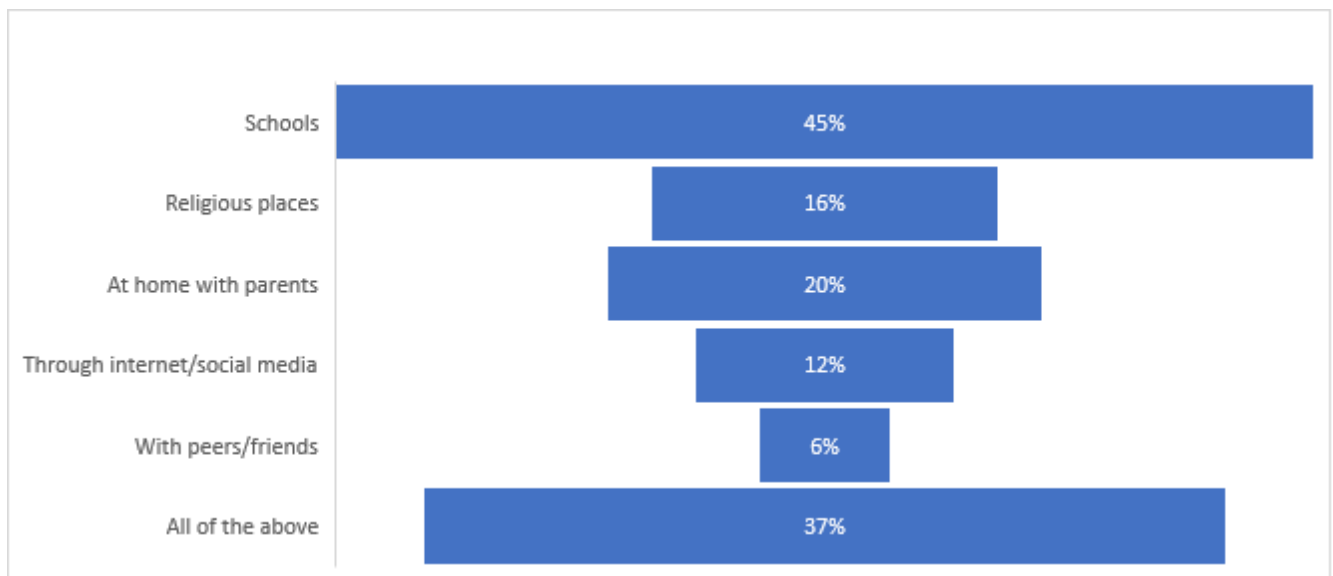
In line with the respondents’ agreement that state institutions should be engaged in the return of Albanian citizens involved in other countries’ conflicts, they were asked to identify the main actors that should be involved in preventing violent extremism in Albania. It is clear from graph 15 below that respondents consider many actors as important in preventing and combating VE, showing the necessity for the whole community to approach the issue – which the literature largely views as an effective tool. However, some actors are seen to play a more active role than others. Respondents identify media as a significantly more important actor, followed by schools and local governments as the main actors that should be engaged in preventing and countering VE. Less importance is placed on women, youth, and law enforcement. While respondents identify schools as important actors, the fact that they do not view youth as actors of change perhaps means they see them as more at-risk that need support and intervention. Thus, it would be essential to engage youth leaders and support them in claiming a leadership role in their communities and among their peers. Also, as media is perceived to have a powerful effect, it is advisable to work with local media to review messaging and enhance a positive impact in the community.

*Graph 15 – Main actors involved in preventing VE*



The vast majority believe that schools are the best place to carry out these messages and reach especially vulnerable young people (45%). Furthermore, more than 1 in 3 respondents said that all of the options provided should be used as primary sources and places where messaging should be focused and P/CVE measures undertaken, which includes religious places, at home with parents, among youth peers, and using internet and social media. Therefore, it becomes clear that working with schools is essential to efforts to combat and prevent VE.

*Graph 16 – Places where CVE efforts should be placed*



## Conclusions and recommendations

- 1- The municipality of Librazhd has a functioning Local Safety Council as one of the first in the country to apply this tool, which has been functioning relatively well despite lack of funding and resources.
  - Collaborate with the LSC to discuss potentiality of establishing a fully fledged referral mechanism to be budgeted by the municipality
  - Strengthen the role of the LSC by adding resources to its functionality so that it is not only an ad hoc structure but a regular one that can conduct activities
  - Review the local safety plans of the municipality of Librazhd to analyze which activities were conducted and what was not achieved
- 2- Librazhd has been one of the first exporters of Foreign Fighters and therefore many of the returnees are expected (or already) to live in the same communities.
  - Assist the municipality in developing local reintegration plans for returning fighters and their families and provide psychological support services for them and their families, as well as the immediate communities around them.
  - Support municipality in identifying returnees that might be engaged to conduct counter narratives based on personal experiences
- 3- Schools are identified as the best places to produce counter messaging and PVE initiatives, together with religious places and the home; however, youth are seen less as actors of change, but rather as recipients of these interventions.
  - While respondents identify schools as important actors, the fact that they do not view youth as actors of change perhaps means they see them as more at-risk that need support and intervention. Thus, it would be essential to engage youth leaders and support them in claiming a leadership role in their communities and among their peers. Also, as media is perceived to have a powerful effect, it is advisable to work with local media to review messaging and enhance a positive impact in the community
- 4- Schools and media are identified as two of the key actors at the local level that should take the lead on addressing VE in the community or where messaging needs to happen.
  - It is essential to educate citizens on the role that each actor and institution, as well as community, needs to play in order to holistically respond to challenges posed by VE in their communities and cities.
  - Engage school officials in developing curricula for students to address issues of VE and security in general
  - Establish parent teacher councils/associations to discuss issues of common concern in school environments
  - Promote the schools as community centers model to attract young people and introduce topics of VE to the activities.
- 5- Poverty is identified by far as the most important driver of VE and push factor for individuals to become foreign fighters, followed by abuses of human rights and racism, which has important implications for future interventions.

- Advocate for a clear local economic development plan for the municipality to address existing economic grievances among the population, especially those in rural areas.
  - Conduct an in-depth analysis of the socio-economic situation of the municipality and support the latter to develop a local development plan that addresses those challenges
  - Increase efforts to conduct participatory budgeting to include the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized communities.
- 6- The religious community is not perceived as highly influential, but there is space to work with religious leaders as they are seen as some of the key actors for dealing with P/CVE and building counter narratives.

Based on the conclusions and recommendations above the following issues/topics should be addressed more specifically in the training:

- 1- Include a module on whole-of-society approach on the role that each actor and institution, as well as community, needs to play in order to holistically respond to challenges posed by VE in their communities and cities.
- 2- Include a module on youth and P/CVE with concrete examples and best practices from other countries that would be feasible and effective to be implemented in the municipality
- 3- Include a module on referral mechanisms and better functioning of local safety councils to improve their role and influence
- 4- Include a module on push and pull factors, with a specific focus on socio-economic factors and conduct group work and brainstorming to develop a mapping of most important factors in the community and steps to address each of them.
- 5- Include a session on building community resilience and the triangle parents-teachers-students as drivers of change.
- 6- Include a session on narratives, counter narratives and alternative narratives and how each actor can be engaged in their development.

