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Nedžad Korajlić
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TRAVELERS TO SYRIA

A Criminological and Security Analysis with Special Focus on Returnees from Syrian Battlefronts

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Sarajevo 2020

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PREFACE

Over the past years, researchers have become increasingly interested in evolutionary views of the numerous forms of social behaviour that lead to radicalization, violent extremism and terrorism. In order to understand such behaviours, through the activities of the ten-month project entitled "Defining the Factors and Processes that Lead to Radicalisation, Extremism and Terrorism in Bosnia and Herzegovina – DeFRET" we conducted a survey research into various forms of individual and social impacts which contribute to this kind of behaviour. We present the study of the project activities in which we have tried to express our enthusiasm with the research process in a simple, objective, meaningful way, presenting the findings of the research project. However, we do not want to dilute the presentation of the findings. Some findings may be completely unexpected; however, it is important to prepare the public by offering it a solid basis on which it will develop its own understanding of such phenomena as radicalization, violent extremism and terrorism.

After the summary and introduction, the first part describes the methodological framework of the research. Apart from methods and techniques of data collection, that chapter treats also the problem and limitations of the survey research as well as ethical issues.

The first part of the findings and discussions is the profile of Bosnia and Herzegovina's "returnees from Syria." The common features were obtained on the basis of social explanation of the factors which contributed to their departures but also on the basis of some individual factors.

In the second part of the findings and discussions we can read about the causes and motives that drove those individuals to leave for Syria but also about the motives driving people to return to Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The findings and discussion are based on the collected responses to the survey questions and verification of set hypotheses. This part tests the war and atrocities from the 1990s as a motive, the mujahedeen who came and fought in BiH in the 1990s as an inspiration, personal assets and financial status as a pressure

factor, the Hijra as a motive, the internet as a possible tool for the spread of ideology, friendship and family relations, religious commitment and teaching and stay in Syria and reasons for return.

In the third part we expand our analysis to include security issues, returnees' experiences from prison, the relationship between returnees and local communities, young people and possible approaches to integration. Moreover, we consider the returnees' attitudes towards an election, society, regulations and Islam in BiH.

In the conclusion, we discuss the possible focus for the development of efficient programmes for (re)socialisation and reintegration.

Taking into consideration the importance of this study, we are proud to share its findings and warmly welcome the future work of all of our colleagues on etiology and phenomenology of radicalization and violent extremism with a view to improving a comprehensive professional discussion at the national and international levels.

Sarajevo, March 2020

SUMMARY

Methodology

The methodology was based on a realistic approach which helped us respond to the goals of the study. The realistic approach contained a methodological design based on qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. The qualitative methods used included a personal interview survey, group discussion (focus groups) and observation. A questionnaire-based survey was used to collect quantitative data. The primary data sources were:

1. Returnees from the Syrian battlefronts: structured interviews were conducted with 11 returnees (out of the total population of 51 returnees) indicated in the Study as the first sample (interviews with returnees);

2. Family members of the persons who, at the time of the survey, were in Syria or had died on the Syrian battlefronts: structured interviews were conducted with nine members of different families, indicated in the Study as the second sample (interviews with families);

3. Citizens and youth representatives from local communities: four focus groups were held, in Cazin, Maglaj, Sarajevo and Tuzla, involving a total of 45 people (23 men and 22 women). Attitudes and level of understanding of the concepts of radicalization, radicalism, violent extremism and terrorism were examined.

4. Residents of closed communities: a focus group was held in one closed community, involving 14 participants, all of whom were men. Also, interviews were conducted with two representatives of another closed community.

5. Police officers and security experts: interviews were conducted with eight police officers from different police agencies in BiH and five security experts.

6. Citizens over the age of 18 in the Sarajevo Canton, Una-Sana Canton, Tuzla Canton and Zenica-Doboj Canton: the survey was conducted on a representative sample of 231 respondents using the "face to face" technique.

Citizens' attitudes towards radicalization, radicalism, violent extremism and terrorism and their understanding of these concepts were examined.

It is important to note that the conclusions reached on the basis of the information collected from 11 returnees and 9 members of different families cannot be generalized as this is an unrepresentative sample selected by the "snowball" sampling technique. In addition, the term “cluster sample” is used in the Study, which combines the first (interviews with returnees) and the second sample (interviews with families).

Number and structure

The number of 301 BiH *travellers to Syria* (the term is used in the text to denote all persons from BiH who went to the Syrian battlefronts in the period from 2012, regardless of the circumstances of departure, gender and age) shows that 85 persons on million people traveled to Syria. The State Investigation and Protection Agency (the SIPA) has estimated that 124 persons related to BiH have been killed in Syria. By January 2020, 80 travellers returned from Syria. Among them the most numerous were men (51), followed by children below 14 (19) and women (10). According to estimates, some citizens of BiH still present in Syria (87), the majority of whom are children.

The primary data we collected show that travellers to Syria from BiH are predominantly male. The ratio between men and women is in favour of men (73% men: 27% female). The ratio is somewhat lower than the European ratio, which is 87% to 13% in favour of men. The first departures of women and children were recorded in June 2013 and continued into 2014.

Socioeconomic status

The majority of our cluster sample (75%) had been unemployed before departure to Syria. The percentage of those unemployed is almost double compared with the European average of unemployed travellers to Syria and Iraq.

An average monthly income of returnees before departing for Syria was 450 Convertible Marks (BAM) and today it is BAM 514. They are engaged in agriculture, working in day labor, mostly in the construction sector, and there are also those who are engaged in raising animals. Nine out of eleven returnees said that they would work in the companies that employ members of other ethnic groups, while most of them maintain a generally positive opinion about non-Muslims.

Education and life prior to leaving

If we look at the level of education of our cluster sample (interviews with returnees and interviews with families), almost all of them finished high school. This places them in the level of education of the majority of BiH citizens. This means that the existing image of this group, as relatively uneducated, naive and inexperienced people, should be taken with a grain of salt. The data obtained show that the returnees are well acquainted with the situation in BiH and the world, and 8 out of 11 of them state that they can use some of the foreign languages.

Based on such a picture, it can be concluded that the level of education in our cluster sample cannot be the cause of radicalization and departure to Syria, if it is taken only for itself and out of connection with other circumstances. The fact that among the travelers to Syria we find in a larger number of persons of certain high school occupations, does not mean that their occupation "incites radicalism", but it is primarily a matter of other factors and influences.

Motives and causes of departure to Syria

Although the majority of returnees from the sample see the atrocities experienced by their families and/or war-related events in BiH in the 1990s as part of the global injustice done to Muslims, seven out of eleven returnees rejected the hypothesis that the atrocities and events had affected their identification with the events in Syria or their decision to go there.

Most of the returnees we interviewed (9 out of 11) believe that the Muslims of Ummah are the victims of global injustice done to them through biased treatment which includes: deprivation of rights, economic, military or otherwise unjust treatment of Muslims in the Republika Srpska entity, hurting the Muslim dignity, terrorising and killing Muslims in Palestine and Syria and ethnic cleansing of Rohingya people. Six out of eleven returnees believe that another form of injustice done to Muslims is the killing of their family members and the war-related events in BiH. Family members of those still in Syria from the second sample could not assess opinions of their relatives.

An analysis of responses shows that the majority of returnees (10 out of 11) claim that ISIL's call for the Hijra did not affect their decision to go to Syria. This frequency of responses is a very clear indication that the main reasons for departure to Syria should be sought in other factors, conditions or motives.

The mental element which contributed to the decision to depart for the Syrian battlefronts does not refer to the mujahedeen who had fought in BiH during the war in the 1990s alongside the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and

Herzegovina. Most returnees and families (15 out of 20) claim the mujahideen did not inspire them to go to Syria.

The majority of returnees (6 out of 11) admit that they did not expect any changes in their financial status by going to Syria. The same is noticeable in the second sample (interviews with families), where 5 out of 9 respondents believe that the financial status of their relatives did not affect their decision to go to Syria. One third of the respondents from the same sample could not answer this question. One family said the financial status had an impact, but that it was negligible.

On the other hand, the poor financial situation and the lack of economic opportunities were recognized by the focus group participants in the local communities and by citizens as the leading pressure factor which contributed to departure to Syria.

The focus group participants emphasized financial gain as the leading pull factor for departure to foreign battlefronts, while interviewed citizens believed the pull factor was an ideological belief. Another pull factor, in their opinion, was financial gain. Regarding financial gain, in the opinion of interviewed citizens, it was a third and the easiest way to recruit citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina to leave the country and fight in another country's battlefront.

The three returnees admit that following the website influenced their decision to go to Syria. However, it is important to mention that none of them went to Syria only on the basis of what they had seen or read on the Internet. It is obvious that our travellers to Syria went there after a short but intensive period of face-to-face interaction with certain mentors – informal lecturers – in order to make a firm decision to depart and establish links that helped them leave.

Lectures by informal religious lecturers were recognized by interviewed citizens as the leading and easiest way to recruit citizens of BiH.

Friendly and family ties played an important role recognized in the motivation factor for departure to Syria. The cluster sample shows that the majority (11 out of 20), prior to leaving for Syria, maintained relations with friends and family members who had gone or had already decided to go to Syria. The percentage of influence of social ties (family and friends) in the recruitment process is almost identical to the percentage of influence of social ties in the process of recruitment and radicalization of travellers from Germany to Syria.

Most of our travellers in the first period of departures (spring 2012-May 2013) say the reason for their departures was to support Muslims in their fight against the Syrian regime and they joined the military formation al-Nusra. All of them confirmed that they had left BiH legally on their way to Syria.

Only one returnee identified himself as a fighter. Two claimed that they had been charity workers and one said he had been in an auxiliary force. Female returnees said their experiences in Syria were related solely to housework and child care.

Six of the eleven returnees admit that they also met people who came from the region. Most of them met up to five people from the region (four of them) and only two of them said that they became friends with these people (one with five and the other with one person). As for the countries they come from, most people from the region, with whom our returnees met in Syria, come from Montenegro (3), followed by Serbia (2) and Macedonia (1).

Most of interviewed citizens (60%) maintain a negative opinion about the decision of some citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina to go to Syria.

There are a number of reasons that drove our citizens to return from Syria. They differ among returnees and no reason was mentioned twice. They gave the following reasons: *to feed my children and to send them to school; the war; I am not a part of their society; they did not allow me to fight; it was a mistake right from the start; it was no longer possible to live like that; my friends persuaded me; and conflicts among Muslims*.

Six returnees had negative experiences during their stay in Syria.

Religious orientation

The data shows that the largest number of travellers to Syria from both samples prior to active practicing Islam was religious and that they began to practice Islam in their early age, as children. Most of them undertook training within the Islamic Community in BiH and maintain positive opinions about religious education at that time. However, their responses differ in terms of assessment of knowledge they received through that education. The returnees from the first sample, unlike the families, believe that their knowledge of Islam during that period was poor. Still, most of families believe that their relatives had good knowledge of Islam prior to beginning to practice Islam actively. One third of the sample of returnees from Syria did not undertake any Islamic education. This information shows some correlation between poor knowledge of Islam in that sample and later indoctrination that contributed to their departure to Syria.

Most of returnees from Syria admit that they belong to all madhhabs and more than one third of them belong to the Hanafi madhhab. Most of returnees denied being Salafists. Nobody from our cluster sample said that he or his relatives identified with Wahhabis.

Prison experience

Most returnees are persons who have served a prison sentence after returning from Syria (7 out of 11). The length of their prison sentences is 15 months on average, although the majority of them was sentenced to 12 months in prison. The longest prisons sentence was 22 months.

Six out of seven prisoners said that they had freely practiced Islam in prison, in both a cell and the prison masjid.

The responses by the former prisoners to the question whether they had communicated with religious officer are important from the aspect of possible deradicalisation. Most of them (4 out of 7) said that they had not communicated with the religious officer in the prison. The reason for the absence of communication was interesting. One returnee said there had been no religious officer in the prison, while another one said he had never seen him.

Returnees have a positive opinion about the prison guard and their treatment of them and other prisoners.

Local community and returnees

The majority of interviewed citizens (57%) believe that the media in BiH have contributed to radicalisation in BiH with their reporting. 41% of citizens believe that are no groups or individuals (31%) prone to violent extremism in their communities. Nevertheless, despite that opinion, it should be taken into consideration that 31% of citizens believe that radicalism is somewhat of a problem in their community, while 8% thinks it is a big problem.

The majority of respondents from the sample of returnees (8 out of 11) confirmed that they accept the laws of the state. However, some do not accept the laws (2), while one returnee refused to answer. In order to get a better insight, we asked which laws they accepted and which laws they did not accept, and why. Of five returnees who answered that question, only one recognizes all laws, while two accept only those laws which are not in contravention of Islam.

When asked if the returnees think that their way of practicing Islam is the most correct, three of them answered that they do not think so, one hopes that it is, while two think that their way of practicing Islam is the most correct.

(Re)socialisation and (re)integration

The focus point in the (re)socialisation and (re)integration of returnees could be their wish and will to attain higher levels of education. The indicator that

seven out of eleven returnees are prepared and want to continue education or attend reskilling programmes is encouraging.

The majority of returnees from our sample believe that employment is the best motivation to increase engagement in social life. Starting a business, agricultural production, support to their current business activities or their work in a construction or another company (public or private) can motivate individuals to change. The analysis of a sample of focus groups in local communities and the citizen survey sample provides the same results.

Six out of eleven returnees responded that they believed that returnees from Syria would be willing to participate voluntarily in (re)integration programmes.

The majority of respondents from our first sample (interviews with returnees) and focus group participants believe that the persons (leaders or mentors) who implement projects or are engaged in project management must be fully cognizant of social problems, well-informed and trained in the work with target groups in regard to social and religious issues of the community and individuals, which may be particularly useful for the integration process.

Returnees need significant support and monitoring if they are to integrate into society. They need support in starting up their small businesses, education, re-skilling and also a stronger linkage with social institutions. Their training, reskilling and employment may contribute to establishing new pro-social networks and ties with social institutions.

It can be assumed that every returnee from Syria was both a witness and victim of violence, rapes and (large-scale) killings, combined with the consequences for humanlives in war zones. This applies also to the children of travellers to Syria. Such cases can cause trauma which requires special psychological monitoring by therapists with specialised skills and approaches required for management of such a group. Psychological treatment should begin as soon as possible, if possible, already in detention facilities and in prison, if returnees are sentenced to prison.

A strategy and programmes against radicalisation, extremism and terrorism must be developed by teams with multidisciplinary skills, including criminalists, criminologists, sociologists, psychologists, religious leaders and security scholars.

Municipal services, in cooperation with the BiH Ministry of Security and providers of education, should establish a model of mentorship and begin training of mentors. A mentor would work with the individuals engaged in violent extremism and the individuals released from prison, who are returning to their local communities.

In order to achieve success in preventing violent extremism in general and in rehabilitation of returnees, it is necessary to improve cooperation and exchange of unique information among police (at the state, entity, cantonal and local levels), prosecutors' offices, courts, correctional institutions, various municipal and cantonal/entity agencies (social welfare services, education institutions, health services), Islamic Community in BiH and civil society organisations.
A significant number of women returned and it is expectedmore women will return. Although in some cases women were young and tricked into going to Syria, regardless of their criminal liability, local police officers should treat them just like men who returned from the aspect of security risks and possible impact on others.

Children are a particularly vulnerable group but still can pose a serious risk. Since they lived in war zones, they need psychological assistance and loving homes. If both parents were killed in Syria or if both parents are detained upon return, while their closest relatives are unable to accept them, foster families should be identified.

INTRODUCTION

The war in Syria contributed to and accelerated the spread of the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI). Within that process, in the early 2012, different military groups were formed in Syria and they are fighting against President Bashar Assad. The al-Nusra Front, formed in January 2012, received support from the people in its fight against the government in Damascus and grew into the most powerful and the leading insurgency group. The al-Nusra leader, Abu Muhammad al-Julani, explained in his first video appearance that the al-Nusra's main goal was to support Syrian population to win a war against Assad's military (Mukhtra et al. 2017). During that period, the al-Nusra Front representatives denied having any ties with the then Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) or al-Qaeda, although the group leader boasted that he was receiving orders directly from Ayman al-Zawahiri. Members and followers of the Jihad from Syria formed the core of the al-Nusra formation. Shortly afterwards, they were reinforced by fighters from Europe, the U.S. and the Middle East. Their rule was based on the Sharia law, but the group did not attempt to create a state back then. According to the information we obtained, a number of citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina went to Syria in 2012 to fight alongside the al-Nusra. More specifically, the three returnees we interviewed said they were in that Front.

The group lost its revolutionary character already in April 2013 when self-proclaimed caliph Abu Bakr al Baghdadi (a war name of the Iraqi-born Ibrahim Awawd Ibrahim Ali al-Badri) declared a merger of the al-Nusra and ISI to form the so-called Islamic State that would stretch across the territory of Syria. This self-declared terrorist formation was named the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, also known by its acronyms ISIS and ISIL and also by its Arabic-language acronym Daesh. The United Nations designated the al-Nusra Front as a terrorist organisation in July 2013 for conducting operations under the joint name of ISIL.

Messages seeking recruitment of foreign fighters and the call to Jihad were sent via a military strategy based on video recordings, which ISIL had developed and released via social media. His ideology attracted over 40,000 foreign fighters from over 110 countries of the world (Global Terrorism Index [GTI] 2017, 88).

Thousands of men of different nationalities (and a significant number of women and whole families as from 2014) left their homes to join ISIL and its fight. According to researcher Alisa Fainberg (2017), the number of foreign fighters from West Europe ranged between 3,700 and 9,000, from Russia between 3,000 and 4,000, from Turkey between 2,000 and 2,200, from the U.S. between 150 and 250, from Canada 130 and from Australia between 120 and 255. Further, Fainberg (2017) has estimated that "the number of foreign fighters originating from the Western Balkans is relatively low, ranging between 900 and 1,000, most of whom came from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo" (21).

ISIL's strategy of calls and recruitment, unfortunately, yielded results. In 2013, there was a growing trend among citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina towards going to fight in Syria. During that period, women and entire families travelled to Syria to live in the so-called "Islamic State".

The information we received from the SIPA shows that 301 citizens from the territory of BiH went to the battlefield in Syria. Most of them were men (59%), followed by women who accounted for slightly more than one fifth (22%) and children (19%). The number of BiH citizens shows that 85 persons for every one million population travelled to Syria. For the sake of comparison, the number of travellers from BiH to Syria is higher than the numbers of travellers from other European countries, such as Sweden, Denmark, France and Belgium with 20-40 travellers to Syria for every one million population (Carlsson 2017, General Intelligence and Security Service 2016). According to the data we collected, 211 persons were in Syria as of the end of 2019. Most of them are children, 128, followed by women, 43, and men, 40. The SIPA has estimated that 124 persons related to BiH were killed in Syria. Most of them were men (88) who had been directly involved in combat activities, followed by 12 women and 24 children below 14. By January 2020, 80 travellers to Syria returned to BiH. Among them the most numerous were men, 51, followed by children, 19 aged below 14, and women, 10. So, we can estimate that 87 more citizens of BiH, most of whom are children, are still in Syria.

Although the research deals with issues from the existing literature and secondary data, our main arguments are based on primary data, that is, on interviews with returnees from Syria and the families of those who lost their lives or are still in Syria. Because of its wartime experience with foreign fighters from the 1990s and the religious structure of the state in which Muslims are the majority, BiH is put at the centre of discussions on issues of extremism and departures of BiH citizens to Syria and Iraq. However, BiH is a part of the global coalition in the fight against terrorism and maintains close cooperation with the international community in border control and suppression of the phenomena in the early stages that lead to radicalization and violent extremism.

Accordingly, BiH stopped departures of its citizens to Syria and demonstrated its preparedness for their returns and prosecution.

The goal of the study is to analyse a number of socio-economic and security issues related to returnees from Syria and to establish their profile through direct contacts with that group. Also, we want to establish and define push and pull factors of journeys to Syria on the basis of which the state, entity, cantonal and local authorities will be able to define better access to jobs and possible measures for rehabilitation and (re)integration of returnees.

We have chosen to use in the study the term travellers to Syria instead of "foreign fighters" whom the UN Security Council defines as "*…nationals who travel, or attempt to travel, to a state other than their state of residence or nationality and other individuals who travel or attempt to travel from their territories to a state other than their state of residence or nationality for the purpose of perpetration, planning or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts or the providing or receiving of terrorist training, including in connection with an armed conflict*" (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC] 2019).

The term "traveller to Syria" has a broader meaning than the term "foreign fighter". It includes all individuals who travelled to Syria, regardless of whether or not they participated in military activities. Similarly, we use the term "returnees" throughout the report to refer to individuals who returned from Syria, regardless of whether or not they participated in military activities.

We hope that the study will be helpful for security and other agencies to develop common understanding since it treats complex issues such as radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism.

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FRAMEWORK OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THE SPECIFICS OF THE RESEARCH

Before presentation of findings and description of the results of empirical research, it is important to consider the framework of research methodology and its implementation. Like in any scientific research, one part of creativity in research implementation in security studies and criminology refers to the selection of an appropriate method. In doing so, we made sure that the strengths of a selected method were used to the maximum and that its weaknesses were reduced to minimum.

This part describes in a greater detail the methods we used in our fundamental research. We want to give the scientific and professional publics an insight into the methodology so that our answers to the key survey research questions can be confirmed or verified in the future. All of us individually felt happy after we developed methods that provided final answers to pre-defined survey research questions. In that procedure we received support from experienced researchers of the International Centre of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism Hedayah in Abu Dhabi who provided with a great dose of optimism and utility advice and recommendations for the development of research methods and procedures.

In order to research the profile and the process of radicalisation of individuals who went to foreign battlefronts and those who returned and to study the influence of returnees on local communities and young people, we asked five key survey questions:

1) What are the main socio-economic characteristics of returnees from foreign battlefronts?
2) What are trigger factors – individual incentives – for radicalisation of returnees?
3) What were the motives for departure to foreign battlefronts?
4) What were the motives for return from foreign battlefronts?
5) What are the impact factors of returnees on local communities and young people?

Some hypotheses were developed on the basis of the key questions and then verified on the basis of results. The survey results are presented in detail below.

Apart from its principal component, the survey had an applied component within which we attempted to collect as many pieces of information as possible which could be useful for various social and state stakeholders interested in prevention of radicalisation, deradicalisation, rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees from Syria. So the survey was expanded to include pre-departure and post-return employment, desired occupations and training, necessary work conditions, experience from prison, daily problems, examination of perceptions about the most responsible stakeholders and the possibility of rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees.

The set directions of the survey required a complex structure of a survey team and simultaneous work with different groups of society – target groups. The survey team consisted of a total of seven persons who were engaged in research activities permanently or occasionally. Four of them were experienced researchers, social scientists who had conducted a significant number of research cases.

