



Kosovo – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 9 January 2018

Are ISIS actively recruiting in Kosovo? Are those who join, sent to fight in Syria? Consequences of refusing to join? Internal relocation / state protection possibilities?

An Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada response to a request for information on Islamic extremists in Kosovo, in a section titled “Recruitment”, states:

“According to Ivan Babanovski, an analyst and former professor of security studies in Skopje, Macedonia, who was interviewed by the Southeast European Times, new members are recruited by Wahhabis in Kosovo who organize ‘free courses, religious gatherings and lectures’. The analyst and former professor also indicated that Wahhabis in Kosovo finance their activities with profits amassed from mosques under their control. Similarly, according to the moderate imam in Drenas interviewed by the Southeast European Times, Wahhabis and Salafists ‘have found space to penetrate into Kosovo society through various individuals and organizations, taking control of mosques and different jobs’.

A ‘religious expert’ interviewed by The Jordan Times in August 2013 indicated that a ‘set-up allegedly run by a Salafi sect known for its strict approach to Islam’ was recruiting people in Kosovo to travel to Syria to fight against the Syrian regime. The Jordan Times adds that, according to experts, recruitment is ‘voluntary’. It also indicates that the BIK denies recruiting fighters for the Syrian opposition. The Swiss newspaper Le Temps reports that, according to Balkan media sources, 100 volunteer fighters have left Kosovo to participate in [translation] ‘jihad’ in Syria. It also states that there is no structured network that organizes such trips; rather, information is found on the Internet and at prayer sites controlled by Wahhabis.” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (26 November 2013) KOS104696.E – *Kosovo: Adherents of the Wahhabi sect of Islam, including influence and areas of operation; recruitment practices (2012-2013)*)

The 2016 US Department of State report on terrorism in Kosovo, in a section titled “Overview”, states:

“The threat of violent Islamist extremism has been growing in Kosovo, assisted in part by funding from foreign organizations that preach extremist ideologies and violent extremist groups actively using social media to spread propaganda and recruit followers. Approximately 315 foreign terrorist fighters from Kosovo have traveled to Syria and Iraq to fight for ISIS or al-Nusrah Front (al-Qa’ida’s affiliate in Syria), of which approximately 58 have been killed.” (US Department of State (19 July 2017) *Country Reports on Terrorism 2016 – Kosovo*)

This section also states:

“Kosovo is a member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS and has taken steps to support the various lines of effort within the limits of its capabilities. It has primarily focused on stemming the flow of foreign terrorist fighters and tracking and restricting financing for terrorist groups.” (ibid)

In a section titled “Countering Violent Extremism” this report states:

“One of the main objectives in the government's CVE strategy is the prevention of violent extremism and radicalization to violence. This includes raising awareness of radicalization among community stakeholders and building their capacity to fight it. The Ministry of Internal Affairs is piloting a referral mechanism in the municipality of Gjilan that will bring together local officials, religious leaders, and civil society to address community concerns of radicalization to violence. Kosovo's CVE strategy includes the preparation and promotion of counter-narratives to weaken the legitimacy of violent extremist messages. The strategy also includes a section on de-radicalization and the reintegration of radicalized persons. The goals include helping radicalized individuals abandon violent extremist ideology, assessing risks posed by individuals returning from foreign conflicts, and raising awareness within the correctional system on the risks posed by imprisoned terrorists.” (ibid)

A report published by Global Research states:

“As fasting and hijabs are clearly apparent, the recruitment of volunteer freedom fighters to Syria and the Islamic State remains out of sight. The recruitment and indoctrination is happening deep in the society, mostly in its lower classes and among people who are often unaware of the process they are participating in. Recent arrests show that the authorities are capable of identifying individuals who have already been actively involved in the Middle East conflicts, but they do very little in order to fight the cause of the problem. In March 2014, the Kosovo Assembly passed a draft law on the prohibition of Kosovo citizens of joining armed conflicts outside Kosovo; however the dissolution of the Parliament in May, early elections held in June and the inability of the political parties to form a new government undermine the future of the bill.

The specific number of Kosovo Albanians fighting in Iraq and Syria is unknown, the authorities claim to have information about several dozen of them, but most analysts suggest that the number definitely exceeds 100. Until now 16 of them died in combat. The ones arrested last week are accused of supporting the Islamic State and the al-Nusra Front, and together with the arrests a significant number of weapons, explosives and electronic equipment have been confiscated. Even though these are men who constitute the vast majority of ‘freedom fighters’, women are sent from the Balkans to the Middle East in order to ‘fulfil their duty in Jihad Al-Nikah – the sex jihad’.” (Global Research (24 August 2014) *Kosovo: The Hidden Growth of Islamic Extremism*)

A report from the Jamestown Foundation states:

“Since the summer of 2014, Kosovo’s authorities have investigated and arrested more than 100 people allegedly involved in terrorist activities.”
(Jamestown Foundation (24 June 2016) *Jihadist Threat Persists in Kosovo and Albania Despite Government Efforts*)

An article from the New York Times states:

“Kosovo now finds itself, like the rest of Europe, fending off the threat of radical Islam. Over the last two years, the police have identified 314 Kosovars — including two suicide bombers, 44 women and 28 children — who have gone abroad to join the Islamic State, the highest number per capita in Europe.

