

Western Balkans



Investment to date: USD 7.4 million
Investment started: 2017
Current investment: USD 5.3 million

Drivers of Violent Extremism

Returnees from Conflicts Abroad also known as Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters (RFTFs) are the predominant manifestation of violent extremism in the Western Balkans (WB). Countries in the WB have had some of the highest number of RFTFs per capita in the world. Individuals who travelled, and in some cases fought in Syria and Iraq had various motives, usually a mix of personal drivers and justifying ideological objectives. WB countries most affected by violent extremist recruitment are characterised by poor governance, corruption, a lack of political accountability, inter-ethnic tensions, and frozen conflict. Lack of employment, poverty, and low levels of education further contribute to vulnerability to violent extremism in the WB more broadly.

GCERF'S Strategy

GCERF's first round of funding in Kosovo focused on the prevention of violent extremism by contributing to providing equal economic and social opportunities for vulnerable populations, as well as improving youth resilience and social cohesion particularly between ethnic Albanians and ethnic Serbs. The next round of funding (in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Kosovo, and North Macedonia) focuses on community-based rehabilitation and reintegration (R&R) of RFTFs and their families.

The strategy is coordinated with national governments and the donor community, and key actors in the R&R landscape including IOM, OSCE, and community-based organisations.

To ensure ownership, impact, and effective coordination, GCERF has established a Regional Accelerated Funding Panel comprised of CT/CVE leaders in partner WB governments, as well as key members of the donor community.

During the last 3 years of investment in Kosovo, GCERF strengthened collaboration with key stakeholders and coordination mechanisms in Kosovo. GCERF then established partnerships with Albania, BiH, and North Macedonia in order to scale up its successful programming and model of community-led R&R. GCERF's Secretariat is now well-connected with the Western Balkans Integrative Internal Security Governance team, and the Regional Network of National Counterterrorism/Countering Violent Extremism Coordinators presided by the EU Regional Counterterrorism/Security Expert.



Beneficiary Quote

"I am aiming to contribute to our community with all the skills that I have gained through this programme. [...] We learned how to address our needs and issues, how to resolve issues, and how to stand up for ourselves and our rights."

- Genta Morina, 18, participant of the Civic Education School in Mitrovica (CBM programme)

Country	Funding to date	Current funding	Funding since	No. active grants	No. active CSOs
Albania	2m	2m	2020	3	8
Bosnia & Herzegovina	Grant process underway				
Kosovo	4.1m	2m	2017	3	8
North Macedonia	1.3m	1.3m	2021	2	9

Portfolio Overview



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Portfolio Objectives

GCERF's programming in the Western Balkans takes a holistic, community-based approach to reintegration. Objectives include:

- building capacity of national and local institutions and frontline practitioners to work with RFTFs and their families
- providing direct assistance and access to opportunities for RFTFs and their families as well as the receiving communities
- improving social cohesion and community agency to create an enabling environment for the reintegration and resocialisation of returnees.

PARTNER TESTIMONY

"We are somehow perceived as a safe place for students [...] they are coming and asking for different kind of issues that they have, not just related to the projects but they see that we might be able to help them in some way, or maybe to call somebody."