State	Bosnia and Herzegovina			
	Cluster sample			
	Interviews with Returnees	Interviews with families	Focus group discussions and interviews	Survey
Data source:	Returnees from Syria	Families of persons who are in Syria or died	Representatives of local communities, young people, representatives of a closed community	Citizens aged +18
Period of survey:	September 2019 January 2020	September 2019 February 2020	October 2019 January 2020	November 2019 February 2020
Survey technique:	Face to face interview	Face to face interview	Focus group/ Face to face interview and observation	Face to face survey
Questionnaire:	Duration 120 minutes 10 sets of questions (total 283 questions)	Duration 100 minutes 11 sets of questions (total 192 questions)	Duration 60 to 90 minutes	Duration 50 minutes
Sample:	Returnees accessible outside prisons	Families of persons who went to Syria	From 8 to 12 participants	2013 census, Una-Sana, Tuzla, Zenica-Doboj, and Sarajevo
Type of sampling:	Non-probability sampling Snowball technique	Non-probability sampling Snowball technique	Quota sampling based on two criteria	Random, three-stage, stratified
Strata:	Una-Sana, Zenica-Doboj, Tuzla Cantons and Sarajevo Canton	Una-Sana, Zenica-Doboj, Tuzla Cantons and Sarajevo Canton	Una-Sana, Zenica-Doboj, Tuzla Cantons and Sarajevo Canton	Una-Sana, Zenica-Doboj, Tuzla Cantons and Sarajevo Canton
Sample size:	Conducted 11 (Planned minimum10)	Conducted 9 (Planned maximum 10)	Conducted 5 FGDs and 2 face to face interviews with representatives of a closed community (Planned 7)	Conducted 231 (Planned 231)

Table 1: Data on field research

In order to understand the sample which is subject to study and analysis as best as possible, the term *individual sample* used in findings and discussions refers to the sample of "Interviews with Returnees", "Interviews with families", "Focus group discussions and interviews" and "Survey". The term *cluster sample* refers to a joint sample of "Interviews with Returnees" and "Interviews with families".

In broadest terms, target groups of the study included:

a) returnees from foreign battlefronts
b) families of the persons linked to departures to foreign battlefronts
c) police officers
d) security scientists
e) representatives of other relevant public institutions and religious and local communities
f) young people - for the purpose of the study, young people are persons aged between 18 and 23. Under psychological study, that period of life is a part of the phase of personal development called transition to adulthood and includes the period from ages 18 to 29. The characteristic of that stage of life is that persons are searching for and establishing their own identity, which may be an important factor for the process of radicalisation and its comprehension
g) members of closed communities - for the purpose of the study, closed communities are defined as small and socially isolated groups of people in which daily lives and relationships are based on Salafi/Wahhabi teachings. Para-jamaats exist in such communities, in which practicing of religion is not supervised by the official Islamic Community in BiH. Such communities in BiH are located predominantly in rural areas, and
h) citizens.

The methodology was based on a realistic approach which helped us respond to the goals of the study. The realistic approach contained a methodological design based on qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. The qualitative methods used included a personal interview survey, group discussion (focus groups) and observation. A questionnaire-based survey was used to collect quantitative data.

QUALITATIVE METHODS

Personal interview survey method

The structured and unstructured interview techniques were used to obtain primary and secondary data, that is, to interview the following target groups:

1) 11 returnees from the foreign battlefronts in Syria (project criterion: at least 10 returnees),
2) 9 members of the families of the persons linked to departures to the foreign battlefront in Syria (project criterion: up to 10 members of families of indicated persons),
3) 8 police officers engaged in suppression of violent extremism and terrorism (project criterion: at least 8 police officers), and
4) 5 experts in areas relevant for the subject of research.

During structured interviews with respondents among *returnees,* we used a questionnaire with 10 sets of questions (a total of 283 questions) designed to probe deep into different aspects of lives of respondents which are relevant for the survey, such as: general characteristics (gender, age, place of birth, nationality, etc.); place of residence; education and employment; family and marital status; life before departure to a foreign battlefront; religious profile; motives for departure to a foreign battlefront; motives for return from a foreign battlefront; experiences from prison upon return from a foreign battlefront; returnee's relationship with the local community and young people. In view of such an approach, the questionnaire was a combination of open-ended and closed-ended questions. Regarding this target group, non-probability snowball sampling was used. Once we entered the circle of respondents, the snowball technique helped us reach out to more returnees and families of individuals who had been killed or were still in the battlefronts in Syria.

The questionnaire for members of families of persons still in Syria. The questionnaire was designed on the basis of the questionnaire for returnees and both were similar content-wise since the survey conducted in this target group aimed at collecting indirectly the data on the persons who had gone to a foreign battlefront in Syria. Although it was an integral questionnaire, it can be divided into three subquestionnaires which were focused on returnees, the persons who were killed in Syria and the persons believed, on the basis of operational findings of security agencies in BiH, to be in Syria during the period of research. Thus, an integral questionnaire consisted of 11 sets of questions (a total of 192 questions), created to probe into the same aspects of lives as in the questionnaire designed for returnees. An additional set of questions asked about the way in which the community treated family members after the community found that their relatives had gone to a foreign battlefront in Syria. The questionnaire for the family members contained open-ended and closed-ended questions and a non-probability snowball sampling method was used.

Family member:	Frequency	Percent
Mother	5	55.6
Father	3	33.3
Sister	1	11.1
Total:	9	100

Table 2: Data on representation of the sample of family members

In the end, we interviewed 11 returnees and 9 family members of those killed or still fighting in a foreign battlefront, primarily parents and siblings (father, mother and sister), totalling around 20 individuals. Although our sample may seem to be small, the number of interviewed people is significant compared with several existing studies of radicalisation and violent extremism, particularly in relation to ISIL and Syrian battlefront. That number was satisfactory for us, especially in view of the methodology used and the population from which the sample was taken.

The questionnaire for police officers was created for the purpose of building up a better picture of the persons who had gone to fight in Syria, which implies their general socio-economic profile, motives for departure and paths to radicalisation. Regarding the latter, focus was put on the role of informal religious lecturers/radical mentors in the process of radicalisation of individuals and recruitment for foreign battlefronts. The questionnaire consisted of four open-ended questions and non-probability purposeful sampling.

Interviews with experts relevant for the subject of the survey research were conducted for the purpose of preparing recommendations for improvement of treatment of returnees by the state and society. Since the experts were informed about the findings of the survey and were requested to provide recommendations which they thought would be useful, there was no

questionnaire of a strict form or content, but only a reminder for conversations. It was an unstructured (free flowing) interview and a non-probability purposeful professional sampling was used.

As a rule, each interview was conducted by a team of two researchers. When circumstances permitted, care was taken that interviewers and respondents were of the same gender. Every researcher in the team took notes especially of the responses to open-ended questions, and interviews were recorded whenever the respondents agreed. Then transcripts of the recordings were made, which was an additional tool to eliminate the factors that could affect the credibility of the collected data.

Since the interviews were conducted with specific categories of people, which is particularly true of the sample of returnees, the research team prepared a procedural framework for action in a pre-survey stage. The procedural framework consisted of a series of activities aimed at encouraging the development of positive motivations and eliminating or minimising negative motivation of respondents for an interview and protection of collected data. These activities included:

- Establishing of an initial contact and assessing the desire and willingness to participate in an interview – informing a potential respondent about the goals of the survey and the organisations implementing the survey,
- Ensuring anonymity of the respondents and data protection,
- Timely informing the potential respondents of the time of arrival of interviewers and setting an exact time and place of an interview (most of interviews were conducted at locations familiar to the respondents), and
- Establishing the best relationship possible between the interviewer and a respondent and a relaxed atmosphere during an interview. In order to establish as best rapport and relaxed atmopshere as possible, the interviewers used certain techniques:
    - Adequate attire, in a manner which would not make them too different from the respondents,
    - Research of a broader area of the locality at which an interview was going to be conducted for the purpose of establishing pleasant and interesting conversation starters,
    - Although care was taken that an interviewer and a respondent were of the same gender, an interview was conducted by the interviewer who had been most favoured by the respondent during a pre-interview conversation,
    - Subtle mirroring of a respondent's body language,
    - Active listening,
    - Polite communication,

- Non-judgmental approach to every aspect of communication with a respondent, and
- Flexibility of an interview – adapting verbal formulations and order of questions to individual characteristics of respondents and during an interview.

Group discussion method (focus groups)

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were used to probe into the views of two categories of the target groups. The first category of the target groups consisted of representatives of local communities and young people, while the other comprised members of closed communities.

Regarding the first category of the target groups, FGDs were used to examine the views on:

1) The concepts of radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism and their understanding,
2) Returnees – motives for departure to foreign battlefronts, specific characteristics of practicing religion and willingness to accept them in society,
3) Security risks and potential threats posed by the presence of returnees in society and influence on the local community and young people,
4) Possibilities and capacities for integration of returnees in a local community.

The focus groups were held in Cazin [Una-Sana Canton (USK)], Tuzla [Tuzla Canton (TK)], Maglaj [Zenica-Doboj Canton (ZDK)] and Sarajevo [Sarajevo Canton (KS)]. Some previous research on foreign fighters originating from BiH designated these four cantons as the regions from which the largest number of citizens had gone to fight in Syria (Azinović and Jusić 2015). At the same time, they have the largest presence of returnees from foreign battlefronts.

The focus groups had 11 participants each (between 8 and 12 people were planned under the methodological framework). The focus group discussions lasted between 60 and 90 minutes each. The participants were selected on the basis of eligibility, that is, the possession of a certain level of pre-knowledge relevant for the survey questions. In essence, it was a non-probability snowball sampling technique. We also took care of the sample variety in terms of socio-demographic characteristics (sex, age, education, ethnic or religious features and employment). According to the survey plan, the focus group of women should have been organised separately if women had been less willing to join the discussion during the first focus group. But the women participated equally to others in all four focus groups. The focus groups brought together citizens –

members of jamaat, businessmen, young people, representatives of education and social institutions and religious communities and police agencies. Jamaat is the basic organisational unit of the Islamic Community. It consists of at least 200 Muslim households within an area (Islamic Community in BiH 2020).

All focus group discussions were recorded and later, transcripts of recordings were made.

MUNICIPALITY/ CITY	SEX		AGE								
	M	F	18-22	23-27	28-32	33-37	38-42	43-47	48-52	53-60	60+
Cazin	7	5	2	1	3	1	2	2			1
Tuzla	5	5	3	2	1		1		1	1	1
Maglaj	6	6	2	1		1	1	1	4	1	1
Sarajevo	5	6	1	2	3		3	1			1
TOTAL	**23**	**22**	**8**	**6**	**7**	**2**	**7**	**4**	**5**	**2**	**4**
	51%	**49%**	**18%**	**13%**	**16%**	**4%**	**16%**	**9%**	**11%**	**4%**	**9%**

Table3: Demographic structure of **45** focus group participants

A psychologist was engaged as an observer during focus group discussions because of the specific features of the survey questions. Using an unstructured observation technique, the observer analysed and noted the behaviour of participants (e.g. willingness to engage in discussion, body language, way of expression, possible pressure, signs of fatigue, exhaustion, nervousness) and development of the discussion. Since all focus group discussions were recorded and transcripts of recordings were made for each focus group, the findings of observations were used as an additional tool to interpret and verify the objectivity of collected information.

The group discussion method was used also with the other category of target groups, the members of closed communities in BiH. Those communities are designated by the security and law enforcement structures and previous research as locations where citizens were indoctrinated, recruited and prepared for a foreign battlefront in Syria. Due to difficulties in opening up and building rapport with members of those communities, which is confirmed by this research as well and frequently sensational media reporting, the public in BiH is deprived of objective information on the dynamics of life within those communities.

Accordingly, the research team aimed at accessing those communities and collecting the information which would provide insight into their lives and activities within those communities. The information could shed light on the possible paths of integration of those communities into society which, in turn, would contribute to eliminating certain phenomena within those communities.

The research plan envisaged holding up to three focus groups with representatives of closed communities (Ošve, Bočinja, Gornja Maoča or Stijena). Despite the fact that two closed communities expressed their willingness to participate in the survey already in the pre-survey stage, the research team anticipated interviews only with members of those communities in case of difficulties in establishing a relationship with, or bringing together, members of other communities within a sample for focus groups.

A focus group discussion was held in a closed community and interviews were conducted with three members of another closed community. A guide for focus group discussions in closed communities contained questions about internal demographic characteristics of a community, daily problems facing its members, religious aspects and a relationship with the Islamic Community in BiH, a relationship with the neighbouring settlements and local authorities, employment, trust in the judiciary in BiH, some democratic principles, the persons who had gone to foreign battlefronts and the possibility of their integration. The guide served as a basis for conducting interviews with members of another closed community.

Some rules for focus group discussions with representatives of local communities and young people applied also to members of closed communities. The focus group involved 10 community members and the length of the discussion was over 60 minutes. Taking into consideration the way of life of the people with whom discussion was held, only men were present in the focus group. Additional interviews were conducted with three men of another closed community. The group discussions and interviews were not recorded.

Qualitative data processing and analysis

Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA Miner) software was used for the coding, processing and analysis of the collected data using qualitative methods.

QUANTITATIVE METHODS

Face to face survey method

In broadest terms, the purpose of using the questionnaire survey method was to find out what citizens thought about returnees and their potential impact on local communities and young people. Moreover, the survey included an exploration of perceptions/positions of citizens on:

1) Various security threats and their contribution to one's feeling of being unsafe,
2) Potential sources of radicalisation and existence of radicalism, extremism and violent extremism in local communities,
3) BiH's susceptibility to terrorism and terrorist attacks,
4) Followers of Salafism,
5) Manners of recruitment and motives driving citizens to leave for foreign battlefronts, and
6) Preparedness, the most appropriate possibilities and the most responsible state and social entities for social integration of returnees.

The survey was conducted in the Una-Sana Canton, Tuzla Canton, Zenica-Doboj Canton and the Sarajevo Canton on a sample of 231 respondents aged above 18 and with a confidence level of 90% and an interval of 10%. The reason for selecting this confidence level is the fact that the survey was conducted by the survey research team and that project resources and time were limited and also because of the possibility of access to the sample.

SEX		AGE										EDUCATION				
M	F	18-22	23-27	28-32	33-37	38-42	43-47	48-52	53-60	60+	No response	None	Elementary	Secondary	University/ college	No response
128	103	92	35	23	19	13	9	11	10	18	1	1	4	137	82	7
55,4%	**44,6%**	**39,8%**	**15,2%**	**10%**	**8,2%**	**5,6%**	**3,9%**	**4,8%**	**4,3%**	**7,8%**	**0,4%**	**0,4%**	**1,7%**	**59,3%**	**35,5%**	**3%**

Table 4: Demographic structure of **231** respondents

In principle, the survey was conducted in three stages, of which two final stages were operational in terms of the survey implementation. During the first stage, a stratified sampling of local self-government units (municipalities and cities) was conducted in the designated cantons on the basis of the criterion of the largest presence of returnees from foreign battlefronts. In this stage, a total of 11 local self-government units were selected and the survey was conducted in: Velika Kladuša (Una-Sana Canton), Cazin (Una-Sana Canton), Bužim (Una-Sana Canton), Tuzla (Tuzla Canton), Srebrenik (Tuzla Canton), Kalesija (Tuzla Canton), Maglaj (Zenica-Doboj Canton), Zenica (Zenica-Doboj Canton), Kakanj (Zenica-Doboj Canton), Vogošća (Sarajevo Canton) and the City of Sarajevo (Sarajevo Canton).

During the second stage, the households in which the survey would be conducted were selected. It consisted of two phases. During the first phase, a random starting point was selected in each selected municipality/city from a telephone directory, although it was not included in the selection of a sample. During the second phase, the households were selected to be part of the sample under the principle of every tenth household against the starting point. If there were more than ten households at the same address, then more households would be selected to be part of the sample.

During the third stage, the selected households were interviewed. If there were several household members, respondents were selected under the last birthday criterion applied to members older than 18.

The questionnaire consisted of a total of 42 questions – most of the questions were close-ended questions and there were a number of open-ended questions. KoBoToolbox software with mobile application was used for the purposes of interviewing.

Processing and analysis of quantitative data

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and KoBoToolBox softwares were used for coding, processing and analysis of quantitative data.

Problems and limitations in collection of information

It was a challenge to undertake project activities related to collection of the data on returnees from Syria and other travellers to Syria. It was a challenge because of the lack of information on exact places of residence of most returnees and the possibility to convince returnees to accept to be interviewed. During interviews with families whose relatives had been killed or still were in Syria, the interviewers encountered unforeseen events in terms of stressful and emotional accounts by respondents, which made the interviewers feel uncomfortable. In order to overcome these challenges, we had to invest a lot of energy in establishing cooperation with the local communities and representatives of closed communities. We managed to overcome the researchers' discomfort by increasing the temporal distance between two interviews.

Regarding interviews with returnees and families whose relatives had been killed or were still in Syria, we have to emphasize that the conclusions regarding these samples cannot be generalised as they were not random but snowball samples. Once we entered the circle of respondents by using the snowball technique, we managed to reach out to many more returnees and families. Generally, it can be said of all samples (interviews, questionnaire survey and focus groups) that they all share a potential problem of sincerity of responses. We admit these limitations and welcome future replications and survey research which will probe deeper into the same questions.

Ethical issues

We believe it is important to present ethical issues treated during the survey. We tried as much as we could to control the collection of primary data. On the other hand, we avoided causing undue stress, anxiety or uneasiness to our returnees and families whose relatives had been killed or still were in Syria. For that purpose, the interviewers had to investigate and acquire knew knowledge about the behaviour of the cluster sample. In a number of interviews with returnees and the parent (father) of the person who is still in Syria, we noticed their discomfort during interviews. By explaining the real purpose of the survey and reassuring them, the interviewers eliminated delusions among the respondents. The interviewers explained to the extent possible to the respondents prior to interviews or focus group discussions the whole procedure and obtained consent for participation in activities as it was

explained to them. Prior to the survey, the participants were informed that they could withdraw from the survey at any time. The respondents did not want to have their identity released, which is the reason why the names of respondents are not mentioned in the analysis of the findings.

1

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

PROFILES OF RETURNEES

What are common features of Bosnia and Herzegovina's returnees from Syria? Although Rekawek (2018), Fainberg (2017) and Azinović and Jusić (2016) claimed that they were uneducated, our findings show that on average, they are as educated as most of citizens of BiH. Most of them come from lower-class families. They and their families are not prone to criminality and most of them were not under investigation or charged before they departed for Syria. They were unemployed. They admit that they did not expect that their going to Syria would have an impact on their financial situation. Regarding their young age, their families described them as positive persons, while some had difficulties in childhood. They are not single and founded a family early in life. Most of them were religious also before going to Syria and are now practicing the Salafi form of Islam. Their friends introduced them to that form of Islam. They do not think they pose a threat to the community nor do they think that citizens are afraid of them. Most of them have a negative experience from Syria, 6 out of 11. They are computer literate and they communicate via email. Most of them use Facebook. They have a sense of belonging to their respective communities in which they live and to the state. They are willing to participate in reintegration programmes on a voluntary basis. Generally, they have a positive opinion about non-Muslims.

In search for common features in this chapter, we present an empirical analysis of social explanation of the factors that contributed to their departure. By analysing their lives before departure, we focus on certain individual factors. An analysis of individual factors on the basis of which it is possible to identify some common features of returnees is given below.

1.1. Age and sex

The analysis "Who are The European Jihadis" (Rekawek et al. 2018) shows that a European average age of foreign fighters who went to Syria is 29.9 for men and 32.8 for women. The Atlantic Initiative released in 2016 its research establishing that an average age of men from BiH who were in Syria was 31 years, while the age of 22 was the most frequent age (Azinović and Jusić 2016). According to the same research, an average age of women (which was established in 43 cases) on arrival in Syria and Iraq, was 30 years, while the age of 24 was the most frequent age. Some analysts claim that terrorists join as immature naïve young men, vulnerable to indoctrination (Merari 1990). Marc Sageman (2004) analysing the age of terrorists who joined terrorist networks, reached the conclusion which did not support the immaturity thesis. However, the main problem regarding the age and sex of persons who joined terrorist groups concerns the lack of relevant data. In our sample, an average age of returnees is 33. However, the sample of families of travellers to Syria who are still in Syria gives a different picture of the average age. It is slightly lower – 30 years.

Regarding age and sex of travellers to Syria, the analysis of the sample of returnees from Syria shows a significant difference between those who went to Syria in 2012 and those who went there during and after 2013. In 2012, travellers to Syria were men and most of them joined the then al-Nusra movement. In terms of age, those travellers were slightly older, with an average age of 33. An average age of travellers to Syria since 2013, compared with 2012, declined to 30. The first travels by women and children were recorded in June 2013 and continued into 2014.

Research studies about women in ISIL, their roles, recruitment and radicalisation processes are numerous and very comprehensive (Buril 2017). Still, our sample group (interviews with returnees and families) as well as other information we obtained show that travellers to Syria from BiH are predominantly men. The ratio between men and women is 73% vs. 27%. A very similar ratio exists in Europe where the ratio is 87% men to 13% women.

An average age of our sample of men does not support the immaturity thesis. Men reached the age of maturity before they went to Syria, that is, they were in their mid-20s and fully responsible for legal obligations. This shows that those persons were able to resist the distortion of reality and deception.

Unlike men, the sample of women shows that they were immature and young. Some of them, as soon as they turned 18, got married and shortly afterwards went with their husbands to Syria. It can be said that they were suitable for "priming". Priming is the process by which recent experiences increase access to a scheme, characteristic or notion (Aronson, Wilson and Akert 2005). Priming is a good example of automatic opinion that occurs swiftly, unintentionally and unknowingly. It often happens when words or ideas are presented so quickly and briefly that their recipient is unable to recognize them knowingly. During discussions with the sample of women, we noticed that they were unable to correct presented schemes and were immature to correct presented topics as much as we could expect.

1.2. Places of recruitment for Syria

Where do travellers to Syria come from? Around 79% of the total number of citizens of BiH who went to foreign battlefronts in Syria, 301, came from the larger entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Federation. The rest came from the entity of Republika Srpska and from the Brcko District of BiH. Within the Federation, most of them came from four cantons: Zenica-Doboj Canton, Sarajevo Canton, Una-Sana Canton and Tuzla Canton.

In our first individual sample of returnees whom we interviewed, most of respondents came from the Zenica-Doboj Canton (81.8%), followed by those from the Una-Sana Canton (18.2%). Two external factors affected this representation in our sample. The first factor is related to the sample selection. The sample was selected from the population of individuals who had returned from Syria – 55. The other refers to policing operations of the local police in the communities in which returnees live.

It turned out that the Interior Ministry of the Zenica-Doboj Canton has the best built system of policing in the communities in which returnees live, followed by the Interior Ministry of the Una-Sana Canton. The policing of the Interior Ministry in the Zenica-Doboj Canton is based on good knowledge of the communities but also of the returnees and families of persons who went to Syria. Close cooperation is maintained through almost daily contacts with returnees from Syria and community representatives. During the focus group discussion in Maglaj, all participants confirmed the daily presence of police in their community. "*When I go to work, I see them, on my way back home, a police patrol is up there, on the right side, they are always present, which contributes to our sense of safety*" (Female, [23-27], FGD Maglaj).

The policing in the Zenica-Doboj Canton should be replicated in other police agencies in BiH. This would certainly contribute to preventive policing and increase levels of security and safety of citizens and their trust in police. Due to all the above, the reason for which most of members of our sample come from the Zenica-Doboj Canton is clear.

Regarding the geographic distribution of the sample of returnees, most of them come from cities/municipalities in the Zenica-Doboj Canton (Zenica, Kakanj, Jelah, Maglaj and Doboj) and two from the Una-Sana Canton (Velika Kladuša and Cazin). Their specific characteristic is that they live at a registered place of residence. Five of them admitted that they had lived at the same address (current location) since birth. Three of them have lived at current location for the last 7.5 years, while one returnee has lived at his current location since 2017. Two interviewed returnees did not live at current location before their departure to a foreign battlefront, while nine of them claim they lived at their current location before departure.

