Kosovo: Covid-19 and the threat of violent extremism –

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The ongoing pandemic has already generated significant changes in public policy. Although the Kosovo government has managed the situation fairly well, the measures that have been taken to contain the spread of Covid-19 have almost exhausted an already limited budget. In 2019, the unemployment rate in Kosovo was 25.3% and is likely to increase as a result of the pandemic, worsening the living conditions of the population, especially young people, who make up the bulk of the population (around 53% of Kosovo's population is under 25 years of age). Lack of employment has been identified as one of the key aspects of the radicalization process and will be one of the major issues following the pandemic. Nevertheless, throughout the pandemic, no cases of radicalization were reported in the country, which means that the threat of violent extremism has not been exacerbated by the current situation. However, these same circumstances could increase the threat after the pandemic.

After Covid-19, the distribution of public funds is expected to shift towards public health and the economy (especially employment). Similarly, the focus is expected to shift to international grants, resulting in increasingly limited resources for CVE/PVE, which may, to some extent, cripple the efforts being made in this area by non-governmental organizations whose work depends on international funding.

On the political front, the coming months will be characterized by unpredictability. The current interim government was ousted over the issue of negotiating an agreement between Kosovo and Serbia, which could include a territorial swap. An ongoing dispute over the creation of a new government or the call for new elections would be dealt with by the Constitutional Court of Kosovo, however, this will not calm the situation. This political crisis, combined with the changes that the current pandemic will impose, will create unfavorable conditions for the prevention of extremism.

At the societal level, quarantine and social distancing measures have created more opportunities for young people to spend more time online, which may well make the most vulnerable more susceptible to online influences that have the capacity to trigger radicalization. Social activities that might otherwise play a role in the prevention process (cultural, religious, and other gatherings) are suspended, and with the lack of such social mechanisms of prevention comes a more fertile ground for radicalization.