They were radicalized and recruited, Kosovo investigators say, by a corps of extremist clerics and secretive associations funded by Saudi Arabia and other conservative Arab gulf states using an obscure, labyrinthine network of donations from charities, private individuals and government ministries.

‘They promoted political Islam,’ said Fatos Makolli, the director of Kosovo’s counterterrorism police. ‘They spent a lot of money to promote it through different programs mainly with young, vulnerable people, and they brought in a lot of Wahhabi and Salafi literature. They brought these people closer to radical political Islam, which resulted in their radicalization.’

After two years of investigations, the police have charged 67 people, arrested 14 imams and shut down 19 Muslim organizations for acting against the Constitution, inciting hatred and recruiting for terrorism. The most recent sentences, which included a 10-year prison term, were handed down on Friday.” (New York Times (21 May 2016) *How Kosovo Was Turned Into Fertile Ground for ISIS*)

A report from Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty states:

“A court in Kosovo said it sentenced seven ethnic Albanians to jail for fighting for the Islamic State and recruiting on behalf of the militant group. The men, all Kosovar citizens who were identified only by their initials, were sentenced to between 2 1/2 and 4 1/2 years in jail, the Pristina court said on January 19. The online news site Kallxo.com reported that some of the men acknowledged having fought with anti-government forces in Syria, while others said they had gone to assist Syrian refugees in Turkey. A few expressed regret for going to Syria, the news site said. Police said around 300 Kosovars have joined IS and more than 50 have been killed. More than 200 people in Kosovo have been arrested, jailed, or are under investigation for recruiting on behalf of IS or fighting in Syria and Iraq.” (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (20 January 2017) *Kosovar Court Jails Seven For Alleged Recruiting, Fighting For Islamic State*)

See also Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty report which states:

“Kosovo’s special prosecutor has charged the imam of the country’s main mosque with inciting terrorism by encouraging worshipers to go to Syria and Iraq and ‘wage jihad.’ In a February 27 statement, the prosecutor said Imam Shefqet Krasniqi had used his preaching and social networks in a way that ‘pushed others to take the road towards the conflict zone in Syria and Iraq

and then commit terrorist acts.’ The prosecutor's office in Pristina said the 51-year-old Krasniqi did this ‘continuously and purposely.’” (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (28 February 2017) *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (28 February 2017) *Imam At Pristina's Largest Mosque Charged With Inciting Terrorism*)

The Executive Summary of a report jointly published by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) states:

“The increasing influence of violent extremist groups in Kosovo¹ after the 1999 conflict showed its results during 2012 and 2013 when most of the 316 confirmed cases of Kosovo foreign fighters decided to join various armed groups in Syria, including the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Al Nusra. Although the trend decreased by the end of 2015, the Kosovo foreign fighters’ phenomenon shows that Kosovo has not remained immune from the global trend of religious radicalization linked to the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. Several studies suggest that Kosovo has arguably supplied the highest number of foreign fighters per capita in Europe to this conflict² and the third highest number of foreign fighters per number of population of Islamic denomination.” (US Agency for International Development (USAID) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (28 June 2017) *Public Pulse Analysis on Prevention of Violent Extremism in Kosovo*, p.4)

This report also states:

“Due to counter-terrorism activities by Kosovo police as well as the justice system, the number of Kosovans that leave Kosovo to join ISIS and other extremist groups has decreased substantially since 2015.” (ibid, p.5)

Referring to a report published by the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies, a Balkan Insight article states:

“The report relies also on four interviews with former foreign fighters from Kosovo, including those currently in detention. It states that there is no doubt that at least some of the people who joined ISIS in Syria and Iraq believed they were heeding the call to fight a holy war in Syria, explaining that for years, through direct personal contact, local imams worked on their indoctrination, encouraging contempt for the secular state. The wives of the defendants often appear to have encouraged their husbands to go to Syria and also joined them, the study finds. KCSS study found that ISIS recruiters and violent extremists use Facebook and YouTube extensively as platforms to spread their propaganda.” (Balkan Insight (25 September 2017) *ISIS Appeal Remains Challenge For Kosovo, Report Warns*)

Full text of KCSS referred to above report is attached for information purposes.

Information regarding the consequences of kosovans refusing to join ISIS was not found among sources available to the Refugee Documentation Centre.

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit within time

constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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