The majority of the cluster sample (15 out of 20) did not live abroad before departure to Syria. Two returnees lived in Austria prior to departure to Syria. The same number from the other individual sample (interviews with families of persons who had gone to Syria) said their relatives had lived in Austria prior to going to Syria.

During exhaustive interviews with returnees, we identified one common feature which most of them share. The majority of them (9 out of 11) admit that they had some sort of contact with the place called Gornja Maoča, located within the Tuzla Canton. They visited that place and attended religious lectures or other events, such as wedding ceremonies under Sharia law.

1.3. Socioeconomic status

Unemployment is one of the factors which have a strong impact on human behaviour. It leads to sudden deterioration of an economic status of social strata and groups, particularly those individuals who have long been unemployed. Unemployment generates all the phenomena that constantly follow poverty and destitution. Such phenomena degrade families in the first place or the entire family circle, which eventually manifests in poor upbringing of children and younger family members. Such children do not have positive features and strong character and very quickly succumb to apathy and disappointment and, as a consequence, resort to vagrancy, prostitution, alcohol abuse and similar phenomena. In this context, Carrabine et al. (2004) conclude that "*children raised in poverty, for example, may see little hope of becoming*

successful if they 'play by the rules'. As a result, they may seek wealth through one or another kind of crime. Merton called this type of deviance innovation – the attempt to achieve a culturally approved goal (wealth) by unconventional means" (57). The radical-critical strand within victimology sets out to extend the focus of thediscipline even further. Its analysis extends to all forms of human suffering and is based on the recognition that poverty, inadequate health care and unemployment are all just as socially harmful as, if not more harmful than, most of the behaviours and incidents that currently make up the official 'crime problem' (Carrabine et al. 2004). According to criminological literature, there is a causal link between unemployment and criminality. On that basis, a thesis that poverty and unemployment fuel terrorism prevails in theoretical sociological and security discussions. This thesis is based on research data which often support the thesis. The authors involved in research of the persons who went from Europe to Syria have concluded that 40% of such individuals were unemployed, while 28% (56 of 197) were employed (Rekawek et al. 2018). The range of jobs was wide, from administrative jobs to those in construction.

The region of Western Balkans is characterised by a high unemployment rate. Under the data of the BiH Agency for Statistics, BiH's unemployment rate in 2019 was 15.70%, while the unemployment rate of youth (from 15 to 24 years) is almost 34% (Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2020). This argument is often used in discussions about terrorism. Our sample group shows that as many as 75% of travellers to Syria were unemployed prior to departure to Syria (15 out of 20) and 25% were employed (5 out of 20). If we compare these percentages with a European average of unemployed persons who went to Syria, it can be concluded that the percentage of the unemployed in our sample is almost double – it is higher by 35%. Regarding employment, there are no major deviations.

In the first individual sample (interviews with returnees), 81.82% were unemployed before they went to the foreign battlefront (9 out of 11), while 18.18% were employed (2 out of 11). This is why, we sought answers through direct interviews to the question what they did for a living and what they lived on before they went to Syria. In order to provide the basic conditions for their lives and the lives of their families, the unemployed persons who went to Syria and returned to BiH were, and still are, involved in various activities in informal economy. Two of them are farmers and the same number are wage workers mainly in construction or perform any job offered to them, and some are involved in raising animals. Their average monthly income prior to departure to Syria was BAM 450, while today it is BAM 514. One person, although head of household, has no income. It is important to mention that two persons found jobs after they returned and served their prison sentences. Today, the number of those employed, 18.2%, is the same as it was prior to their departure to Syria. There are two pensioners in the group of returnees. In the second sample

comprising the families of travelers to Syria, the majority of them (66.7%) said that their relatives had not been employed before they went to Syria. One third of those employed worked in a cell phone store or a joinery company.

On the basis of available data and other socio-economic data (average monthly income before going to Syria, which were calculated on the basis of average income in BiH for 2013 and 2014) which we obtained, we made a differentiation of our sample into persons without income and with minimum, average and above-average income. Out of 11 that we collected data from and who had returned from Syria, 6 were without any income, 3 with a minimum income, 2 with an average income and none with an above-average income. Out of 9 families of the persons who went to Syria but have not yet retuned or whose relatives were killed, one family had an average income, one a minimum, and four families had no income. Three members of different families did not answer this question. (Table 5).

	No income	Minimum income	Average income	Above-average income	Total
Returnees	6	3	2	-	11
Two parent families	4	1	1	-	6
Total	10	4	3	-	17

Table 5: Socio-economic status of returnees from Syria and two-parent families, before departures to Syria

Class differentiation of people created in all class societies very difficult, poor and destitute living conditions for most citizens. Criminal etiology believes that the class division of society placed people in a subordinate position in terms of enjoyment of basic goods necessary for human lives and livelihoods. While some live in excessive wealth, others live in social poverty and oftentimes are unable to maintain bare life or their natural ability to live as living individuals with legal sources of livelihoods (Milutinović 1969). If we add to this globalization accompanied by fragmentation, risk and corruption influences, then it can be stated that violence often becomes a tool to restore people's ability to live and work freely (Froeling 2007). Naturally, it had to reflect on the social character, ideology and behaviour of those people. Those who are unable to satisfy their basic human needs experience various crises, protest, resort to revolt and this is how they enter a conflict with their situation and society in general. We can understand that such a situation often puts them in the way of temptations and efforts to acquire goods and rights they are deprived of and with which they will satisfy their material and spiritual needs. In such an environment, it is natural to expect behaviours which are not in accordance with the existing normative system. Such behaviours can generate various socially negative phenomena, and one of them is certainly radicalization – in

the first place – and later that form can grow into violent extremism and terrorism. “It is more likely that calls for radicalisation and recruitment of individuals will succeed in the countries which are characterised by such phenomena as injustice, bad management, marginalisation of certain groups, unsolved social, political and economic issues and lack of preparedness of the authorities to support vulnerable groups” (Zeiger and Aly 2013, 26).

As it can be seen from Table 5, the majority of travelers to Syria in the cluster sample come from families that had no income, 59 percent of them. More than one fourth was not religious in the past and one half of them did not practice Islam. Our assumption is that these people without income formed the core of "radicalization" - for example, agitation for travel to Syria as a legitimate mean to achieve ideological goals. We also learned that there is a clear and linear link between intention and action in the process of recruitment. That process implied that the person accepts to join an informal group and travels to Syria in order to achieve political, ideological or religious goals.

Most of focus group participants believe that employment or job stability is undoubtedly an important factor of normal behaviour. This opinion was maintained primarily by young participants. However, the young participants do not hide that most of them have poor work habits for independent and social activities. Despite such an opinion expressed by the young participants, it is not possible to conclude on the basis of discussions with a sample of returnees that they lack such work habits. On the contrary, most of them are in business for themselves thereby satisfying their essential needs. This opinion is shared by the focus group participants: “*We accepted them that is their way of practicing religion, I am not a believer, I am an agnostic. We adjusted to them also as workers, for example, a man with a beard sells eggs, we buy eggs from him, so what, eggs are good…*” (Female, [23-27], FGD Maglaj).

Another information supports our belief that returnees have good work habits. More than one third of returnees were active job seekers before they went to Syria. Almost an identical percentage of those persons are looking for jobs today. They would like to work in construction, to grow fruits and vegetables, to work as drivers, while women would like to be in sewing and tailoring business. Through discussions, we wanted to hear about the minimum requirements if they started working for a company. In addition to good salary, precise work time, full registration, most of them (6 out of 11) would like to enjoy full religious freedom, that is, to be granted prayer breaks and for women to wear clothing which they think is suitable for them, that is, to wear niqab.

With their cultural characteristics, understanding, habits and tradition, those individuals are often labelled in a public discourse as the persons who fail or do not want to establish a link with culture and tradition of the community in which they live. Accordingly, we tried to investigate whether those persons

were reserved towards members of other ethnic groups in BiH, that is, towards Serbs, Croats and others. This was why we asked whether they would accept to work in the companies which employed Serbs, Croats and others.

Nine out of eleven returnees said that they would work for such companies, while seven of them maintain generally positive opinion about non-Muslims. In this context, attention should be given to their job search and prison experiences after they returned from Syria. Two out of five returnees, who stated their job search experience, had a positive experience. The same number of returnees had a negative experience. One respondent did not know how to decide on this issue. To explain their negative experience, most of them said that the employers' first reaction was that they had been in Syria and punished for a crime: "*Although we served our prison sentences and we are free citizens now, we still may not apply for any job. From the municipal up to the state level. On the other hand, the persons convicted of the most serious crimes, rape or a war crime, are free to apply for jobs at all levels, and some may even serve as mayors. Is there justice here?*" (Male, #3, interview with returnee). Asked a returnee from Syria who had served his prison sentence and is now trying to become a full member of the community in which he lives.

He also said that his impression from job interviews was that despite the employer's positive opinion about him as a candidate, the employer did not want to employ him out of fear of police activities. Those activities included contacts with returnees, which other people would not understand, which might affect the company's image.

1.4. Education and vocation

There is no doubt that correlation between education and vocation, on the one hand, and indoctrination and radicalisation, on the other, makes much sense from an etiological point of view, which is the reason why it needs to be discovered and explained in the study of violent extremism and terrorism. The research done so far in BiH into that correlation shows that there is not enough primary data on formal education of travellers to Syria. Azinović and Jusić (2016) stated that „*police reports and accessible sources do not provide enough data on formal education of those persons, particularly not on their cognitive and generally intellectual abilities*" (47). International research about education gives varying results. Rekawek (2018) in the research "Who are the European Jihadis?" presents data that "*they are not especially well educated, with only 9% (18 out of 197) finishing high school. Only three of those later completed their BA studies and two of the three are in the criminals turned terrorist subset*" (20). The education background is diverse, ranging from elementary grades of a rural

school to university students (Fainberg and Fellow 2017, 16). In our cluster sample (returnees and families), the majority (14 out of 20) have secondary school education. In the first sample – returnees – one person has elementary school education and one has a master's degree. In the other sample – families – one fifth of them said that their relative had elementary school education, the same percentage confirmed that their relative had a university degree. Education levels are not monolithic as only two respondents from the cluster sample completed the same secondary school – madrasa. More precisely, only 2 out of 20 had fundamental Islamic education. Others had various secondary education: traffic technician, driver, caterer, trader, plumber, locksmith and technician. It is noticeable that the majority did not have Islamic education.
The unequal access to education, the poor quality of education and the relationship between education and employment were found as potential causes that could increase the vulnerability of youth for radicalization (Sas et al. 2020). Researchers Turčalo and Veljan (2018) insist on causal links between education and radicalization: „*Education, both informal and formal, plays a central role in radicalization as a factor of both resilience and vulnerability*" (15). Azinović and Jusić (2016) say that people who went to Syria have a low level of education, more precisely: *"that most migrants who went to BiH from Syria and Iraq finished only primary school*" (44-45). They say that the persons who went to Syria were relatively uneducated and were thereby more susceptible to indoctrination. In order to avoid eclecticism and similar approaches, it is necessary to define a character of mutual links and establish an order and regular patterns in the web of early influences which should shed light on the link between education and indoctrination.

If we look at the level of education in our cluster sample (returnees and families) from different angles, we can say that they have secondary school education, like most of other citizens of BiH. This means that the perception of this group as the group of relatively uneducated, naïve and inexperienced people is wrong. On the contrary, according to the data we obtained, those citizens are well aware of the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the world, and 8 out of 11 from the first sample (interviews with returnees) say that they are able to speak a foreign language. Most of them said that they speak English and Arabic. Most of them (8) are computer literate and communicate via e-mail or social networks. The most frequent social network they use is Facebook.

On the basis of this picture, it can be said that the level of education and vocation cannot be a cause of radicalisation and a decision to depart for Syria, if taken alone, irrespective of other circumstances. The fact that the persons with secondary school education prevail among travellers to Syria does not mean that their vocation "incites to radicalism". Their radicalism is primarily the result of other factors and influences. The results of the focus group discussion in the so-called closed community convinced us that it is not the case with the

low-paid vocations either and that those persons live in poverty under unfavourable financial and cultural circumstances. An explanation of this situation must be sought elsewhere – "*in the social treatment of those groups, in the status of persons in the group, in social and personal characteristics and other relevant circumstances under which we live*" (Male, [48-52], FGD Maglaj) These findings correspond to the opinion maintained by E. Seelig who says that "vocations as such will never turn a law-abiding person into a criminal" (Le and Cusson 2010, 229).

In addition to formal education, some individuals from the group of returnees attended also information education. Two attended a CNC operator course. Nearly one half of the sample (5 out of 11) said they possessed working skills (carpenter, truck driver, construction worker and caterer) which, however, they would not be able to prove with certificates.

The focus point in the process of (re)socialisation and (re)integration of those persons could be their wish to continue education. The indicator that seven out of eleven returnees are ready and want to continue education or reskilling programmes is encouraging. Some of them completed training in growing fruits and vegetables and work in a canteen while they were serving prison sentences for the crime of engaging in battles in Syria. This helped them develop new skills and norms of behaviour and was of help in prison. They applied their new skills in their farms after they were released from prison. However, only a small number of them had this opportunity (2), while others were left to their own resources after they were released. This is why, it is important to identify the types of factors and social relationships which can motivate an individual to engage in the community in which he can develop an alternative identity and change his approach to action (Christensen and Bjørgo 2017).

1.5. Pre-departure life

A meta-analysis clearly shows that the factors of indoctrination are differently differentiated in terms of expression of their influence on radical behaviour, starting from those whose influence is marginal and insignificant to the factors the power of which may in some cases be exclusive and decisive. Convinced that *travellers to Syria* share some characteristics of their lives before they went to Syria, we considered some of them. Of course, it would be an illusion to believe that an analysis of characteristics can explain their departure to Syria as a socially unacceptable phenomenon.

In order to find about propensity to criminal behaviour of the persons who had travelled to Syria, we looked for answers to the question about activities

related to criminal behaviour of an individual and his or her difficult childhood. Asked whether anybody from their family had been a victim of crime or violence, our cluster sample (interviews with returnees and interviews with families) provided a clear picture where 19 out of 20 said that nobody in their families had been a victim of crime.

Most of respondents of the cluster sample (19 out of 20) would go to local police if their car or another property had been stolen. This is understandable since we noticed that local police officers in charge of communication with returnees had developed good relationships with them. Slightly over one third believes that the state authorities should be responsible for security, while one fourth believes that local authorities/municipalities should be guardians of security.

In our search for information on returnees' childhood, we managed to collect some brief accounts of their childhood, which indicate that more than one third of those persons had some difficulties in childhood. They described those difficulties during interviews. Two of them were victims of the war. One lost his eye and the other one was forced to leave BiH, when he was a child, and to live in Libya alone, without parents. Trauma from that period left imprints on his mind and is still noticeable in his behaviour. One of them was the victim of domestic violence.

The second sample (interviews with families) shows a significant difference from the first sample (interviews with returnees). The majority of the sample (8 out of 9) admitted that their relatives had not had any difficulties in their childhood. Upon our insistence, the family members shared some characteristics of their relatives' childhood. Most of them described their relatives as positive persons with such attributes as: shy, serious, calm, excellent student, nice, amiable, quiet and happy. The family said of one person that he had suffered convulsions in his childhood.

We did not detect among the majority of respondents of the cluster sample any model of paranoid personality disorder or PTSD prior to their departure to Syria. The data which we received from the parents interviewed whose children are still in Syria, as well as the focus group participants who knew those persons, suggests that they were good and obedient children who liked to socialize and go to school. This might have contributed to the behaviour which shows that most of those persons (6 out of 11 interviewed returnees: 7 out of 9 interviewed families) did not consume alcohol, drugs or gamble before they went to the battlefront.

One returnee consumed alcohol, one consumed alcohol and drugs and two returnees gambled in addition to consuming alcohol and drugs. Those persons were never in explosive situations in which they would commit crimes nor

were in conflict with government authorities. The majority of respondents from the cluster samples (10 out of 11 interviewed returnees and 8 out of 9 interviewed families) was not under investigation or charged before they went to Syria. Accordingly, they were not sentenced for crimes before they went to Syria.

According to the results of the cluster sample, the hypothesis that the persons were in conflict with the law prior to going to Syria is not supported. Of course, we should keep in mind that one respondent-returnee was generally quarrelsome, unruly fans at sporting events and prone to causing bodily injuries and was under investigation before departure for Syria. One respondent from the second sample (interviews with families) was sentenced to 6 months in prison prior to going to Syria for illegal possession of weapons.

Regarding their lives before they went to Syria, it is important to probe into the relationship between the parents of the persons who travelled to Syria. Modern literature and most recent research have paid only little attention to that relationship, although we know that marital conflicts may cause "family problems" which can affect a person. The families which have criminogenic influences are known in literature under different names, such as "broken home", "a separated family", "a deficient family" and "defect family relationships" (Milutinović 1969). Apart from negative, the family may have also a positive influence on the development of young members of society. This is why we think that it is important to analyse the families in which returnees and those who are still in Syria whose families we interviewed lived before they went to Syria. Out of 11 returnees from Syria whom we interviewed, 10 grew up in the two-parent families. In the second sample (interviews with families), most of their members who went to Syria grew up with both parents – 7 out of 9. Both parents (mother and father) were the most responsible for the development of most of travellers to Syria from the cluster sample (11 out of 20). The mother was the most responsible for 7 out of 20. In only one case, the father was the most responsible parent. Three returnees lost their fathers before they went to Syria, and two returnees lost their mothers. Most respondents from the cluster sample still have both parents. Regarding marital relationship, in the first sample (interviews with returnees) the parents of four returnees are divorced, while in the second sample (interviews with families) the parents of one person are divorced. One of the travellers to Syria faced triple difficulties: his father left the family and began an entirely new life, placed a mortgage on the property which then the bank sold, and he, his mother and children have no place to live and his mother is seriously ill.

Two respondents from the cluster sample said that there had been domestic violence incidents, mainly physiological abuse by the father. There was no domestic violence in the families of most of the respondents (16 out of 20).

Fathers of three returnees abused alcohol, and one returnee said that his father had criminal background.

This data shows that many travellers to Syria do not come from broken or families facing substantial challenges. This is best shown by the research data regarding the employment of parents. Most of the cluster sample had one working parent while that parent lived in the same household. Most parents have secondary school education (75% of fathers; 50% of mothers). One parent, i.e. mother, has no skills. Most of fathers worked in public companies (mine, railways, Mittal, iron works, Krivaja, GHK, tourist community), catering and private business. Most mothers are housewives, followed by public administration officers at the municipal level and textile industry.
The data we obtained show that the majority of parents from the cluster sample (70%) practice religion. In the sample of returnees, 63.6% of parents are religious (7 out of 11). This percentage is slightly higher in the second sample, 77% (7 out of 9). The parents practiced Islam, although the intensity of religious practice is different. Five of them in the first sample practiced Islam on a daily basis, one parent practiced Islam often and one from time to time.

In further investigation of the pre-departure lives of travellers to Syria, we looked for an answer to the question whether they had lived abroad. One fifth of the cluster sample admitted that prior to going to Syria they had lived outside BiH, that is, in Austria, in 2012. One third of respondents from the first sample had been forced to leave their homes. Their reason was the war in BiH in 1992-1995.

1.6. Islamic education and practicing Islam

We tried to test the causal link between Islamic education and practicing Islam, on the one hand, and departure of travellers to Syria, on the other, on the basis of our hypothesis. The hypothesis that "travellers to Syria had a low level of knowledge about Islam before they began to practice Islam actively" was used to see whether there was a shift in commitment to Islam from childhood to early adulthood. Researchers Wiktorowicz (2005b), Sagemer (2004) and Nielsen (2013) confirm the possible causal link between Islamic education and practicing Islam in their young age and radicalisation and joining "Jihad" later in life, believing that the meaning of causality is "recognizable" in the domain of these social phenomena. "A low level of religious knowledge means that individuals are less able to make a difference between moderate and extreme versions of Islam" (Nielsen 2013). Marc Sageman (2004) has doubts over the

existence of these causal links. His doubt is based on the clusters he examined and "which showed that 70% had been religious in young age" (70).

In our cluster sample, the majority (75%) of persons who went to Syria had been religious before they began to practice Islam actively (8 out of 11 – interviews with returnees; 7 out of 9 – interviews with families). To be religious means to believe in God and to belong to a particular denomination or religious institution. Regarding their practicing Islam before departure, there is a statistical difference between our samples. In the first sample (interviews with returnees), 5 out of 11 returnees said they practiced Islam during that period in some way (going to Friday noon prayer, periodically fasting during Ramadan), while in the second sample (interviews with families) the number of practitioners is much higher – 7 out of 9. The most represented practitioners of the cluster sample practice traditional Islam – 8 out of 20. Among the respondents-returnees, 3 out of 11 admit that they were not practitioners of Islam, while the second sample (interviews with families) shows that there were two people.

Regarding the period in which they began to practice Islam actively, there are statistical differences in responses of the cluster sample. Four of the eleven respondents from the first sample (interviews with returnees) said that they had begun to practice Islam actively at the age of 5-9, while in the case of respondents from the second sample (interviews with families) only one person started practicing Islam at that age. In the second sample (interviews with families), most of them said their relatives had begun to practice Islam actively at the age of 15-19 (5 out of 9). The three interviewed returnees admitted that they started actively practicing Islam at the age of 20-24. As for interviewed families, this answer is related to two people. Regarding ages 25-34, there are no statistical differences among the respondents from both samples.

Both samples show that the persons who went to Syria had begun to practice Islam at a young age. Based on that, it is no wonder that 4 out of 11 interviewed returnees said that they had been encouraged to practice Islam by their families and childhood. The other group comprises those who were encouraged by their friends (2 out of 11) and in some cases an event played a crucial role (war, dream, search for rescue, reading books). Only one respondent-returnee said that he had been encouraged to begin to practice Islam actively by social networks.

Most of respondents from the first sample (interviews with returnees) received some form of religious education before they began to practice Islam actively (6 out of 11), while more than one third did not. In the second sample (interviews with families), all 9 families confirmed that their relatives had received some form of religious education before they began to practice Islam actively.

Regarding Islamic education before they began to practice Islam actively, most of respondents from both samples (cluster sample) maintain a positive opinion about religious education back then (46% - interviews with returees: 89% - interviews with families). Slightly more than one fourth of returnees (3 out of 11) has a neutral position on that education. Interestingly, no respondent from the cluster sample maintained a negative opinion about religious education prior to beginning to practice Islam actively.

More respondents from the first sample (interviews with returnees) made negative assessments of knowledge about Islam. Three of them believe that they had poor knowledge about Islam, unlike the second sample (interviews with families) where only one out of 9 made such an assessment. Unlike the respondents from the first sample (interviews with returnees), where only 1 out of 11 assessed their knowledge of Islam as good prior to beginning to practice Islam actively, most of respondents from the second sample (interviews with families), 5 out of 9, assessed that their relatives had had good knowledge of Islam prior to beginning to practice Islam actively. Most of respondents from the cluster sample undertook training under the auspices of the Islamic Community in BiH (kuttab, mosque, a course delivered by the Islamic Community of BiH, school), while only one respondent-returnee from the first sample said he had received training during that period through informal lectures.

The data shows that the largest number of travellers to Syria from both samples prior to active practicing Islam was religious and that they began to practice Islam in their early age, as children. Most of them undertook training within the Islamic Community in BiH and maintain positive opinions about religious education at that time. However, their responses differ in terms of assessment of knowledge they received through that education. The returnees from the first sample, unlike the families, believe that their knowledge of Islam during that period was poor. Still, most of families believe that their relatives had good knowledge of Islam prior to beginning to practice Islam actively. One third of the sample of returnees from Syria did not undertake any Islamic education. This information shows some correlation between poor knowledge of Islam in that sample and later indoctrination that contributed to their departure to Syria.

1.7. Family and marital status

The primary data which we collected and analysed debunk the stereotype that travellers to Syria from BiH are lonely, that is, that they lack ties with society as a whole. Both samples provide information on marital status, under which 80%

of travellers to Syria are married when it comes to civil marriage (16 out of 20). Regarding Sharia marriage, the percentage of those married is higher – 85% (17 out of 20). Such a high percentage of those married corresponds to the principles of Islam which encourages its believers to get married and have children. The single ones that we interviewed are single because of their age and lack of financial capacity to provide for family. In this group, some travellers to Syria encouraged the younger persons to marry their daughters or sisters of their friends. This was how they strengthened religious and group ties. However, there are examples in which such marriages ended in divorce. The majority from the first sample (interviews with returnees) entered into Sharia marriage for the first time (60% - 6 out of 10). Regarding formal marriages, most respondents-returnees remarried, 5 out of 9. On average, returnees have lived in formal marriage for 11 years, and in Sharia marriage for 8 years, whereas the longest marriage is 23 years and the shortest marriage lasted for 5 months.

We managed to collect some brief information on how those persons met their partners. It varies from one person to another. However, one third from the cluster sample (6 out of 17 married) used the internet to find a partner. It is noticeable that the internet is used to establish a relationship between an individual and young girls who will potentially convert and who suffer because of isolation or ordinary discrimination. The research team did not research which online content was used for these acquaintances.

One fifth of the cluster sample met their partner at various events and locations (i.e. in a mosque, at mawlid, in a coffee shop), while a small number of them knew their partners from early childhood, that is, they were neighbours, and one respondent met his wife through friendship with her father. The largest number, 10 out of 17 respondents of the cluster sample (59%), arranged a marriage directly with a girlfriend – future wife. One fourth did it through their girlfriend's parents and three of them through friends. The partners of the largest number of respondents from the cluster sample have secondary school education (9), 4 have elementary school education and 3 have a university degree. Regarding employment of returnees' partners, the data shows that most of spouses are unemployed (7).

The majority of respondents from the cluster sample, 17 out of 20, grew up in two-parent families most of whom are religious (14 out of 20) and practice Islam, although differently from travellers to Syria from the first and the second sample. Sixteen of them have siblings, while the number of those who have sisters is bigger. Brothers are more religious than sisters, although they practice Islam equally. There are some differences between the ways in which respondents from the sample and their sisters practice Islam and those differences, among female respondents, concern their sisters who do not wear headscarves and most of them do not practice Islam the way they do. All the

focus group participants in Maglaj who practice Islam confirmed that they practice Islam differently from the way Islam is practiced by respondents from the first sample – returnees. "*We pray the way our grandfathers and grandmothers did. We do it the way we learned in a kuttab of the Islamic Community in BiH. The way it has been done for centuries is the rule, and the way Islam is practiced now is different". You ask yourself why, what is going to happen next?*" (Female, [53-60] FGD Maglaj).

Regarding the cluster sample, a half of the total number of spouses were familiar with the activities related to departure to Syria – 10 out of 20 – and 11 out 20 partners went to Syria together. However, there are significant statistical differences among individual samples. In the first sample – interviews with returnees – only 3 partners went to Syria, while in the second sample - interviews with families - that number is far higher, where 8 out of 9 of them went to Syria together. This difference concerns the timeframe of departures as we have already said that most of the respondents from the first sample went to Syria from 2012 to mid 2013, when not many women left. Most respondents from the cluster sample have children – 16 out of 20. On average, couples have three children each, and two couples have six children each. In the first sample (interviews with returnees), only one person said the children were in Syria with her. Most of this sample, 8 of them, did not travel with their children to Syria. In the second sample, responses are quite the opposite, as all those who have children, 8 out of 9, took their children to Syria. Also, some children were born in Syria. The children are now in camps across Syria.

Four respondents (returnees) said that their children go to public school, while the same number of them said that their children did not go to school because they were too young. On the other hand, only two respondents (returnees) said that their children go to kuttab which teaches under the curriculum of the Islamic Community in BiH where children are taught Islam by religious officers – khawajas. Most children are taught Islam by their parents.

Most respondents from the cluster sample have one thing in common: they are the only providers for their families, while they have not received any financial support for themselves or their families. Six out of twenty persons from the cluster sample are single parents.

2

MOTIVES AND CAUSES OF DEPARTURES TO SYRIA

The creation and development of human activities can be investigated on the basis of agencies of conscious and willing elements which, as subjective drivers, direct those activities. This is the case with activities of our travellers to Syria because they had to make a decision before they embarked on a journey; they had to decide and deciding is a conscious, motivated process. Such decision making is preceded by a certain process which may be psychological in nature and linked to values and interests, needs, positions, emotional moods and religious processes. A decision to leave can hardly be made automatically because the human being, as a conscious being, brings elements of consciousness into his or her life plans, activities and behaviour. Among conscious elements, in our research focus, the motives related to the goals of a journey, interests and aspirations of travellers to Syria are primarily interesting. Explanations of the character and sources of motives of departure to the battlefronts in Syria are understood differently. The motives for going to Syria for Moroccan fighters were researched by Fainberg and Fellow (2017) and concluded that "*the fundamental motives of the departure concern religious and socio-economic reasons*" (12). Further, they state that "*regarding Shia foreign fighters, the character and sources of motives of departure vary. Iran, which sends its troops to Syria on purpose, obviously follows its geopolitical interests. Indian Shiite are motivated by religious feelings"* (26). Shiites from India are motivated by religious sentiments According to Forest (2012) in confronting the terrorism of Boko Haram in Nigeria, there are two primary factors for engagement in terrorist activities: *"preconditions" or "existing things" and "triggers" or "things that happen". Ideology is the leading motive* (30). *"Shiites from India are motivated by religious sentiments*" (26) On the other hand, Sageman (2008), Horgan (2009) and Bjorjo (2005) claim that ideology is often not the motivating factor and an ideology of a terrorist organisation

usually happens after an individual has joined that organisation (Zeiger and Aly 2013).

Azinović (2017) advocates a different approach to motivating travel to the battlefield in Syria, when he writes that: "*Muslims from the Western Balkan region were motivated to go to fight in Syria and Iraq as they felt it was their duty by reason of similar assistance that Balkan Muslims had received during the wars in the 1990s. Then, after declaration of a "caliphate" and ISIL activities towards promoting the Hijrah, the Hijrah, as the most important duty of "real Muslims" was seen as a motive*" (62).

The research frameworks of explanations of the character and sources of motives driving people to depart for Syria and Iraq show that they are multidimensional and overlapping. The analysed groups of global travellers to Syria clearly shows conscious elements – political, social, psychological and ideological motives. Regarding travellers to Syria from Western Balkans, according to existing research, the identified motive is to support Muslims and respond to the call for Hijrah. We analyse below the motives driving people from BiH to depart for Syria and whether those motives are the same as the motives of the above groups.

In addition to explaining the motives that drive people to depart for Syrian battlefronts, it is important to investigate and analyse the causes of behaviour which led to their departure. Researchers began to deal with the causes in the early 1990s. Sageman studied the causes of arrival of foreign fighters in Afghanistan in the late 1980s and early 1990s. However, if the phenomenon of departure to foreign battlefronts is considered from criminological and security viewpoints, the question is whether the meaning of causality is discernible in the area of social phenomena and processes.

This is particularly important if we know that in literature different terms are used to refer to the notion of a cause, such as: factors, force, motivation, stimulus, intention, dynamical plane and others (Milutinović 1969). Hartmut von Hentig (1954) says that the cause is the force that generates another force. Contemporary criminological theorists, who differentiate between causes and conditions for socially unacceptable behaviour, oftentimes make legal omissions in specific identification of direct causes. Those omissions concern causal factors which do not have that character and examination of relationships between socially unacceptable behaviour and other phenomena, which does not make much sense, while the findings of important causal links are ignored. This is why, we believe that we should pay attention in this part to direct conditions, circumstances and causes, apart from motives, as elements which contributed to the creation of fertile ground and making concrete decisions to depart for Syria.

2.1. War and war atrocities from the 1990s as a motive

In the researches which were conducted by Peresin (2017) and Andonov, Mikac and Mamić (2014), war and post-war conditions were cited as phenomena which conditioned easier decision-making on going to foreign battlefields. Azinović (2017) follows the same approach and states that "*Muslims from the Western Balkan region were motivated to go to fight in Syria and Iraq as they felt it was their duty because of similar support that Balkan Muslims had received during the wars in the 1990*s" (62). We assessed the role of the war and war atrocities in this process on the basis of our hypothesis: the killings of family members and the events during the war in BiH between 1992 and 1995 affected the image of global injustice done to Muslims and an easier identification with the developments in Syria and Iraq, and also the decision to go to foreign battlefronts.

The first thing which is noticed in relation to our hypothesis is that nearly a half of the cluster sample was in some way the victim of the war and lost some family members. Among those interviewed who identified war victims in their families, the highest frequency of responses is recorded in those who lost relatives (4) followed by those who lost a brother and father (2) and uncle, grandfather and aunt (2). The father of one person was injured during the war.

Second, most of respondents from the first sample (interviews with returnees) - 9 out of 11 - see the past war in BiH as an aggression, while one person believe it was a war of defence. The participants of focus groups gave identical answers. On occasion, some participants of focus groups provided more responses, among them "*the goal of aggression was not attained*. *That goal was to destroy the Muslim population in Bosnia and Herzegovina*" (Male, [28-32], FGD Cazin).

Senior participants of the focus groups explained that their perception of the nature of the war in BiH was based on their own experience and that there were numerous examples which they could give in support of their perception. It was emotionally difficult for a few senior participants of the focus group who had been involved in the war events to think about the past war and what could have happened.

We have mentioned earlier that more than one third of our sample was forced to leave their homes during the war and almost one half of them lost someone

from the family. These are important factors in creation of the opinion under which all of our interviewed returnees believe that the war in BiH was aimed at eradication of Muslim population – Bosniaks. Unlike returnees, family members of those in Syria believe – one fifth of them – that their relatives thought that the events in BiH were aimed at eradicating the entire Muslim population – the Bosniaks.

Most of respondents from the first sample (interviews with returnees) – 9 out of 11 - believe that the Muslims of Ummah are the victims of global injustice done to them through various approaches and in different ways. Among those approaches, those interviewed mentioned: deprivation of rights, economic, military or otherwise unjust treatment of Muslims in the Republika Srpska entity, hurting the Muslim dignity, terrorising and killing Muslims in Palestine, Syria and the ethnic cleansing of Rohingya people. Six out of 11 returnees believe that another form of injustice done to Muslims is the killing of their family members and the war events in BiH. Family members of those still in Syria from the other sample could not assess opinions of their relatives. (Stanković 2019)

Although the majority of respondents experience the killings of their family members and the war-related events as a part of global injustice done to Muslims, 6 out of 11 returnees reject the thesis that the killings of their family members and the war-related events in the 1990s affected their identification with the developments in Syria and decision to leave. This thesis is unacceptable also for the respondents from the second sample (interviews with families) where 5 out of 9 rejects the killings of their family members and the war-related events in the 1990s as causes of the behaviour that led to the conscious element – the motive for departing for the Syrian battlefront. From our cluster sample, only one person out of 20 experiences the suffering of his/her family and the war events of the 90s as a motive for leaving.

2.2. The mujahedeen as an inspiration

The period of mujahedeen includes the arrival of mujahedeen in BiH during the war in the 1990s. The mujahedeen were Arabs who had fought in Afghanistan, originating mainly from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Jordan and Yemen. Evan Kohlmann, who studied the arrival of the Afghan war fighters and volunteers from Islamic and West European countries in BiH, believes that most of them made an independent decision to defend Islam in BiH. They began to arrive in BiH via Croatia in the early autumn of 1992 and continued until the beginning of 1996. They formed an al-Mujahedeen unit within the Seventh Muslim Brigade of the Third Corps of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and

Herzegovina (United Nations 2018). It is not possible to describe all scenarios and roles depicting the organisation and arrivals of the mujahedeen in BiH in a few lines only. The most interesting are those that say that most of them came here with the honest intention to support BiH. The mujahedeen say that the main motive of their arrival was their belief that the war had amounted to genocide against Muslims in BiH, which was a cause for a new Jihad. Officially, we could not find a document of the Government of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina calling foreign fighters – mujahedeen – to come to BiH. The then Foreign Minister Haris Silajdžić said: "*…we did not need people, we needed weapons. However, those people came here. Most of them came to help. They certainly did harm to the image of Bosnia and Herzegovina and our fight*" (Stanković 2019).

Although some mujahedeen came independently, international research found that the arrival of mujahedeen had been organised by some international humanitarian organisations. One such organisation is the Islamic Cultural Institute in Milan, which was led by sheik Anwar Shaaban.

During an interview with the then officer of the intelligence and security sector we found out that the intelligence and security structures of BiH uncovered very early during the war that some mujahedeen had been infiltrated into the country without the Sarajevo Government knowing or approving it, and with West and neighbouring security agencies knowing and assisting their arrivals. "*Some of them carried out intelligence activities, while others had a task to reinforce an extreme wing with their presence and ideology, that committed crimes in subsequent battles and caused a rift in the Islamic Community in BiH*" (Interview, #1, Officer of the security sector of BiH, 2019). By doing so, they besmirched the fight of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

No domestic comprehensive research study of etiology and phenomenology of the mujahedeen who fought in BiH has been conducted. Most of them were written by Bosnian journalists, including publicist Esad Hecimovic and journalists from "Slobodna Bosna", "Start" and "BH Dani" magazines. At the international level, this topic was addressed by the American expert on terrorism, Evan F. Kohlmann, who wrote the book "Al-Qaeda's Jihad In Europe: The Afghan-Bosnian Network". According to their estimates, between 2.500 and 3.000 came to BiH in 1992-1995. However, the largest size of their unit was 500-1.000 members.

Publicist Esad Hećimović (2006) wrote about the arrival of the mujahedin in Bosnia on the basis of available documents from the security services, pointing to the following conclusion:

> "*In addition to military activities carried out by foreign fighters, their activities were soon expended to include a far more important activity of foreign fighters, the spread of 'true Islam'. Abu Abdul Aziz al-*

> *Muntesib a.k.a. Red Beard, the first leader of mujahedeen in BiH, said that in Bosnia, they had two duties: the first was Jihad and the second was to teach 'true Islam'. The centuries-long practice of Islam in Bosnia was, in their view, wrong; they did not think Bosnian Muslims were true believers and their task was to teach them true faith. Foreign Islamic missionaries began struggling for influence on religious officers and believers in Bosnia already in 1993, in an attempt to change the Bosnian understanding of Islam. The official Islamic Community in BiH faced opposition from within its own ranks. There was a conflict between traditional Bosnian Islam and "imported Islam" mainly outside of public view, except rare incidents*" (36).

According to authors Galijašević (2007) and Al Hamad (2004), the evolution of mujahedeen continued after the war which we refer to as the period of Wahhabism (1996–2000). In this period, media often generalised Wahhabis in a negative context. This period was followed by the period of Al Qaidism (2001-2004) in which attempts were made to link Bosniaks, due to some individuals from the al-Mujahid unit, with al-Qaeda branches, describing them as a threat in the form of the White al-Qaeda, and to describe BiH as a fertile ground and a range for terrorist training. Although Muslims in BiH were never radicalised, attempts were made to describe them as such and to link them to such terrorist organisations as Al-Qaeda. Following this period, BiH was again the target. Its institutions were claimed to be weak by the political representatives of the Republika Srpska entity, that is, that they were not doing enough to implement a strategy against terrorism and violent extremism.

In addition to being a constant target of the politics of the Republika Srpska entity, which were supported by the politics of the neighbouring states, the BiH institutions and our country were constantly presented as a fertile ground for recruitment of terrorists through Salafists. Sociologist Puhalo (2016) also writes about such an approach and states that "*the media reporting on the terrorist training camps in BiH (Donji Vakuf, Mount Zelengora, regions of Bihać and Maglaj) present the state as unable to oppose those threats or (what is even worse) as uninterested in doing so. Reference to unnamed but 'verified' sources and documents frames this story in an aureole of mystery and sends a message to citizens of the BiH that the security services are 'barren', that is, that they succumbed to the Salafists' influence and control*" (57). We call this period the period of radical groups in BiH, that is, the period of Salafism (2005-2011). The last period related to departures of our citizens to Syria is called Isilism (2012-to date). In this period, media reporting does not make any difference between Salafists and terrorists, that is, ISIL fighters. This is proven by reporting on Operation "Cut" in which arrested individuals were immediately labelled as ISIL members who, according to reliable reports, wanted to kill a police officer and over a hundred people (Puhalo 2016).

Atlantic Initiative research (2015) mentions senior Al-Mujahid fighters as a motive for departures to Syrian and Iraqi battlefronts. This motive has often been emphasized also in the media reports indicating the threat posed by foreign mujahedeen who remained in BiH after the war. According to Edina Bećirević (2017) "*extreme ideologies arrived here with the mujahedeen but their spread after the end of the war may not be linked only with the former foreign fighters, which is the reason why they should be understood in the context of more complex social transformations over the past decades*" (85).

On the basis of the above, it can be said that the public discourse and research have often advocated a thesis that the numerous travellers from Bosnia and Herzegovina, those who went to fight alongside ISIL, had maintained ties with mujahedeen. We thought this suspicion was interesting and we wanted to check it out by defining and testing the following hypothesis: foreign fighters who had fought alongside the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina were an inspiration to foreign fighters in Syria from BiH. We tested the hypothesis through several questions that we asked returnees from Syria and families whose members had gone to Syria.

Regarding links between the mujahedeen – foreign fighters – who fought in BiH and our cluster sample, there is little evidence to confirm any closeness, collaboration or ties between them. Even if such links exist, they are related to some respondents knowing about the mujahedeen and some respondents from the first sample – returnees – having heard about achievements of foreign fighters in the ranks of the RBiH Army (mujahedeen), while the families were unable to say whether their members who had gone to Syria had heard about mujahedeen achievements.

The majority of respondents from the cluster sample did not participate directly in the war in BiH (18 out of 20), which indicates that most of them could not be linked directly to the mujahedeen. Most of them were born during or after the war. Only two respondents from the first sample (interviews with returnees) participated directly in the war in BiH. However, although only two returnees participated directly in the war in BiH, four returnees said they had met the mujahedeen. This means that there are two individuals in the group of those who said that they had not participated directly in the war who met the mujahedeen after the end of the war. The persons who met the mujahedeen come from the Zenica-Doboj Canton. They are senior people and one younger person who did not participate directly in the war in BiH. Four respondents (returnees) who met the mujahideen became friends with them.

In view of the shift in religious commitment of the majority of our cluster sample, we tried to establish whether some of the respondents had been trained in Islam by the mujahedeen. Only three respondents from the first

sample (interviews with returnees) undertook such training, while the majority of them, 8 out of 11, did not undertake any training in Islam by the mujahedeen.

Seven out of 11 returnees heard of combat achievements and success of the mujahedeen who had fought alongside the RBiH Army. Regarding the motive of arrivals of the mujahedeen in BiH, 6 returnees believe that their motive was to support Muslims, 2 believe it was a religious motive, while one returnee believe motives were different and hardly identifiable.

Most of respondents from the first sample (interviews with returnees) (7 out of 11) believe that there was no need for having the mujahedeen in BiH, while six of them feels proud of their contribution to the fight against the enemy. The respondents from the second sample (interviews with families) could not say what their relatives who had gone to Syria thought about the arrival of the mujahedeen in BiH or their contribution to the fight against the enemy. The participants of focus groups heard of the arrivals of the mujahedeen in BiH during the war but have very little knowledge about them. "*I cannot say anything about that period, 1995, but we do not have any examples on the basis of which we could say that we are threatened by a group of people who came here*" (Female, [23-27] FGD Cazin).

A female participant of the focus group shared her experience with the members of that group: "*I remember, it was 6 years after the war, and I was 10 at that time. I walked down a street and a man turned to me, I remember it so well. He was tall, big, he had a beard, and he told me, 'you cannot sing while walking down the street. It is forbidden in Islam.' I looked at him and turned away. Those persons realised soon that so extreme ways would not be supporte.*" (Female, [28-32], FGD Maglaj).

Some members of the focus group in Maglaj believed that "*Maglaj was depicted in the media negatively because of the mujahedeen, although they never had cases of special types of radicalism, unlike some other places*" (Male, FGD, closed community).

It is important to note that most of respondents from the cluster sample (17%) claim that they were not inspired by the mujahedeen. Interestingly, there is no significant statistical difference among the responses in both individual samples on this issue. In fact, this information shows that most of our travellers to Syria were not inspired by the mujahedeen who fought during the war in BiH or their interpretation of Islam. Such data debunks the hypothesis that foreign fighters who fought in the ranks of the Army of RBiH were the inspiration for the departure of BiH citizens to Syria. Accordingly, we can conclude that conscious elements that contributed to departures to Syria do not include the mujahedeen who fought in BiH during the war in the 1990s. Likewise,

according to our data, the mujahedeen cannot be identified as a cause of behaviour that led to departures to Syria.

2.3. Property and financial situation as a pressure factor

Academic literature speaks a lot about the influence of crises caused by financial problems and emphasizes that those crises are often related to delinquent forms of behaviour, including radicalization and violent extremism. These links are belittled, rejected and are often not respected (Christensen and Bjørgo 2017). Rahim (2014) says that militants understand that education is important for the creation of enlightened, sound and tolerant society which in turn is of vital importance for maintaining vital economy and uprooting ignorance and poverty. This is important since ignorance and poverty can be a foundation of religious extremism and terrorism (Mirahmadi, Farooq and Ziad 2012).

Gurr (2015) shows a "linear causal relationship in which social and economic layers of society generate psychological discomfort which in turn produces collective action" (Ashour 2009, 6). Ben Arab (2016) found that in Tunisia, there are findings of research which support socio-economic explanations of radicalisation. Those individuals are usually dissatisfied with the status quo and are helpless (Ghosh et al. 2016). The fundamental motives for their departures to Syria lie in ideological and religious and socio-economic reasons: in the case of Moroccan fighters, according to experts, it is possible to follow a clear positive link between recruitment and social marginalisation of potential fighters (Fainberg 2017). According to a research study of Fainberg and Fellowa (2017), unlike the fighters from the MENA region, westerners do not travel to Syria in order to improve their financial situation. The results of our research show that financial situation did not affect thinking of 17 out of 20 travellers to Syria about their future life in BiH. This is why, the position of all of our respondents from the first sample (interviews with returnees) that the financial situation did not affect their decision to leave for Syria is no surprise. The percentage of such responses is slightly smaller for the respondents from the second sample (interviews with families). 5 out of 9 respondents believe that the financial situation of their family members did not affect their decision to depart for Syria. One third of them was unable to answer this question. One family confirmed that there was such influence, although it was negligible.

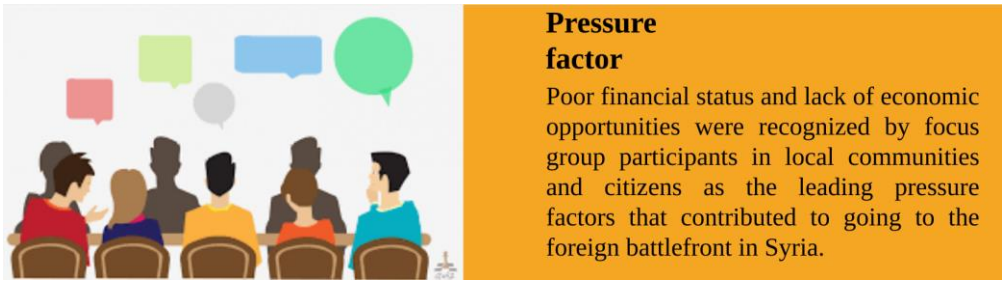
Regarding financial expectations of travellers to Syria, most returnees (6 out of 11) admitted that they had not expected any change; one returnee said it was not important for him; and one returnee said his financial situation remained

unchanged. There are statistical differences in the frequency of responses between the returnees and families. One third of interviewed families, compared with the majority of returnees, believes that their family members who went to Syria did not expect any change that would improve their lives, compared to their lives in BiH. We can conclude that in the cluster sample, nearly one half (9 out of 20) shares that opinion.

Most of respondents among returnees complained about their degraded status which refers particularly to their wives and children who wear headscarves. *"They experience humiliation of their personalities and dignity wherever they go and this was why they wanted to change place of residence and come to the environment in which sisters and brothers who wear the same kind of clothes and practice Islam in the same way live"* (Male, interview, closed community).

However, most of returnees (6 out of 11) did not have any hope in better lives in Syria nor did they expect that their departure would make their lives better. Only one fifth believed that their lives would improve in Syria in terms of freedom of practicing religion.

Results clearly show that BiH travellers to Syria share the same characteristics with western travellers. They do not travel to Syria in order to improve their financial situation. In the cluster sample, the financial situation did not have a strong influence on departure to Syria. It could have been judged by the real situation in the field that the motive of some individuals whom we interviewed was to improve their financial situation, but this was not confirmed in our case.



***Picture 1*:** Pressure factor

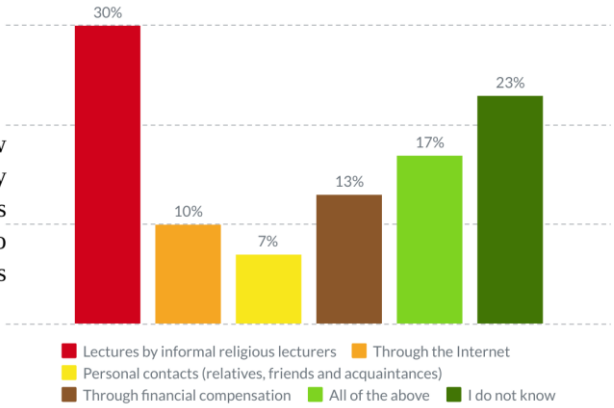
On the other hand, poor financial situation and the lack of economic opportunities were seen by the participants of the focus groups in the communities and citizens as the leading pressure factors which contributed to the decision to go to the Syrian battlefront. More than one fifth (21%) of citizens share this opinion, while in all four focus groups in the local communities this factor had the largest frequency of selection. The participants of the focus groups emphasized financial gain as the leading pull factor, while citizens see that factor in ideological belief. Financial gain is another pull factor recognised by citizens, which is true also for the focus groups. Regarding

financial gain, it should be stressed that in the opinion of interviewed citizens, financial gain is the third easiest approach seen to attract BiH citizens to the foreign battlefront - 13% share this opinion.

Recruitment approach

Informal religious lecturers

The results of the survey show that citizens perceive lectures by informal religious lecturers, as the easiest possible approach to recruiting (gaining) BiH citizens to go to foreign battlefronts.



Graph 1: Frequency of citizens' answers to the question of the recruitment approach

Apart from the above factor, we wanted to investigate whether travellers to Syria could have been affected by various phenomena and activities, and how, like: police activities, media reporting and feeling of being rejected by the society and local community and poor treatment of the community by the local authorities. Most of respondents share the opinion that none of these activities affected their decision to go to Syria. Only one respondent (returnee) from our cluster sample fully agreed that "the feeling of rejection by the society and local community and poor treatment of the community by the local authorities affected their decision to go to Syria.

2.4. The Hijrah as a call

The Hegira, or Hijrah in Arabic, literally means departure, migration. The Hijrah is the migration of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Yathrib, later renamed Medina, by the end of September 622. Persecution of Muslims in Mecca reached its peak so that even the Prophet's life was in danger. A refuge was offered to the Prophet in Yathrib (Glasse 2006).

ISIL's strategy used social media to call all Muslims all over the world to commit to being loyal to the so-called Islamic State and to emigrate there without delay. That call was accepted by those who responded to it and those who issued it as a Hijrah concept. Comparison of the call with the Hijrah is very deliberate and is meant to be a call to religious nostalgia. For Fumerton (2016) and Langemeijer

(2016) the Hijrah is a relatively complicated term that triggers discussions over many years which is translated mainly as "emigrants in the name of Allah" (Solomon and Al Maqdisi 2009).

In order to increase propaganda to attract new followers all over the world, ISIL established its propaganda magazine entitled Dabiq. Dabiq is "*a periodic magazine focused on the problem of tawhid (unitarianism), manhaj (truth seeking), hijrah (migration), jihad (holy war) and community (jama'ah)*" (El Ghamari 2017, 81). The third issue of Dabiq "A Call to Hijrah" focused on a call to foreign fighters across the world to come to Iraq and Syria in order to join Caliphate as soon as possible. Some research identified the Hijrah as a motive for a journey/migration to Syria. "*Those women called themselves muhajirs – migrants – who left the country of infidels to emigrate to a "promised land" and to serve Allah. Believing that they were fulfilling a religious duty (Hijrah) and lured by what was sold as a potential utopia within the ISIL territory, some women were excited to be able to participate in the process of building a state that would create a new, ideologically pure society – the Muslim Ummah in which all women would live honorable lives, under strict Sharia rules"* (Azinović 2017, 62).

Azinović and Jusić (2015) observing the phenomenon of voluntary visits to Syria in the context of the Hijra, write that: "*In the communities which share such views and values, the Hijrah can be an important motivating factor for departing for Syria or Iraq, which can be one of explanations why a relatively large number of women and children go there. It means that the reason for a voluntary departure to the so-called Islamic State does not necessarily have to be to fight, it can be the conviction that Muslims have a duty to leave infidel societies and join "the community organised by the will of God"* (47). Further, the same authors (2016) state that "*Following individual and group departures of men from BiH, a growing number of women, children and whole families (in some cases three generations in one family) began to leave. In our judgment, those people chose migration (Hijrah) and have no intention to return to BiH voluntarily*" (53).

In our field research, we tried to obtain a response to the question how much the call to Hijrah was attractive to our travellers to Syria. Through direct interviews with our sample, we sought an answer to the question whether the call for the Hijrah to Syria affected their decision to go there.

An analysis of responses shows that the majority of the returnees, 9 out of 11, claims that ISIL's call for the Hijrah did not have any impact on their decision to go to Syria. This frequency of responses deeply illustrates a need to look for the reasons for going to Syria in other factors, conditions or motives. Only one respondent claimed differently from what one third of respondents claimed, saying that he had responded to Allah's call. No respondent confirmed that he had received or that he had needed any blessing of his going to Syria from

anybody. Of course, those are the persons who were aware of their behaviour. Their behaviour was motivated in some way, although it cannot be concluded that the Hijrah was the motive that drove them to depart for Syria, as was claimed in the previous research.

2.5 The internet as a possible tool

The internet as a new medium which established a new type of relationship between an individual and virtual community, on the one hand, contributed to the exchange of information and reduction of distance among the people and speeded up the development of the economy and society. On the other hand, *"the internet is facing such challenges as cybercrime, misunderstandings in sharing the information because of limited control of interpretation of the information in different contexts, unlike the exchange of information in the real world. Amid the threat of global terrorism, this problem has become even more pronounced and hence requires more attention*" (Zeiger and Aly 2013, 155). Examples show that the internet may help spread an ideology but also support the process of radicalisation and recruitment of individuals from various parts of the world for foreign battlefronts. *"Case studies of foreign fighters from France, Belgium and Germany show that offline networks, personal knowledge and social links are equally, if not more, important for on-line communication in the process of radicalisation*" (Fainberg and Fellow 2017).

Interestingly, most of respondents (7 out of 11) from the first sample (interviews with returnees) are computer literate, while 8 of them use e-mail or social networks to communicate with people. Such representation of the use of the internet in our sample encouraged us to talk with them about the websites reporting on Muslim suffering and the possible influence of the internet on their decision to go to Syria. Eight out of 11 interviewed returnees said that prior to going to Syria they followed the situation in that country via the internet. Unlike women, the men used the internet more often to follow the situation in Syria. Interestingly, older respondents followed the developments more often than young ones. The responses to our question whether the websites had affected their decision revealed an interesting connection between the internet and their decision to leave.

Three returnees said that the websites had affected their decision to go to Syria. However, it is important to mention that no person went to Syria solely on the basis of what he or she had seen or read on the internet. The information provided through the internet made them sensitive to injustice done to Muslims in Syria, Iraq and Palestine. It is obvious that our travellers to Syria went through a brief but intensive period of face-to-face interaction with a

mentor – informal lecturers – in order to make a firm decision to leave and establish links that helped them depart. Lectures by informal religious lecturers are identified by citizens as a leading and the easiest way to recruit BiH citizens for foreign battlefronts. 30% chose this option. The internet was chosen as the fourth option by 10% respondents.

Three returnees said that the website Vijesti umeta (News of Ummah) had a great weight and influence on making a decision. The website was blocked in 2016, and until then it had written on topics such as "types of martyrdom operations - infographic display", "Amaq news agency - Islamic State troops occupy Sha'ir area" and "martyrdom operations in Iraq and Syria for April, 2016." Through this site, death threats were made to persons from BiH (N1 BiH 2020). As another website, one returnee stated Put vjernika (Believers' Path), while other two returnees identified some foreign websites and Saff. On the basis of these results, we can say that the internet and some websites played an important role in shaping motives and making a decision to travel to Syria.

2.6. Friendship and family ties

Friendship and family ties are the factors which have a strong influence on human behaviour, including radicalisation process. Of course, a whole series of questions are asked in research of correlation between friendship and family ties and radicalisation, for example: the length of friendship, knowing each other, frequency of contact and other questions that must be taken into consideration when researching this issue.

Searching for those ties, several researchers in Europe emphasized their existence and concluded that "extremists who are well integrated into the European society mainly recruited friends and relatives" (Bakker 2006; Ekici, Sozer and Atak 2010; Sageman 2004). Ties among friends and relatives are noticed very well in the processes of radicalisation of arrested terrorists in 2015: in 26% (52 out of 197) of all cases from the data set, radicalisation was launched by individuals who were close to those arrested, that is, they were their family members or friends (Rekawek et al. 2018, 24).

In order to establish those ties in our sample, we defined the following hypothesis: departure of friends / family members to the Syrian battlefront affected my decision to go.

It is possible to conclude on the basis of comparable data for two tested variables (friends and family) that those whose family members did not go to Syria (8 out of 11) are more numerous in the first sample (interviews with

returnees) than those whose friends did not go to Syria (6 out of 11). The claim that some of their friends went to Syria is less supported by the respondents in the second sample (interviews with families) – 4 out of 9. However, a high percentage of friendly ties with the persons who went to a foreign battlefront in the cluster sample may suggest that such ties played a significant role in making a decision to go to Syria. The majority of respondents-returnees who admitted that their friends or family members went to Syria (4 out of 6) claimed that they had talked about their departure with them and that friends and family members had invited them to join them.

Here, we should add the fact about keeping company. One third of those who admitted that they had friends who had gone to Syria said that they had seen those friends on a daily basis and the same percentage said that they had met with their friends once a week, or 2 or 3 times a month. The frequency of responses to the question how many of their friends had gone to Syria was linear. One returnee said that the number was over 15, the other one said that it was up to 10, and two returnees mentioned 2 to 3 friends. Regarding the family variable, 2 out of 11 returnees confirmed that some of their family members had gone to Syria and that they had met with those family members on a daily basis prior to going to Syria. This number is equally divided when it comes to the number of family members who went to Syria. One respondent confirmed that one member of his family had gone to Syria, while another respondent said that more than 5 members of his close family had gone to Syria.

One quarter of respondents from our cluster sample that said that some of their friends had gone to Syria also said that the departure of those friends had affected their decision to go Syria (3 out of 5 “very much” – 2 out of 5 “much”). Such findings are in line with the opinion of Scott Atran who believes that people who follow violent jihad usually do so in small groups that are predominantly made up of friends and in some cases family members (Atran 2008).

In our example, we can say that friendly relationships played a more important role recognised in the motivation factor for departure to Syria compared to family ties. If we consider the cluster sample, we can conclude that the majority of our sample, 11 out of 20, prior to going to Syria maintained contact with friends and family members who had gone or had already decided to go to Syria. Our percentage of influence of social ties (family and friends) in the process of recruitment is almost identical to the percentage of influence of social ties on the process of recruitment and radicalisation of travellers to Syria from Germany. The government report released by the German Die Welt claims that 54% of foreign fighters were radicalised and recruited via social ties: families and friends (Fainberg and Fellow 2017, 37).

Regarding the most frequent reasons for which family members and friends went to Syria, there is no unique reason in our sample. The following reasons have the same frequency: killings of Muslims, support to Muslims, full freedom of practicing Islam, adventurousness, fanaticism, delusion and the Hijrah.

Asked whether they could say what changed in their personal decision to leave after they had talked and met with their friends and family members who had gone to Syria, one returnee said that (s) he would not do the same today and that decision was wrong. Most of returnees (10 out of 11) did not want to respond.

The responses of the focus groups and those of respondents to the questionnaire regarding recruitment via social ties, family and friends are interesting. No participant of the focus groups identified social ties as a possible tool of recruitment or the factor that affected the decision to depart for the Syrian battlefront. Regarding the respondents to the questionnaire, a small percentage, 7%, believes that recruitment was the easiest way to recruit relatives and friends.

2.7. Religious commitment and teaching

Faith is a relationship between us and God. Studying this relationship, Sageman (2004) considers how "*despite some popular beliefs about individual freedom, that relationship is firmly founded in social processes. Islam is one of the most sociable religions, with many prescribed joint activities*" (100). Islam demands sociability and commitment, it is permeated with sensory and cognitive components as well as behavioural components. These components are mutually inclusive and reinforcing.

Islamic religion demands "achieving peace" and under the Quran, the true Muslim is the one who made peace with Allah and other people (Khalid 2010, 10). Peace with Allah means genuine submission to the Will of Allah, that is, purity and goodness, and peace with people means doing well in this world. So, the Muslim Holy Book, the Quran (Surah Al-Baqarah, ayat/verse 112) says, "*…whoever submits his face in Islam to Allah while being a doer of good will have his reward with his Lord…*" (Translation: Korkut 2016).

In addition to submission to Allah and doing good things to people, the Quran emphasizes the importance of peace and security of the entire humankind. Under Islamic teaching, only one word will dominate Jannah/paradise and spread everywhere, which is peace. Under the Quran, "*They will not hear therein*

ill speech or commission of sin, only a saying 'peace, peace" (Al-Waqiah ayats/verses 25-26).

If we analyse only this short verse of the Quran that calls for peace, submission and goodness, the following question is logical: how can Muslims (followers of Islam – religion of peace) misinterpret the Quran verses (Ayat) that they present Islam as a violent religion? Perhaps the reason is the literal interpretation of the Quran and the Sunnah[1] by informal and self-declared religious teachers/lecturers. Quite often such lecturers are recognized in simplicity of their interpretation and in this way, they attract many of those who are looking for one solution which is deprived of the possible duality. This is why, it is no wonder that they attract individuals who have already chosen to develop skills in a technical field which is void of duality, for example, architecture, engineering, chemistry and medicine.

The issue of influence of informal religious teachers/lecturers on religious education of our sample is addressed below. The thesis that the most important influence on religious education of travellers to Syria had teachings by informal religious teachers is tested through a number of survey questions.

Asked which Islamic teaching they belong to, all interviewed returnees from Syria and families of those who went to Syria said that they belonged to Sunni teachings. Most of returnees from Syria said they belonged to all madhhabs, and more than one third said they belonged to the Hanafi madhhab. Their responses to the question whether they identify themselves as Salafists or Wahhabis are interesting. Slightly more than one third (4 out of 11) answered positively, saying they are Salafists. However, most of them, 7 out of 11, are not Salafists. On the other hand, no respondent from the cluster sample said he or his family member was a Wahhabi.

Since the results show that our returnees from Syria do not identify themselves with Wahhabis, and that the majority of them do not identify themselves with Salafists, we wanted to see their reaction when they were referred to as Wahhabi or Salafists and whether they would feel hurt. Most of them (7 out of 11) said they would not be hurt, while three returnees would be hurt if somebody referred to them as Wahhabi or Salafists. One returnee did not provide an answer to this question.

Most of the respondents from the sample were committed to practicing Islam in a "traditional Bosnian way" before they began to manifest characteristics attributed to Salafism in the domestic public and beyond. This is why we wanted to find out what attracted them to Salafism. People usually look for some important changes in life in order to experience a new religious or social

[1] Sunnah is the Prophet's practice, word and deeds.

bonding. Examples of such changes are promotion, changing a place of residence, marriage, etc. However, it was the purity of Islam and literal practicing of Islam that attracted most the population of the sample that considers themselves Salafists to Salafism. In their opinion, social peace and personal examples of the persons who treat each other as brothers were another call to embrace Salafism. It is important to emphasize here that in the opinion of the families whose members went to Syria, a spouse of a family member had the strongest impact of their family member's decision to accept Salafism. One third of respondents shares this opinion.

10 out of 11 returnee respondents are devoted to the Salafist form of practicing Islam, while 4 of them are considering themselves as Salafists. Those who say they discovered the form of Salafism through friends account for the majority of the cluster sample (8) followed by those who came to know about that form independently from others (7) and those who did it through family members (4). In assessing the responses in our individual samples, we noticed a difference in opinions about discovering the form of Salafism they practice. Those who say that they discovered the form of Salafism they practice independently from others account for the majority of respondents in the first sample (interviews with returnees), 7 out of 11, unlike the second sample (interviews with families) where respondents claim that only one family member discovered the form of Salafism by himself. In the second sample, most of respondents discovered it through friends, 5 out of 9, while the three returnees became acquainted with Salafism through friends. Similarly, the number of respondents in the second sample (interviews with families) who discovered the form of Salafism through family members (3) is bigger than in the first sample (1).

Those who say that their friends who encouraged them to make that decision are responsible for their active practicing Islam account for the majority of respondents in our cluster sample, 9 out of 20, followed by those who say that they were influenced by family members (7) and, in the end, those who say it was their own decision (3).

One person made a shift in his religious commitment and moved away from practicing religion. This was the result of his disappointment in the living conditions after he went to Syria and also upon his return from Syria.

We thought it would be very important to find the sources from which returnees from Syria learned about Salafism. The usual and widespread belief in media in BiH was that those were some communities outside the Islamic Community in BiH and public lectures delivered in various places. The largest percentage of the cluster sample – slightly more than one third – says the religious literature was the prime source they used to learn about Salafism. This is followed by lectures, including online lectures and websites, as the

fourth source. Only one person in the first sample (interviews with returnees) says he did not attend the religious lectures delivered outside the Islamic Community in BiH, while as many as 10 of them say that they attended such lectures.

Certain places/settlements play an important role in the process of joining the global Salafi movement (Sageman 2004, 99). In BiH, several places were known for public lectures delivered by informal lecturers but not organised by the Islamic Community in BiH. Those places are Gornja Maoča, Bočinja, Bihać and Ošve near Maglaj. Two respondents from the sample of returnees say that they attended lectures outside BiH, in Vienna. Four returnees confirmed that such lectures were dominated by general religious topics, while one returnee said that he listened to topics about Jihad.

Most of citizens in local communities believe that lectures delivered by informal religious lecturers in those places and elsewhere in BiH are the most convenient avenues to recruit BiH citizens for foreign battlefronts. This opinion was shared by 30% of surveyed citizens.

Four interviewed returnees are members of the Islamic Community in BiH and two returnees have a positive opinion about the Community. A neutral, neither positive nor negative, opinion about the Islamic Community in BiH is most frequent (4 out of 11), while three returnees have a negative opinion about the Islamic Community in BiH. It should be emphasized that most of returnees from Syria admit that they are not members of the Islamic Community in BiH (7 out of 11).

The family members of those who went to Syria claim that their relatives, in most cases, (6 out of 9) were members, but could not assess their opinion about the Islamic Community in BiH.

2.8. Stay in Syria and reasons for return

Christensen i Bjørgo (2017) say "*that many individuals escaped terrorist groups by reason of their disappointment, moral distancing or abhorrence of extreme violence committed in Syria. There is an emerging feeling that "things went too far", especially when it comes to violence*" (37).

The length of stay of the respondents from our sample, returnees from Syria, is different. The shortest length of stay in Syria was 50 days, including return (one returnee), while the longest stay was nearly 7 years. The largest number of returnees from the sample (4 out of 11) stayed in Syria up to seven months.

One returnee from Syria travelled to Syria two times (2012-2013), when fighting in another country's army was not punishable under the BiH law. Only later, in 2014, the crime of unlawful forming and joining foreign para-military and para-police forces was introduced in the amendments to the Criminal Code of BiH. The goal of the amendment was to punish socially dangerous behaviour and to improve counter-terrorism efforts.

During their travel and stay in Syria, geographic distribution of our returnees was different. Most of them did not stay in the first place of arrival. They stayed in Azaz, Aleppo, and Raqqa. Only one returnee said he had lived in Tell Abyad and had not seen other BiH citizens who had come to Syria.

Most of returnees from Syria whom we interviewed lived in the city controlled by ISIL (4 out of 11). Three lived in a city controlled by opposition forces, while two lived in the places controlled by insurgents.

It is interesting that regarding their experience and activities in Syria, only one returnee said he had been a fighter. Two said they had been charity workers, and one said he had been a member of support staff. Female returnees said they had been only mothers and wives. The returnees who had fought alongside ISIL account for the majority of those who identified the group that had belonged to while in Syria (3), followed by those who said they had not joined any particular group (2), and one returnee said he had joined Dawlat al Islamyyah.

Most respondents (interviewed returnees) have a negative opinion about the situation and their experiences in Syria (6 out of 11). Their negative experiences were based on bad relations within some groups which began fighting among themselves. That affected security and rendered the idea for which they had left senseless. "*We went there to assist Muslims in fighting against Assad's regime*" (Male, #2, interview with returnee). On the other hand, one fifth of returnees said their experiences were positive.

It is possible to conclude on the basis of the information collected from the returnees from Syria that they met other persons from BiH and the countries from the region in Syria. This is supported by the research conducted by the Atlantic Initiative (2016): "Upon arrival in Syria and Iraq, most of persons from BiH tried to keep together in a new environment" (Azinović and Jusić 2016b., 50).

Accordingly, we asked the respondents whether they had met persons from BiH in Syria. It is noticeable that most of them (7 out of 11) met the persons from BiH. Slightly more than one fourth (3) said that they had met up to five persons from BiH; the same number of respondents said that they had met more than 10 persons, while one respondent said he had met between 5 and 10 persons.

Regarding possible friendship between the respondents and other persons from BiH, such a desire was expected. This is supported by the fact that most of respondents became friends with other persons from BiH, although there are differences only in the number of their new friends. One returnee said that he had made friends with up to ten persons from BiH, one with almost all he had met, one with five persons, and two with two persons. One fourth of the respondents said that they had met the persons who had come from BiH to Syria but were foreign nationals.

Six out of 11 returnees met with the persons who had come from the region. The majority are those who met up to five persons from the region (4), and only two said they had made friends with those persons (one with five persons, the other one with one person). Regarding the countries from which they came, most of the persons from the region whom our returnees met in Syria came from Montenegro (3), followed by those from Serbia (2), and Macedonia (1). Our returnees met also the persons who had come from outside this region: they said that they had met in Syria the persons from almost the whole world, including Africa, Arab countries, Chechnya, France, Austria, Turkey and the United States. Some of them made friends with those people in Syria, and one returnee said he had made friends with more than 10 such people.

There are a number of reasons for which our returnees from Syria decided to return. The reasons vary among returnees and statistically the same reason was not found in two persons. The spread of reasons is as follows: **to feed and educate my children; escalation of the war; I am not a part of their society; they did not allow me to fight; it was a mistake right from the start; I could no longer live that life; my friends convinced me; and a conflict among Muslims**.

Asked whether their decision to return was affected by the possibility of being criminally prosecuted, four returnees gave a positive answer, while the majority (7) think that criminal prosecution did not affect their decision to return. Most of them said that they had not needed anyone's permission to leave Syrian territory.

2.9. Departure and travel routes

Based on collected information, we believe that it would be extremely important to analyse departures and returns through three periods. The first period is particularly important. It lasted from the early spring 2012 to May 2013. According to assessments made by interviewed returnees, between 25 and 29 persons went to Syria during that period. All of them were men,

including the persons included in the sample of persons who travelled to Syria during that period. Nobody from our sample travelled alone during that period. Most of them travelled with a friend. In analysing the reasons for departures during that period and the military formation they joined upon arrival, we have to start primarily from the developments and political situation in Syria at that time. Most of our travellers in that period said that their reasons were to assist Muslims in fighting against the Syrian regime, and they joined the al-Nusra group. Two interviewed men from the sample said that they had joined ISIL. Since fighting alongside a foreign army was not punishable under the law, all of them said that they had left BiH on their way to Syria legally.

The next period lasted from June 2013 to January 2014. During that period, the members of our sample went to Syria freely and legally, and some of them returned to BiH but soon left again. One returnee said that he had gone to Syria two times and that he had not had any problem while leaving BiH. "*In the summer of 2013, I freely crossed all crossing points. Even the border police wished me a safe journey. On my way back to BiH six months later, they knew where I was coming from, but still, I had no problem. It was the same two or three months later on my way to Syria for a second time, nobody from the security agencies said anything bad to me or that I could encounter problems because of my journey*" (Male, #1, interview with returnee).

During that period, recruitment and indoctrination increased in BiH, resulting in increased departures from BiH. This is proven by the fact that most of respondents went to Syria precisely during that period (8 out of 11). The returnees estimated that around 110 men had gone to Syria during that period. Unlike the first period, when only men left, during the second period, also women (25) and children (21) left. We found out that there was a better connection between the Istanbul airport and the Syrian border. Most of those who travelled during the second period (64%) said they had not travelled alone. Also, during that period, the al-Nusra and ISIL saw some changes, which was the reason why some BiH citizens returned. More than one third of respondents from the sample returned to BiH before January 2014. The motives that drove them to return include disappointment in the original goals of those organisations and an armed conflict between them.

The third period began in February 2014 onwards. This period is characterised by individual departures (around 19 men, 9 women and 4 children) and attempted departures of our citizens to Syria. During that period, journeys became more complicated due to an increased attention by the security agencies in BiH towards the individuals who were planning to go to Syria and also an increased control of the border between Turkey and Syria. There were no departures to Syria by the end of 2014 and during 2015. That was the result of inclusion of the crime of serving in a foreign army in the Criminal Code. New criminalisation was introduced in the BiH Criminal Code (unlawful formation

and joining foreign paramilitary or para-police formations) amid changed social structures and new relations. This is why we think it is necessary to emphasize that criminalisation in one phase of development may lose that character in the next phase, which manifests the need to introduce new criminalisation in new and changed situations. Under the new criminalization in the BiH Criminal Code "*the individuals who organise, command, train, equip or mobilise other individuals or groups of people to join another country's military, para-military or para-police formation operating outside Bosnia and Herzegovina shall be punished. Joining such formations as well as other activities, including incitement to the commission of this crime, shall be punishable*" (Azinović and Jusić 2015, 55).

During the third period, there were no major returns until December 2019 when 25 citizens of BiH were brought back from Syria to BiH (7 men, 6 women and 12 children) with support of the U.S. Government and good coordination by the BiH Ministry of Security.

The majority of the respondents used airplain for travel. The advantages of the air route included faster arrival to the Turkish-Syrian border, a safer journey, less police control and cheaper option than travelling by road. In view of the financial situation of the respondents from the sample of returnees, which was bad, this factor was very important. All interviewed returnees say that BAM 250 maximum was enough for a flight ticket. Between BAM 50 and 100 was enough for road transport to the Turkish-Syrian border and some had to pay smugglers or individuals from a military faction (up to BAM 200) to smuggle them across the Turkish-Syrian border. Most of them (7 out of 11) said that they needed BAM 500 for transportation from Sarajevo to Syria. However, two interviewed returnees say that they spent a lot more as they were involved in charity work. The cost amounted to 2,000-5,000 BAM. "*I went to Syria to help innocent children and people. I often met children who were hungry, without anybody's care. I also saw women with children and old people. I helped them, of course. I gave them my own money which I had earned here and taken with me to Syria*" (Male, #1, interview with returnee).

Further, investigating the route to Syria, we identified one common exit point in BiH. For most of them (10 out of 11) it was Sarajevo (the International Airport), and the entry point in Turkey was Istanbul. Upon arrival in Istanbul, travellers to Syria took domestic flights. Most of them flew from Istanbul to south-eastern Anatolia (the cities of Sanliurfa, Hatay and Gaziantep). From there they proceeded by road, hiring a van or a car for a joint journey to the Turkish-Syrian border via three different routes. The first route was Gaziantep-Kilis-Azaz-Afrin-Aleppo-Al Raqqah. The other route was Gaziantep-Kilis-Azaz-Al Bab-Al Raqqah.

The third route went from Reyhanli via the border crossing Bab al Hawa to Ad Dana and further to Aleppo. Only one returnee from our sample used a different route, entirely by road. That route went via Serbia, Bulgaria and Turkey (Gaziantep-Birecik) into Syria (Kobani). Most of our travellers to Syria did not travel alone. Most of returnees (6 out of 11) crossed the Turkish-Syrian border illegally. However, one third crossed the border legally.

Testimonies of one third of respondents from our sample reveal that they knew who would be waiting for them at the Turkish-Syrian border, although they did not reveal the profile or occupation of those individuals. Those who did not know who would meet them at the border which they crossed illegally said that they had paid smugglers or representatives of the Syrian opposition force to transfer them to the Syrian territory. Two retrunees said that they had been allowed to cross the border by Turkish troops, although it had not been a legal border crossing point. It is important to stress that the majority of the sample (8 out of 11), upon arrival in Syria, was not checked or received any instruction as to their behaviour. Those instructions (written or oral) would have referred to their behaviour from the moment of departure to the moment of arrival to Syria. Reports on this issue emphasize that travellers to Syria received some instruction. The Radicalisation Awareness Network Centre of Excellence (RAN) wrote in its report from 2017 that "travellers to Syria were given manuals for recruitment which provide practical advice for preparation and journey and instructions on how to hide upon arrival in Turkey and journeys to various hiding places along the border. The recruitment manual contains also a chapter on women travelling to Syria. Those chapters advise that women may travel without a mahram (male guardian) in order to conceal the purpose of their journey. When they travel with their husbands, women are taken to a separate house called madhāfah where they stay until their men have completed training in a camp" (Meines et al. 2017, 16). Our travellers to Syria said they had not received such manuals. Nobody said that they needed a recommendation or blessing from any Salafist authority in BiH or those who had gone to Syria earlier.

2.10. Return and routes to BiH

Regarding returns, most of our returnees from Syria returned between 2013 and April 2014. Four returnees used the same route to return and most of them (6 out of 11) illegally crossed the Syrian-Turkish border. All of them entered BiH legally. Six returnees admit that they did not need a permission to leave the territory, two returnees claim otherwise, saying that they needed a permission. They had to obtain a permission from a military commander or emir of the territory. They needed a similar amount of money to return, which ranged

between BAM 500 and 1,000. There was an increase in costs because two returnees used the smuggling routes to cross into Turkey and had to pay smugglers. Five returnees found a route to Turkey by themselves. One returnee was assisted by friends, and two were assisted by charity and government organisations. Five out of 11 returnees travelled back to BiH alone, and the same number in company of another person. One returnee did not describe his journey back to to BiH. Upon arrival in BiH, four returnees reported to the police, and the same number called their families. Two returnees said they had not called or reported to anybody.

One fifth of our sample (interviews with returnees) estimates that 10 persons who returned from Syria live in BiH, one believes that 20 persons returned, while the other one believes that around 13 persons returned. Those who said that they did not know how many people had returned from Syria to BiH dominate (4 out of 11).

People in BiH reacted differently to the decision of some citizens of BiH to go to Syria and to return from Syria. Most of surveyed citizens (60%) have a negative opinion, and only 2% has a positive opinion about their departures. However, it is clear to us that the travellers to Syria made a decision and left BiH to go to Syria, and after some time returned to BiH. We wanted to know what happened after they decided to return. Whether some forms of behaviour changed or will change depends on the length of stay and firmness of the initial decision to depart. After they decided to return, we investigated whether they had any doubts over their decisions to go to Syria and whether they regretted to have ever departed. Responses show that four interviewed returnees have regrets, while two have no regrets. Three returnees did not know how to answer the question and the two did not comment.

3

SECURITY, LOCAL COMMUNITY AND YOUTH

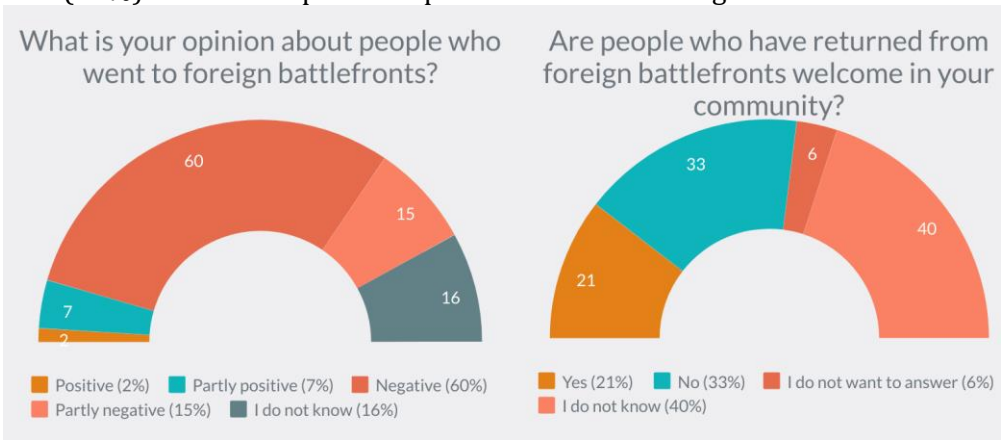
3.1. Security of local communities

Security in local communities may be examined from a number of angles. Security does not imply the sheer absence of crime but also of other forms of behaviour and events that affect security in the community and safety of the people, as well as a feeling of being safe (Karađinović 2016).

The results of the survey of public perceptions in the local communities show that most of respondents in the communities where we conducted the survey feel safe (55%). The place of residence is perceived by the majority of respondents as rather safe. Friendly and peaceful neighbourhood (78%) and professional community policing (54%) are the factors which largely have a positive impact on one's feeling of safety.

On the other hand, no matter which region the respondents come from or which ethnic group they belong to, they think that *organised crime* (45%) *and politics/political conflicts* (36%) contribute most to their feeling of unsafety. This position is maintained primarily in the Sarajevo Canton where 68% of respondents think that organised crime is the major social threat to safety of citizens, followed by respondents in the Una-Sana Canton, 55%, Tuzla Canton, 52% and Zenica-Doboj Canton, 36%.

In assessing the knowledge of citizens that some people from their community went to join another country's army and returned, one fifth has that knowledge. More than one half (52%) do not have that knowledge, and more than one fourth said they did not know anything about it. Most of surveyed citizens – one third - have a negative opinion about welcoming the persons who returned from another country's battlefront. On the other hand, slightly more than one fifth (21%) maintains a positive opinion about welcoming returnees.



Graph2: **C**itizens' opinion about the people who departed and who have returned

In order to gain a more detailed insight into the influence of returnees from Syria on the security of the community, we analysed the differences between our samples (questionnaire, interviews with returnees and focus groups).

We examined how much returnees from Syria may affect the feeling of safety in a community and how through our empirical approach. The analysed data shows that two returnees from our sample believe that security has improved since they returned to the community.

Most of returnees (6 out of 11) believe that the level of security remained the same, while one returnee did not answer. The returnees from Syria have noticed police presence in the community on a daily basis. Three returnees have noticed it, while two returnees have noticed it once a week. In addition, two returnees never noticed police presence in the community.

Interestingly, most of surveyed citizens (95%) in the local communities are not aware of incidents caused by returnees over the past four years. Still, the largest number of surveyed citizens (36%) believe that the persons who returned from another country's battlefront pose a security threat to their community. On the other hand, slightly more than one fourth (26%) of respondents believe that returnees do not pose a security threat to their community.

Regarding positions and opinions of the focus groups in the local communities, we can conclude that they hold the same views. There are risks related to the presence of returnees in their local communities. The first risk may manifest itself as an anxiety felt by some persons after they gave a testimony or as an experience of a dangerous event, that is, post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD. "*Those who return from the Syrian battlefront may suffer from PTSD*" (Female, [28-32], FGD Cazin). A second risk concerns possible continuation of recruitment of other people. "*They may do the same, try to convince their relatives and friends to follow in their footsteps*" (Male, [38-42], FGD Tuzla). A third risk was identified by the Sarajevo focus group and also by the one in Cazin. It concerns possible rejection of returnees by the community and people. "*In my community there is a man who fought in another country's battlefront. He had been convinced to go and then returned to BiH, he sold everything, bought the sheep and now lives far from other people and he said that one should be cautious with such people*" (Male, [23-27], FGD Sarajevo).

In order to get a deeper insight into the fears of citizens, we asked our returnees whether they thought that citizens were generally afraid of them because they had been in Syria. The majority of returnees (10 out of 11) did not think the citizens were generally afraid of them or that they had any reason to be afraid. The focus group participants shared a similar opinion. Most of them do not see any reason why they should be afraid of returnees.

> "*Frankly, I have no fears, because I am thinking, why would they hurt us upon return? I cannot see any reason. If they return out of fear caused by their experiences in the battlefronts or because they regret having left, why would they come here and hurt us"* (Female, [43-47], FGD Maglaj).

Interestingly, one half of our sample of returnees believes that they contribute to the local community through some of their activities. One third said they did not make any contribution.

Judging by the responses of the respondents among returnees and local community members in the focus groups, relationships with neighbours are good. Four returnees said they are excellent, while five returnees said they were good. Good communication between returnees and their neighbours must have contributed to it. Good communication is based on responses, where nine returnees have said they maintain daily communication with their neighbours. The same number claims that they provide help when necessary, which contributes to good neighbourly relations. During our visits to the Bočinja and Ošve communities, we talked to the neighbours of returnees whose ethnic background is different. They confirmed there was mutual assistance among them. Also participants of the focus groups in the local communities confirmed good neighbourly relations. Representatives of the local authorities spoke about good cooperation among returnees, neighbours and the local authorities more often than the participants. "*We maintain extremely good cooperation with the people in Bočinja, people are implementing projects, opening stores in Maglaj, Ošve. I mean, there are no problems, but it is important to write and release that information*" (Female, [48-52], FGD Maglaj).

Four returnees said that they had talked with their neighbours about their experiences in Syria, while most of them (7 out of 11) had not shared their experiences with the neighbours. Most of returnees (8) have never felt being avoided by reason of their lifestyle.

Interestingly, most of returnees (6 out of 11) maintain contact with young people aged 18-23 and three of them maintain that communication on a daily basis. This is why, it is no wonder that most of returnees assessed their relationships with young people as good (6 out of 11), and two returnees said the relationships were even better or excellent.

Four returnees admit that they talk with young people about the problems facing young people in the community. On the other hand, most of them (7 out of 11) do not discuss their experiences from a foreign battlefront with young people. The returnees have assessed that there are a number of problems facing young people in their community. They include poverty, unemployment, abuse of drugs and alcohol, crime, internet addiction and psychological pressure.

Most of our returnees claim they do not know what young people in their community think about their stay in Syria. Most of returnees claim that they have never noticed or felt to be avoided by young people by reason of their lifestyle or the way in which they practice religion. On the other hand, the reason for departing for Syria, which the young people mentioned most frequently, was to improve financial situation and because of a bad situation in the society, that is, their own frustration over the situation in their country.

Asked whether they pray in mosques which belong to the Islamic Community in BiH, most of our returnees (9 out of 11) said they went to such mosques, while two returnees said they did not. Out of those who said they went to such mosques, four of them go to mosque every day. Regarding communication and relationship with local believers, 8 out of 11 returnees maintain communication and say that the relationships between them and other believers are excellent (4) and good (4).

Regarding discussions about issues related to Islam, the majority of returnees (6 out of 11) said they had not discussed such issues with community members, while the two said otherwise. Although the majority said they had not discussed Islam with other community members, three returnees believe that the community members have good and positive opinions about their interpretation and practice of Islam. The same number of our returnees maintains a positive opinion about the way in which community members interpret and practice Islam. Most of them admitted that they had never shared their experiences from Syria with other community members nor had they ever felt being avoided by community members because of their interpretation and practice of religion. Regarding opinions of community members about their departures to another country's battlefront, most of returnees (7) said they were not aware of such opinions.

3.2. Experiences from prison

We bear witness to the numerous initiatives aimed at investigating the impact of prison sentences. However, such initiatives lack full agreement on manners of treatment and adaptation of prisoners to prison life. Methodological limitations of research, primarily omissions made in the selection of samples, inadequate control of effects of various variables/factors (Bonta and Gendreau 1990).

In most Western countries, prisons have long been presented as hubs for radicalisation, where radicalised individuals can establish ties with each other and radicalise other prisoners. Under the report by the French Ministry of the

Interior, there are 500 individuals serving time in prison on terrorism-related changes, while a little more than 1,200 prisoners have been labelled as being radicalised. Of these, at least 50 people serving terrorism-related sentences were released in 2019, alongside 400 individuals who reportedly radicalised in prison. In an attempt to mitigate the risk tied to the release of radicalised prisoners, the 2018 French National Plan for the Prevention of Radicalisation called for the creation of a permanent unit that would monitor these individuals once they are released from prison (European Eye on Radicalization 2020).

We attempted to get responses to the questions whether there is a danger of radicalisation in prisons in BiH and about the role of returnees from Syria in radicalisation of prisoners in direct interviews with prisoners. However, this was not allowed by the BiH Justice Ministry despite the fact that the BiH Council of Ministers had endorsed our project activities.

Azinović believes that the individuals serving time in prison for fighting in Syria may radicalise other prisoners as they can easily become their role models (Radio Sarajevo 2020). In addition, Azinović and Jusić (2016) when discussing about the role of returnees in prisons consider that „*the influx of such prisoners into the prison system which is not fully prepared to receive them could create a new platform for the process of ideological radicalisation and recruitment. Moreover, returnees from the battlefronts serving time in prison could establish ties with criminals willing to procure arms and explosives for money or to provide illegal transportation of people and arms and explosives across the BiH border*" (90).

Is the prison system prepared to accept returnees from Syria? Are there platforms for the process of ideological radicalisation and recruitment? How are prison staff members treating prisoners? What is the approach to human rights in prisons? We sought responses to these and other questions, related to experiences from prison, in direct interviews with the members of the sample who had served time in prison. We wanted to be socially useful, although the BiH Justice Ministry prevented us from investigating the possible processes of radicalisation in prison and prison conditions.

The majority of our first sample (7 out of 11) includes the persons who were released from prison. An average length of their prison sentences was 15 months, although five out of seven returnees served 12 months each. The longest prison sentence was 22 months. Although one third of returnees served time in prison during the same period, they were put in prisons throughout BiH – in Bihać, Zenica, Sarajevo, Foča and Igman. Most of them (5 out of 7) served full time in prison.

Experiences of prisoners in regard to their treatment by the prison guards are important in terms of strengthening or weakening the ability of an individual to

(re) integrate: "*This is why, good prison conditions and an opportunity for the prisoner and the prison staff to develop mutual trust are crucial and a prerequisite for reducing prisoners' resistance and for potentially motivating prisoners to change by developing alternative relations and opportunities while in prison*" (RAN Working Paper 2016). When the prison staff demonstrates trust in some prisoners, it can be crucial for prisoners' development and self-confidence and can initiate a change (RAN P&P Work group 2016, Christensen 2015 i Hansen 2018).

Generally, the respondents from our sample of returnees who had experience from prison maintain a positive opinion about the prison guards and their communication with them and other prisoners. Only one former prisoner had a neutral opinion about the prison staff. Others were divided between those who believed that the treatment of prisoners was good and those who said it was very good. Also the prison management was assessed positively by seven of the respondents.

Most of prisoners shared a cell with other prisoners (6 out of 7). Our returnees from Syria who served time in prison shared cells with the prisoners sentenced to prison for various crimes (murder, drugs, petty crimes and organised crime).

All could freely communicate with them and other prisoners. Most of the time they communicated during free time, over lunch or prison outdoor time. One half of them, who served their sentences, talked to other prisoners for a shorter time, up to 10 minutes, and the other half talked to other prisoners for up to two hours a day.

Prison visits to all former prisoners from our sample were allowed. Most of the time they were visited by their family members, a spouse and children. Most of them said that the visiting room officers were near them during the visits.

It is interesting that six out of seven prisoners (returnees) worked in prison. Many worked in a greenhouse – vegetable production (3), one worked in a canteen, and one in a laundry room. Two respondents did not say anything about their labour.

The responses by the majority (4 out of 7) of the respondents who said that they had shared their personal experiences from the battlefront with other prisoners in which they described reactions are interesting. One prisoner said that other prisoners had felt repulsion, but it later changed. The behaviour of other prisoners was very good towards them and they treated them just like other prisoners. Another one said that he had kept company with 10 prisoners and he did not have the impression that they had a negative opinion about him. Two respondents said that they had been treated by other prisoners well. One

respondent did not say anything, but emphasized that "a prisoner is a prisoner". Only one respondent said that other prisoners had provoked him.

Six out of seven prisoners said that they had freely practiced Islam in prison, in both a cell and the prison masjid.

The responses by the former prisoners to the question whether they had communicated with religious officer are important from the aspect of possible deradicalisation. Most of them (4 out of 7) said that they had not communicated with the religious officer in the prison. The reason for the absence of communication was interesting. One returnee said there had been no religious officer in the prison, while another one said he had never seen him.

The former prisoners who communicated with the religious officer (3 out of 7) said that they had not discussed their fighting alongside a foreign country's military. On the other hand, all of them said that they had good relations and had been pleased with the religious officer's activities. Two respondents said that other prisoners were mainly pleased with the religious officer, if his services were available at all.

Two out of seven former prisoners (returnees) had an opportunity to teach Islam to some persons in the prison, which proves the possibility of developing and establishing a platform for ideological radicalisation in prison. Two respondents did not comment on this question.

In addition to the positive opinion about the treatment of the returnees and other prisoners by the prison staff, the possibility of communication with other prisoners, prison visits, our former prisoners shared also some problems which they had faced in prison. The distribution of those problems is different and it is not possible to define one shared problem. The problems range from food, loud music and TV running all the time, which interfered with their prayers and sleep needs and affected their religious freedoms in the IV wing. We did not find out anything specific about those freedoms

3.3. Relationship with the local community and possible approaches to integration

Modern sociological theories about crime maintain that etiological causes of socially unacceptable behaviour should be sought in communities/groups as special social systems in which individuals are formed for delinquent behaviour. Those communities are different by character and size. Regarding size, they range from the family of the offender, in our case a "traveller to Syria",

to larger groups that include one social unit. One very important segment of relationships within a community is their communication, which primarily refers to forming positions among the group members, as general opinions of the community about travellers to Syria and vice versa. The community's opinions are important. Those communities represent social environments to which travellers to Syria return and where they continue to live after they have served their prison sentences.

The primary goal of the prison system is to "guard" and isolate offenders and the goal of the probation system is to monitor and control them in a community. This is why, there is a need for full cooperation between these two systems. However, there is only the minimum level of cooperation. Maloić, Rajić and Mazar (2015) notice that and state that "*cooperation comes down only to exchange of information on the assessed levels of risks posed by offenders and the assessment of the necessary forms of surveillance and control in a community, which proves to be ineffective in terms of reducing recidivism rates*" (130).

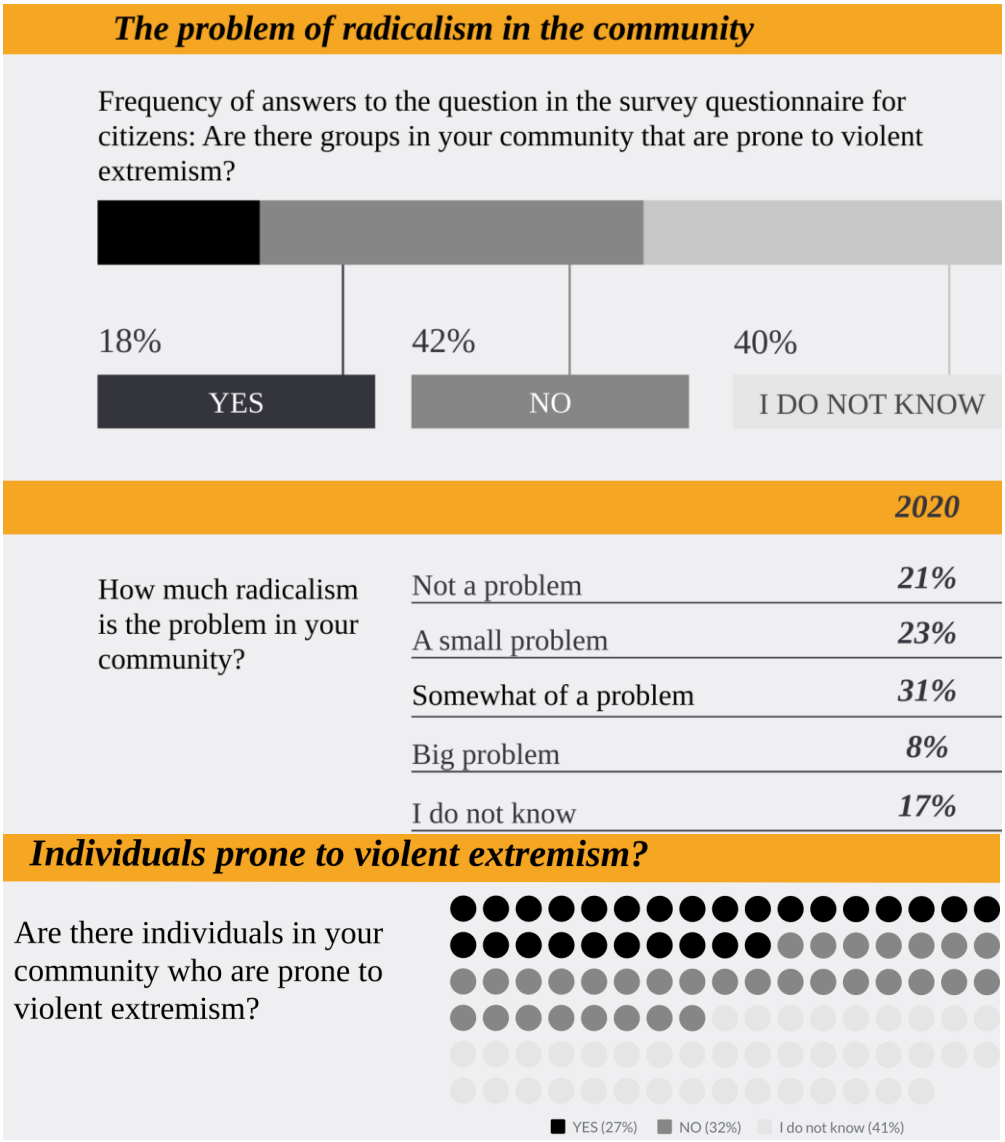
Asked about the general opinion of citizens in their local communities about them (returnees whom we interviewed), the largest number of returnees believe that the opinion is positive (5 out of 11). Three returnees have an even more positive opinion, believing that the community in which they live have a very positive opinion about them. Only one respondent said that the persons in his local community has a negative opinion about them.

"*I think that those people have an absolute right to live and pursue their own lifestyle, although it is different from our thinking, so long as their behaviour does not pose a threat to life, freedom and rights of others*" (Male, [60+], FGD Tuzla)."*I have absolutely no prejudices against them, on the contrary, I have a positive opinion about them*" (Male, [48-52], FGD Maglaj).

In assessing the reasons why most of them think that the community has a positive opinion about them, their responses were different. Some said that the reason was that the community members knew them, others said that the community knows they are not bad people. Still others claim that they have good relations with Serb neighbours and that the main reason for the community's positive opinion is that they are nice people.

On the other hand, the returnees believe that the negative opinion about them is the product of the media propaganda against them over the last years. This opinion is shared by the participants of the focus groups held in the local communities where the returnees live (Maglaj, Cazin, Tuzla and Sarajevo). "*Advocating a bad image of returnees and Salafists is an example of biased and false media reporting. Media want to control everything, including them*". (Male, [18-22], FGD Cazin).

Most of surveyed citizens (57%) believe that the media in BiH contribute to radicalisation in BiH with their reporting. A very high percentage of citizens, 41%, believe that there are no groups prone to violent extremism or such individuals (31%) in their community. Still, despite such an opinion, we should take into consideration the fact that most of interviewed citizens, nearly one third (31%), believe that radicalism is a problem to some extent in their community, while 8% think it is a problem. Slightly more than one fifth believes that radicalism is not a problem in their community, while almost one fourth (23%) thinks that radicalism in community is a minor problem.



Graph 3: The frequency of citizens' answers about the problem of radicalism in the community

The number of returnees who believe that the community's opinion about them may affect their feeling of belonging to that community is small (2 out of 11). It is obvious that the community opinion factor is not crucial for their feeling of belonging to the community.

Five interviewed returnees said that the persons in their community have a positive opinion about the way in which they are practicing Islam. On the other hand, the data from the survey of public perception in the local communities about returnees from another country's battlefront – the survey of citizens conducted in the communities where our returnees live – provides a very much different picture. The largest frequency of responses to the question about opinions about the Salafi interpretation and practicing of religion is recorded among the neutral respondents, 39%. They are followed by the respondents who maintain a negative opinion – 23% - and those with a very negative opinion – 19%. A very small number of respondents had a very positive opinion, only 4%, and positive, 6%.

When we compare the opinion of returnees and the opinion of surveyed citizens of the local communities, we see a huge difference in their responses. The returnees' perception is that the community maintains a positive opinion about the way in which they practice Islam, while the largest number of respondents (42%) in the community maintains a negative opinion. The focus group participants had a divided opinion. The division is made into those who believe that the way of practicing religion is an individual right and those who see that particular way of practicing religion as radical and extreme.

The focus group participants who did not have a negative view of the way in which returnees from foreign battlefronts or Salafists practice Islam said that they have a right to live that way, with their customs and practice. "*We do not need to condemn them, otherwise, they would be radical. Who says that the way in which we practice Islam is correct?*" (Female, [23-27], FGD Cazin). The focus group participants often emphasized that "*when it comes to practicing Islam, the problem is that views of those groups are overburdened with prejudices and stereotypes*" (Male, [48-52], FGD Maglaj). Puhalo (2016) wrote about negative stereotypes about Salafists that dominate among the BiH citizens: "*Most often they are described as individuals who do not like other people – 32% - as quarrelsome – 31.8% - unemotional – 30.1% - uncivilised – 28.6% - dirty – 17.7% - impolite – 16.3% - and dishonest – 16.3%*" (127). Furthermore, Puhalo (2016) says that there is a difference in the perceptions of Salafists among different ethnic groups. "*Bosniaks do not have a black-and-white picture about Salafists. On the one hand, they are observed as the people whose behaviour (uncivilised) turns others away from them, while on the other, we can say that they have some characteristics (courageous, clean, honest and proud) which are appreciated very much in our society. Like Croats, Serbs too have negative stereotypes of Salafists (uncivilised, do not like other people, unemotional, quarrelsome, dishonest),*

although these stereotypes are less present among Serbs than among Croats" (128).

The focus group participants who have a negative opinion about the way in which returnees from foreign battlefronts practice Islam justified their views with what they know about them. "*They attend gatherings, they have clips calling Wahhabis to a war and killing. The Quran forbids killing*" (Male, [23-27], FGD Sarajevo). "*To me, all that is radical, extreme, terrorist*" (Female, [28-32], FGD Sarajevo).

Since one half of returnees assessed that the people in their communities maintain positive opinions about the way they practice Islam, we wanted to hear why they think so. There are two possible reasons. One third said that their neighbours are aware of their choice and respect that. This was confirmed during the focus group discussions in the local communities. Another third thinks that the reason is that they do not cause harm to anybody.

A relatively small number of respondents from the sample of returnees (2) believe that the community's opinion about the way in which they practice Islam can affect their feeling of belonging to the community. Regarding belongingness to the community, the majority (10 out of 11) clearly has that feeling.

3.4. Attitude towards elections, society and regulations

The idea that citizens participate with their free will, translated into an election, in the process of electing their representatives is the foundation of a democratic society. When it comes to support of that idea in our sample (interviews with returnees), it is important to stress that 5 out of 11 returnees support that idea. Four of them have a positive opinion, while one returnee believes it is very positive. Three returnees are neutral, while the one looks at that idea negatively. Two returnees did not answer to the question.

The right of citizens to participate in a fee election is a fundamental right of citizens. Most of respondents from the sample of returnees, 6 out of 11, used that right. Those who voted expected a change for the better (4), while the one voted because he had been told to vote. Those who did not vote gave two reasons. The first reason is "those who we should vote for are thieves" and was mentioned by one interviewed returnee. The other reason, "Islam forbids it", was also mentioned by one returnee.

The results of responses to the question whether they plan to vote in future general and local elections show a change in the position of the sample (interviews with returnees) in favour of a negative response. Most returnees (8 out of 11) said they would not vote in future. This tendency may indicate disappointment with some individuals who were elected or the emergence of religious fanaticism or similar phenomena which may advocate against voting in some situations, claiming that it takes away the faith from religion. Without discussing the history of that problem, which, in our view, would be legitimate, it is noticeable that the responses that they will not vote because there is no social progress (3), disappointment in those elected (1) and "all of them lie" (1) have the largest frequency. Apart from these responses, from the security perspective, some responses that indicate religious fanaticism as a possible reason why the returnees will not vote are worrying. One returnee said that voting "takes one away from religion" and the same number claims that "they do not recognize the law" which is the reason why they will not vote. Such fanatic and other similar views may have criminogenic impacts that lead to the commission of crimes.

Those who say they will vote expect that the situation will improve and that justice which is needed in society will be strengthened.

In order for the society to respect the rights of its members and their ability to organise themselves, it is necessary to have regulations on individual activities and behaviour in the group in place. The regulations may have different forms. The attitude of the respondents from the sample of returnees towards regulations (laws) of the state, which have a strong impact on the behaviour of the society, is analysed below. It is particularly interesting to see individual attitudes towards those laws because oftentimes they are criticised in media reports of failing to respect the laws and "*we can often read that the Salafi communities or some religious facilities are outside the BiH state, that is, that the state institutions have no control over them and that they have no access to them, which is not true*" (Puhalo 2016, 58).

The majority of respondents from the sample of returnees (8 out of 11) confirmed that they accept the laws of the state. However, some do not accept the laws (2), while one returnee refused to answer. In order to get a better insight, we asked which laws they accepted and which laws they did not accept, and why. Of five returnees who answered that question, only one recognises all laws, while two accept only those laws which are not in contravention of Islam.

The only reason for which they respect laws is "because the law has to be respected". Likewise, the only reason for which some do not respect laws is that "the laws take us away from religion".

3.5. Attitude towards Islam in Bosnia and Herzegovina

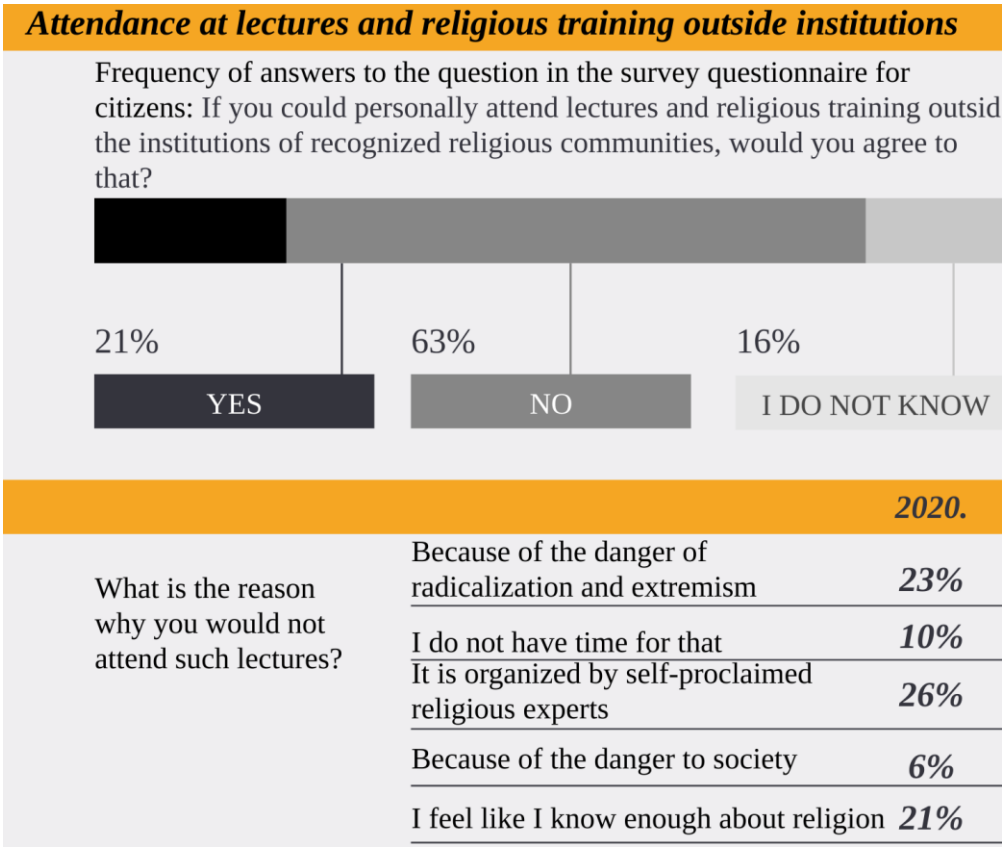
Islam has a rich and centuries-long tradition in BiH. Most of citizens in BiH are Bosniaks "*who are Muslims of the Hanafi school of religious law*" (Glasse 2006, 68). Since the universal mission of Islam is to establish and spread peace and wellbeing in a country, the life in accordance with Islamic regulations requires discipline and constant vigilance, equality of all human beings, equality of men and women, it would be absurd to link any crimes with that religion (Kržalić and Korajlić, 2018). In this part, we shall present and analyse opinions expressed by individual samples (returnees, survey of the perception of citizens and focus groups in local communities) about traditional understanding and practicing of Islam by the BiH Muslims.

Regarding the opinion about traditional understanding and practicing of Islam in BiH, the dispersion of responses is in accordance with the size of the sample (interviews with returnees). The majority of respondents (9 out of 11) shared opinion. Responses range from "it is the correct form of Islam", "just like 'mine'", "good", "neither positive nor negative", some believe that "there are some mistakes in it, but it is still good", "nothing particular", and "I respect it so long as it is not in contravention of original Islam". Although most of respondents from the sample of returnees have a positive opinion about traditional understanding and practicing of Islam in BiH, slightly less than one half says that they would not practice Islam in that way.

The majority of surveyed citizens (72%) said they were religious. Of those who said which religion they practiced, 83% said that Islam was their religion. Regarding religious training, the respondents were divided into two major groups: those who undertook religious training within religious institutions (54%) and those who were trained in school (30%). Only a small number of respondents (8%) was self-taught.

The responses to the question in the survey "If you could participate in lectures and religious training provided outside the institutions of recognised religious communities, would you accept to participate?" are very interesting. The option "yes, I would accept" was chosen by 21% of respondents, while the majority (63%) chose the "No" option. The respondents who chose the yes option under which they would attend training and lectures outside institutions gave the following reasons in support of their choice: their wish to learn more about the basic teaching, principles (77%), to find their own identity (6%), lectures delivered by the religious community are not good and are superficial and they would like to hear proposals and suggestions for improvement of the community (4%), to meet new friends and to be encouraged to develop (2%). The majority of those who said they would not attend training and lectures

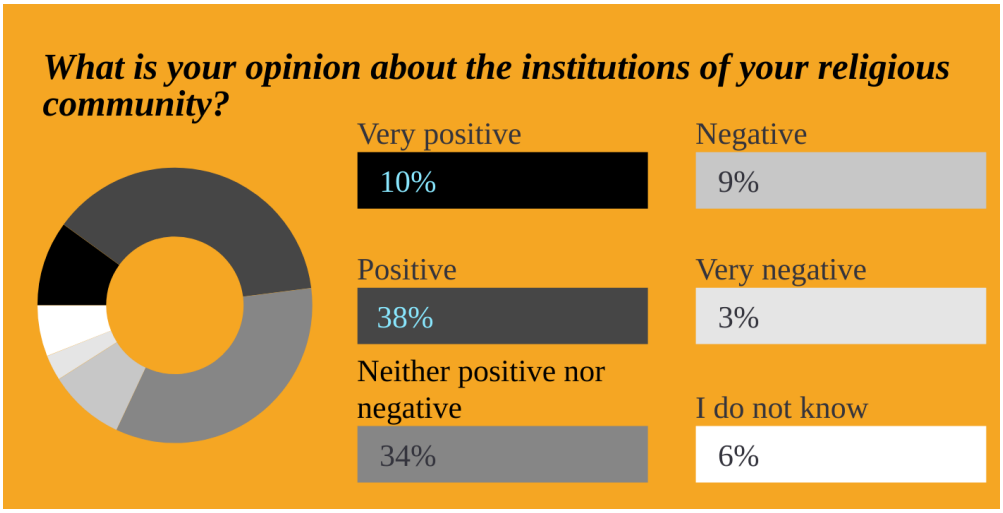
outside institutions said that such lectures and training are organised by self-declared religious experts (26%) and that such an approach pose a threat of radicalisation and extremism (23%).



Graph 4: The frequency of citizens' answers about lectures and religious training

Most of surveyed citizens (52%) believe that there are organisations and individuals in the community who deliver lectures and religious training outside the Islamic Community in BiH. This sample is almost fully homogenous when it comes to an opinion on this issue since the differences in demographic variables are insignificant. The responses to the question about the role of religious authorities in building inter-ethnic trust in BiH are very similar. Most of citizens (59%) think that religious authorities play a role and can have an impact on the improvement of inter-ethnic trust (absolutely 18%; partially 41%).

Regarding the assessment of opinions of citizens about the institutions of the religious community, the highest percentage of respondents (48%) has a positive opinion (very positive 10%; positive 37%). More than one third of the respondents are indecisive and 12% have negative opinions about the religious community institutions.



Graph 5: The Frequency of citizens' answers about institutions of religious communities

The focus group participants in the local communities clearly said that they practiced Islam the way their grandfathers had practiced Islam many centuries before. All of them said that they had a positive opinion about the Islamic Community in BiH and that they had received religious training in kuttabs of the Islamic Community in BiH. "*I practice religion the way my mother did it and the way we were taught in kuttab. That is traditional teaching, as they call it now*" (Female, [53-60], FGD Maglaj). The responses of the focus group of the closed community are interesting and very much similar to the responses provided by the returnees. The focus group did not share an opinion about traditional understanding and practicing of Islam in BiH. The biggest number of participants believe that as such, Islam is correct, but there are those who think there are some mistakes, but is still good. Some believe that it is wrong to call it traditional Islam as it would imply wearing niqab.

> "*If we look back in history and take pictures of major cities, for example, the pictures from the Austro-Hungarian era, we will see women wearing long dresses and niqab over their faces, and men wearing beard. Take the pictures of those places to see how they look now. Is it traditional Islam? Where did traditional Islam shown in the pictures from the Austro-Hungarian era go? This is why we believe that it is wrong to use the term 'traditional Islam'*" (Male, closed community, interview).

Our next question aimed at probing the views of returnees about their own way of practicing Islam. Three returnees said they did not think it was the most correct way, one hoped it was and two returnees said that the way they practiced Islam was the most correct way.

Asked whether returnees should adapt to the society and the society to them, the largest frequency of responses is recorded among those who said that nobody should adapt to anybody (2) and those who said that adaption should be both ways (2).

The statements by the Maglaj focus group members show that in some periods Wahhabis/Salafists demanded that the local community members should adapt to their behaviour and teaching. That period was identified as the period that started 6 years after the war, in 2001, in Lješnica: "*In the beginning, some individuals wearing long beard approached me and told me that I was not allowed to sing on the street as it was forbidden in Islam. I know that they displayed their flag on the local mosque. Then, the community protested and said, 'you will not harm our customs and the rest'. Then the situation calmed down and they stopped imposing their rules*" (Female, [23-27], FGD Maglaj).

The long-time officer of the security services whom we interviewed thinks this was solved through institutions. "*With our actions and activities we forced them to assimilate in the community instead of the community adapting to them, which is extremely positive in the whole story. We took timely action in regard to that smaller group and we did not allow them to exert their influence"* (Interview #3, security sector officer, 2020).

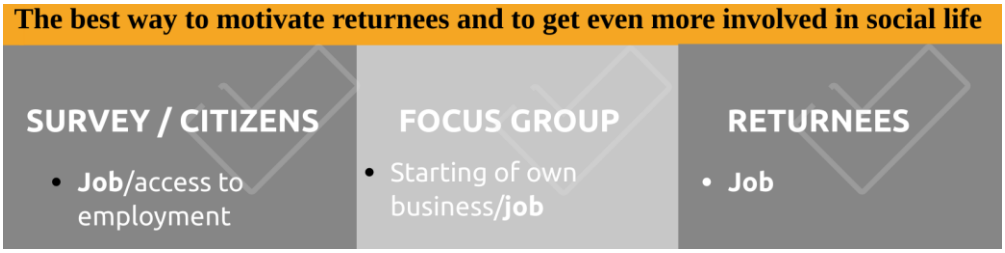
4

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR (RE)SOCIALISATION AND (RE)INTEGRATION

Social relations play an equally important role in reintegration of individuals as those in radicalisation processes (Christensen 2015). Changes in social relations, new approaches to community service, community development projects, acquiring new skills and learning norms of behaviour may be the way to motivate returnees and to engage them even more in the social life. This increases a chance for their (re) integration in society (Barelle 2014 and Christensen 2015). This is why it is important to identify the best models and programmes which will motivate an individual to engage in the community in which he can develop an alternative identity and change his range of activities (Christensen and Bjørgo 2017, 49). It is also important to identify who would be most acceptable and most effective for the community and returnees in making such changes through the implementation of the programmes. This is particularly important, as today there are many initiatives for the prevention and fight against extremism and terrorism as well as initiatives for reintegration of returnees most of which are implemented not only in a community, where there is a need. We also notice that such initiatives are based on different understanding of terms and various goals.

This was why we wanted to explore the best ways for returnees which would motivate them to engage even more in the community. Most of respondents from our sample of returnees from Syria (9 out of 11) think that employment would be the best motivation. Starting up a business, agricultural production, support to their current labour and employment in a construction or another company (public or private) could motivate an individual to change. The same

result is achieved through an analysis of the focus group discussions in the local communities and the responses to the survey of public perception of returnees in the local communities. The focus groups in the local communities show a clear trend of linking employment projects to motivation of returnees to integrate in the local community. Interestingly, most of citizens (71%), compared with the findings of the survey of returnees and the focus group discussions, chose jobs/access to employment as the first best way to motivate returnees to engage in the local communities. Respondents from all samples share the views about the best way to motivate returnees to engage more in the local community.

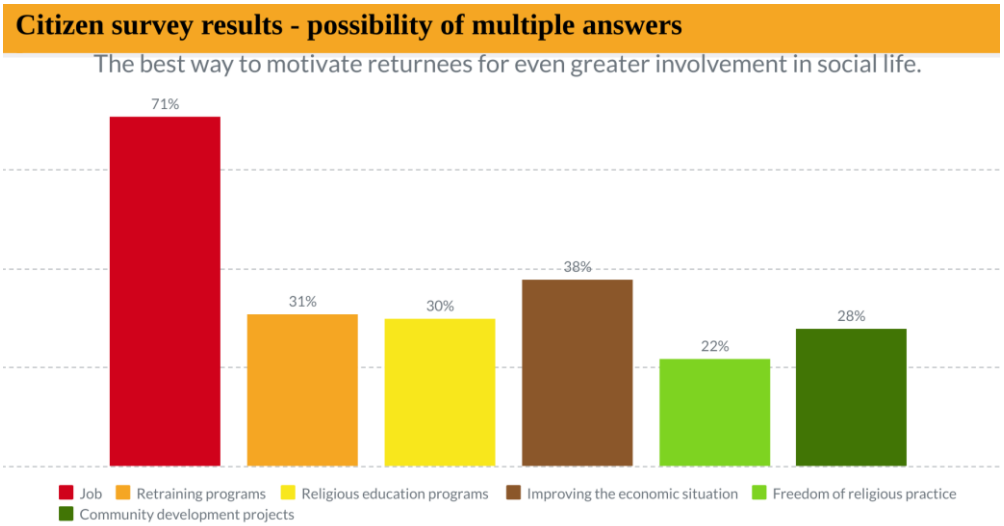


Graph 6: The most frequent answer of three samples on the motivation for inclusion in social life

The first best way to motivate returnees is jobs/access to employment. Employment is an excellent way to support the returnees to remain on the labour market and not to return to their old habits, making it possible for them to acquire new experiences and develop new skills. "Marsden said that many young radicals are sceptical towards mainstream societies, and we could even say that they have fears (e.g. they may fear going to labour centres alone), while mentors could support them, for example, by monitoring them. For example, Finish experts have mentioned that they often support people to find new alternatives to their activities which would be more appropriate for their knowledge and skills" (Saznov, Ploom and Saumets 2019, 22). As we can see what the needs of empirical research and on the basis of international practices, it is possible to conclude that returnees need support to take the first step – find a job – which will give them positive feedback. That information may encourage development of a new identity which will be different from the identity of a fighter or radical.

Five returnees chose improving the general economic situation as the second best way to motivate for greater involvement in social life. More than one third of the respondents to the survey questionnaire (38%) chose the same manner of motivation.

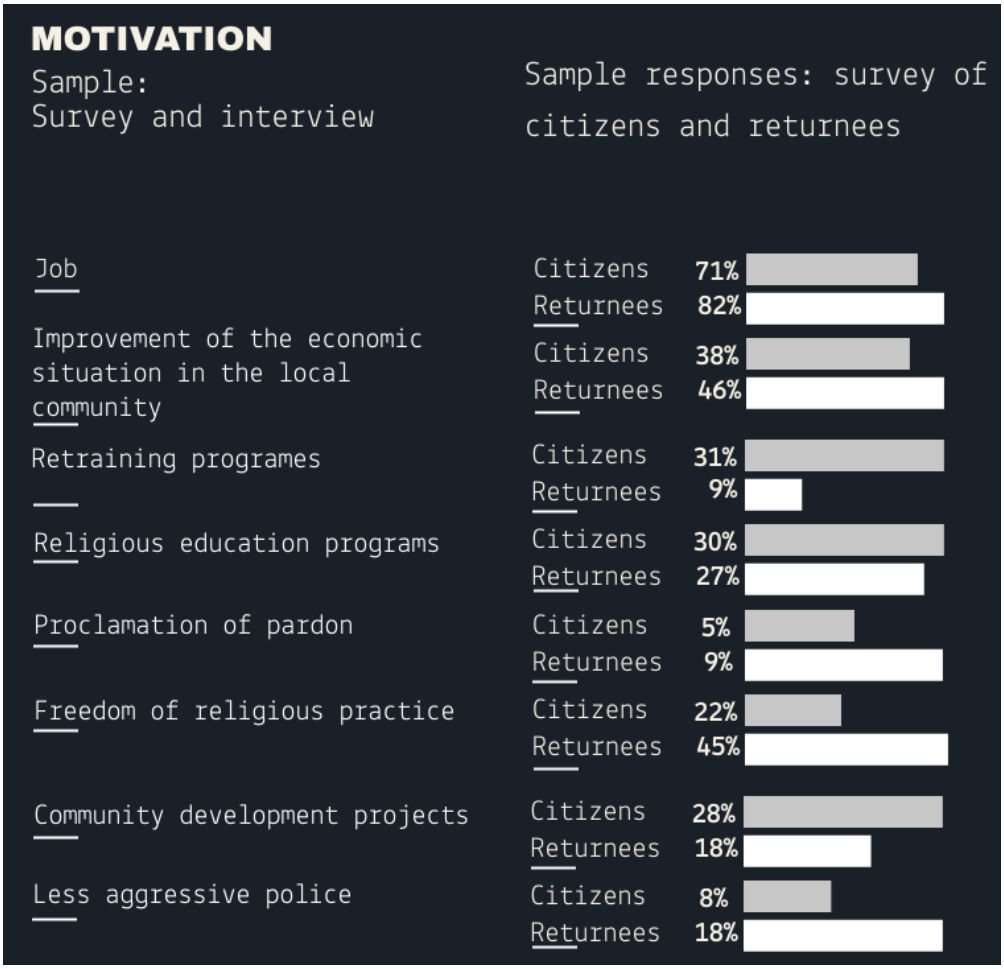
Five returnees **chose religious freedoms as the second motivation, with a special emphasis of practicing religion.** For the citizens of local communities, this motivation is the sixth option. Slightly more than one fifth of them chose that option.



Graph 7: The frequency of citizens' answers about the best way of motivation

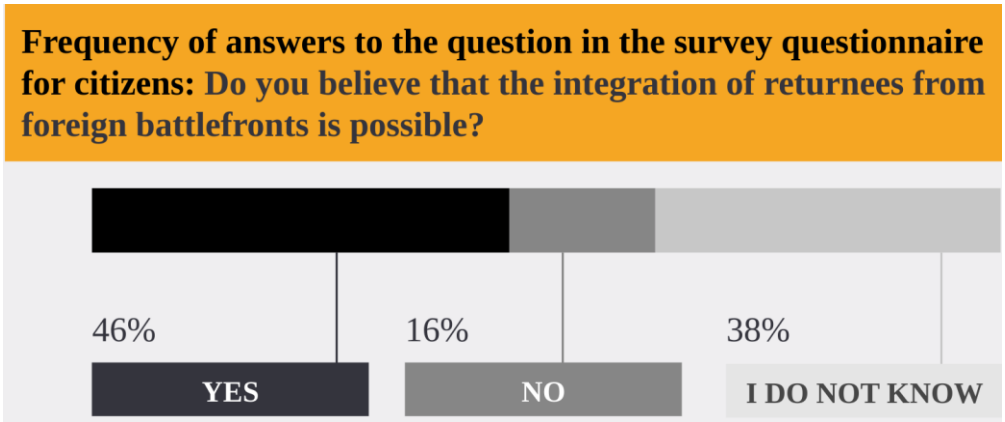
The returnees chose religious education programmes as the third best way to motive an increased inclusion in the local community activities (3 out of 11)**, while citizens chose reskilling school programmes** (31%). Education could be a good method to revive a wish to participate in social activities. According to a German expert, support is needed in that area, especially to identification of the needs of an individual: whether they need secondary education, vocational education or a university degree. What they are interested in should be supported and fostered through acquisition of knowledge which would make their views of the world multiple, introducing the shades of grey which will pave the way for changing radical views (Saznov, Ploom and Saumets 2019, 23).

In the opinion of citizens, **the implementation of religious education programmes** would be the fourth possible way to engage returnees in the social activities. For returnees, the fourth way includes **local development projects and reduced aggressiveness of police** (2 out of 11). The local development projects may engage individuals in labour which may fill their free time. Community labour should be based on the established security forum which will define the shared priorities of the community and police, including the priority of reducing aggressiveness of police. This will contribute to returnees' trust in policing and also to their engagement in joint activities. The fifth way is defined as a reskilling school programme which was chosen by one returnee, while 28% of citizens chose the local development programme.

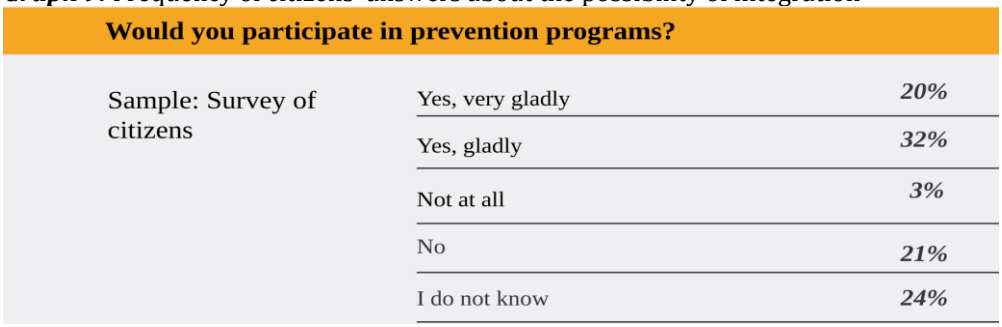


Graph 8: The response ratio of citizens and returnees

The majority of respondents from the sample of returnees (6 out of 11) said they believed that returnees from Syria would be willing to participate voluntarily in reintegration programmes. The local community plays an important role in the process of social transformation. This is why it is important that the majority of citizens of the local community, i.e. the sample, (52%) support rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees and 44% of them believe that integration of returnees is possible. It is encouraging that most of citizens (53%) are willing to take part in the prevention and reintegration programmes.



Graph 9: Frequency of citizens' answers about the possibility of integration



Graph 10: The frequency of citizens' answers about participation in prevention programs

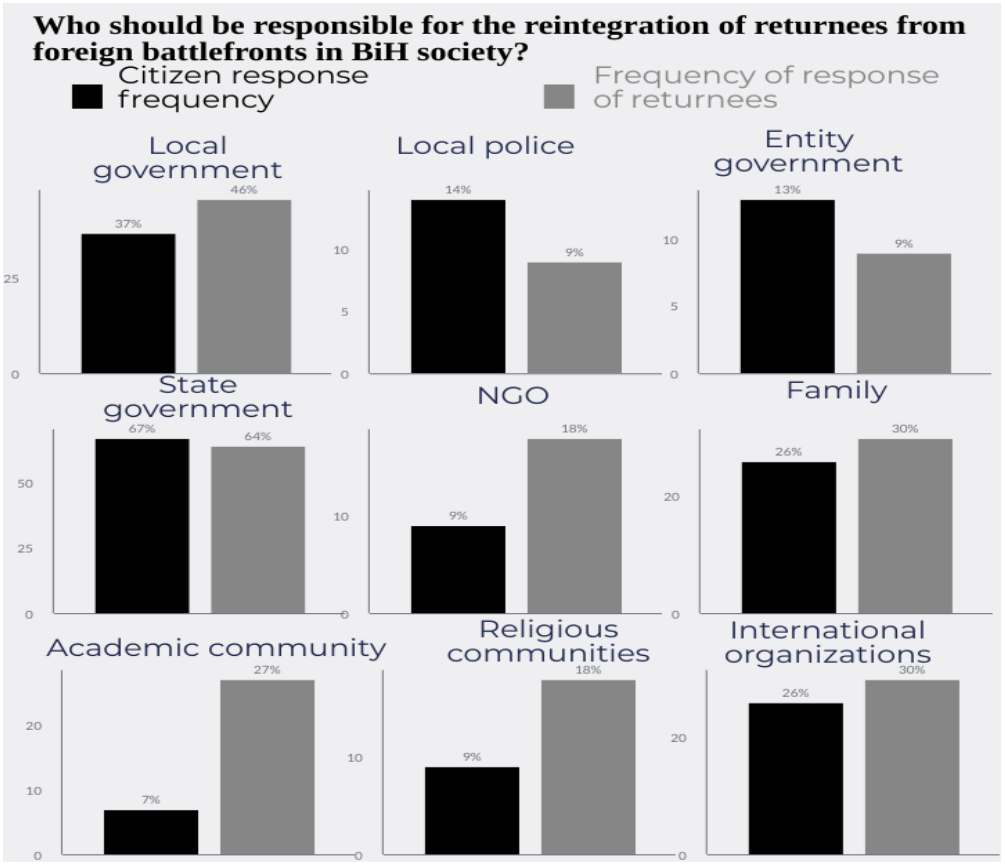
In addition to defining possible focus points of development of a reintegration programme, there are also other factors which are related to an individual and a group, which need to be identified in the context of an attempted integration. One of these factors are subjects or individuals (mentors) who should implement reintegration programmes. This is why the opinion of our sample on who should implement reintegration programmes for their population and also the community.

A number of interesting responses were provided**. For example, the majority of respondents from both samples** [returnees (7 out of 11) and citizens of local communities (67%)] **believe that the state authorities** would be most responsible for the implementation of such programmes. **The next choice was the local authority with a slightly bigger** frequency of responses among returnees (46%) than among citizens (37%). Interestingly, the Islamic Community in BiH is the third choice of four returnees, while the third choice of citizens is the family (26%).

The institutions of religious communities are the fourth choice of citizens. It is interesting that the returnees give preference to the academic community (universities) in the implementation of projects and not to non-governmental and international organisations, unlike the citizens who give preference to international organisations and non-governmental and not to the academic

community (universities). The returnees' last choice of those who should implement integration programmes **are entity governments and local police.**

Most of respondents from our sample of returnees and focus group participants believe that the persons who implement projects (leaders or mentors) or who are engaged in project management must have a good knowledge of social problems, must be well informed and trained in social and religious issues relevant for the target groups in the community and for individuals. This may be very useful for the integration process. International researchers dealing with reintegration programmes believe the same. "*This is why, it is crucial that employees and mentors are well informed and, if possible, trained for a specific target group and in specific cultural, political and particularly religious issues and norms which are specific for that target group*" (Christensen 2015, 290). In this context, the engagement of people with a high level of knowledge about Islam, etiology of socially unacceptable behaviour and security in such programmes in order to support the development of a more complex form of religious and etiological understanding among returnees and to prevent misinterpretation of the part of the staff involved.



Graph 11: The relationship between citizens' and returnees' responses to the question of who should be responsible for the reintegration of returnees

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study identified common features of the BiH returnees from Syria and tested traditional theories of behaviour – social and situational. We also tested already identified motives driving BiH citizens to depart for Syria, but we tried to identify also some other motives. Our findings reject a great deal of generally accepted knowledge about the BiH returnees.

Regarding social explanation, the respondents among returnees come from lower classes and are not employed. They do not attribute their decision to go to Syria to that situation. Their education is average, which is also true of most of citizens of BiH, and only two returnees from the sample completed a madrasa school. Most of them practiced religion prior to going to Syria and they are committed to the Salafi form of practicing Islam. We have not found evidence that the returnees are criminals or that their family members were prone to criminal behaviour. This is confirmed by the responses that most of returnees were not under investigation or charged prior to going to Syria. Regarding psychological characteristics of returnees, no diagnosed mental disorders or PTSD prior to going to Syria could be established on the basis of the responses provided by the majority respondents from the cluster sample.

During the interviews, the returnees first did not reveal their motives for going to Syria. This changed in the course of the interviews and each of them shared his personal reason that had affected his decision to depart: persuasion by friends or a family member; support to Muslims; freedom to practice religion; to see what people were going there/adventurousness and the fight in the way of Allah.

The findings of the analysis show that the returnees did not identify the war in BiH in the 1990s as a motive nor could the mujahedeen who fought in BiH in the 1990s be identified as a cause of behaviour that resulted in the motive for departure. Psychological and philosophical motivation was not identified by our group of returnees. Religious motivation, recognised in doing the hurrah, was identified only by one returnee. This means that the main reasons for going to a foreign battlefront should be sought in other factors, conditions or motives.

The information that for most of returnees their journey to Syria was not a way to earn for a living or to live better lives shows that the economic motivation was not crucial for their decision to go to Syria.

The fundamental motives of those journeys do not lie in ideological and religious or socio-economic reasons but in the reason inspired by a desire to maintain a recognised status in a group that the returnee most often belonged to, built on the basis of his friends from that group. Friendly ties played an important role in motivating our sample to make that decision. It is the first group of motives we identified. Life in a group under the same principles may be identified as an individual pull factor. The social pull factor is recognised in the stories which the returnees read and watched via the internet and which provoked their compassion or desire to assist. Although the returnees spoke only a little about the Salafi leaders of the communities, those leaders may be included in the group of pull factors.

The other group of motives includes the motives of persons who "by reason of insufficient or wrong upbringing" did not have moral strength to resist the temptation that "pulled" them to go. We did not find the motive related to compensatory factor, generated by the feeling of inferiority.

Wishing that this study is used as a tool by practitioners in different security agencies and also by policy makers as support to addressing issues related to returnees from Syria, we give the following recommendations:

- **Returnees need significant support and monitoring if they are to integrate into society.** They need support in starting up their small businesses, education, re-skilling and also a stronger linkage with social institutions. Their training, reskilling and employment may contribute to establishing new pro-social networks and ties with social institutions.
- It can be assumed that every returnee from Syria was both a witness and victim of violence, rapes and (large-scale) killings, combined with the consequences for humanlives in war zones. This applies also to the children of travellers to Syria.
    - **Such cases can cause trauma which requires special psychological monitoring by therapists with specialised skills and approaches required for management of such a group**. Psychological treatment should begin as soon as possible, if possible, already in detention facilities and in prison, if returnees are sentenced to prison.
- **A strategy and programmes against radicalisation, extremism and terrorism must be developed** by teams with multidisciplinary skills, including criminalists, criminologists, sociologists, psychologists, religious leaders and security scholars.

- **Municipal services, in cooperation with the BiH Ministry of Security and providers of education, should establish a model of mentorship and begin training of mentors.** A mentor would work with the individuals engaged in violent extremism and the individuals released from prison, who are returning to their local communities.
- **Through community policing and joint programmes implemented with local communities, it is possible to identify future joint goal**s which will help returnees hope for future. It can motivate individuals to engage in social activities, education and employment, which can strengthen their reintegration in the BiH society.
- **In order to achieve success in preventing violent extremism in general and in rehabilitation of returnees, it is necessary to improve cooperation and exchange of unique information** among police (at the state, entity, cantonal and local levels), prosecutors' offices, courts, correctional institutions, various municipal and cantonal/entity agencies (social welfare services, education institutions, health services), Islamic Community in BiH and civil society organisations.
- **Our returnees have warned of huge differences, in terms of future risks, between the returnees who returned before April 2014 and those who are still in Syria and should return.**
    - Some will be disappointed and will wish only to return to a peaceful life.
    - Others may be mentally unstable, aggressive and embittered over the circumstances in which they lived but also over the collapse of their ideas. This group of returnees should be subjected to a special risk assessment and their time in prison should be organised in stages in order to identify their propensity to violence. Here, we mean violence against prison staff, other prisoners and the public. During those stages, it would be necessary to consider mental health issues (the risk of suicide, mental instability and mental/physical illness). This approach can help identify needs for monitoring and treatment by psychologists, psychiatrists, doctors and other specialists.
    - Accordingly, we suggest that the BiH Justice Ministry consider using one of the tools which are developed particularly in the UK in assessing risks of violence among imprisoned returnees and extremists (for example, VERA2 or revised ERG22+).
- A significant number of women returned and it is expectedmore women will return. Although in some cases women were young and tricked into going to Syria, regardless of their criminal liability, local police officers should treat them just like men who returned from the aspect of security risks and possible impact on others.
- Children are a particularly vulnerable group but still can pose a serious risk. Since they lived in war zones, they need psychological assistance

and loving homes. If both parents were killed in Syria or if both parents are detained upon return, while their closest relatives are unable to accept them, foster families should be identified.

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„The study showed and proved that only serious field research, with adequate methodology, makes things clear, and the results do not give room for manipulation, except in cases where the future data user may start from pre-established prejudices or when for ideological or other reasons continue to manipulate the facts"

Professor emeritus Mirsad D. Abazović, University of Sarajevo, BiH

"*An interesting analysis of the collected primary data. Analysis of the data collected, especially from 11 returnees, can be a rich contribution to the literature on this topic*"

Dr. Valery Perry, Democratization Policy Council (DPC)

"*The results of this research study will certainly be useful for researchers in the field of security sciences, criminology and criminalistics for further national and comparative research and in-depth examination of some of the researched issues and factors of radicalization in the academic community of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the region and beyond*"

Professor Želimir Kešetović, University of Belgrade, Serbia

"*...the study is the result of excellent fieldwork, where a wide range and number of respondents in BiH society compensates for the fact that there is no larger sample of returnees*"

Professor Ana Dević, KU Leuven University, Belgium