- Staff member, GCERF partner in Kosovo

Portfolio Overview as of February 2022

Partner Name	Partner since	No of CSOs	Focus populations	Key activities
Albania				
Terre des Hommes	2020	2	Staff in reception centres, RFTFs and families, local institutions	Capacity-building of frontline practitioners in trauma- and violence-informed care; providing direct support to RFTFs and families; capacity-building local institutions on R&R
Counselling Line for Women and Girls	2021	4	RFTFs and families, religious leaders, receiving community	Psychosocial support to RFTFs, families, receiving community; building PVE capacity of religious leaders; providing access to a helpline and reporting mechanism
Institute for Democracy and Mediation	2021	3	R&R stakeholders, receiving communities, RFTFs	Training and coordinating R&R stakeholders, social events to socialise and reduce stigma, vocational training and apprenticeships for RFTFs and members of receiving communities
Kosovo				
Community Building Mitrovica	2018	2	Local governments, youth	Supporting local authorities to develop and implement a strategy on P/CVE and R&R.
Community Development Fund	2017	2	Children (of RFTFs and others); FTFs and other community members	Educational activities for RFTF and other children; vocational training, internships, and small grants to RFTFs and other community members; training for frontline workers
Advocacy Training and Resource Centre	2018	4	Government actors, frontline practitioners, journalists, receiving communities	Supporting implementation and monitoring of national P/CVE strategy; training and coordination of R&R stakeholders, awareness-raising about RFTFs to reduce stigma
North Macedonia				
Macedonian Center for International Cooperation	2021	5	Vulnerable groups in receiving communities, media actors, frontline workers	Psychosocial support to vulnerable groups in receiving communities; capacity-building to media actors on reporting on VE; training and coordination of frontline workers
Macedonian Young Lawyers Association	2021	4	Government actors, non-state actors working on R&R, receiving communities	Capacity-building to state and non-state actors working on R&R

Performance



Direct Beneficiaries: 68,747

Indirect beneficiaries: 1,117,000

Key Activities

With an emphasis on reintegration and resocialisation, as well as a secondary objective to tackle other forms of extremism including ethno-nationalism, key activities from the current investment include:

- Providing vocational training, organising internships and paid apprenticeships, establishing market linkages, and giving small-scale grants for RFTFs and other members of receiving communities
- Supporting RFTF children in their reintegration into school systems through assessments, individual education plans, manuals for teachers and school psychologists, and private tutoring for children
- Developing guidelines and training for frontline practitioners (community policing officers, social workers, psychologists), journalists, religious leaders, teachers, and national and local institutions
- Supporting the implementation and monitoring of the national PVE strategies
- Supporting coordination and lesson sharing among governmental and non-governmental entities working on PVE and R&R
- Providing psychosocial counselling, medical support, and access to civil registration and housing to RFTFs and their families
- Providing access to a helpline and reporting mechanism in receiving communities
- Organising events to encourage social engagement and reduce stigmatization of returnees

Portfolio Outputs (2 rounds in Kosovo)

- 21 **advocacy meetings**
- 2,114 awareness raising events
- 7,613 participants in **cultural and sports activities**
- 53 **youth clubs** established
- 187 people received **livelihood support**
- 4,773 people trained in PVE, conflict sensitivity, critical thinking, and conflict resolution skills
- 400 people received vocational skills training

Portfolio Outputs Current Programming (final data not yet available)

- 1,051 participants in capacity-building for **frontline workers**
- 113 government or local authority participants received capacity-building
- 769 participants in **cultural and sports activities aimed at reintegration**

BENEFICIARY TESTIMONY

As part of the first round of funding in Kosovo, GCERF's local partner developed a project that worked with young people on key skills needed for successful entrepreneurship to address the lack of access to socioeconomic opportunities as a driver of recruitment to violent extremism. Below is a quote from a focus group conducted by an independent evaluator with project beneficiaries.

"Being part of these trainings has helped me to improve my leadership skills and get more active in the community, and whenever we are told or hear about how youth should stay away from extremism I say that you should not tell youth do not turn to this ideology or extremism, but rather, you have to show to them that what they can do is work and get engaged in creating or developing something new."

- Youth beneficiary, Kosovo

BENEFICIARY TESTIMONY

ATRC, GCERF's partner in Kosovo since 2018, provided media training to youth and journalists addressing stigmatisation of returnees, which presents an important barrier to reintegration. Through its programme, ATRC also became aware of certain false narratives taking place online and used its platforms to set the record straight to prevent project beneficiaries from stigma or isolation due to false reporting. Below is a quote from a participant who joined a focus group conducted by an independent evaluator.

"The training also influenced my attitudes towards the returnees because I was able to better evaluate the kind of news that is being produced and how they are portrayed by the media – sometimes in distorted ways."

- Student beneficiary, Kosovo

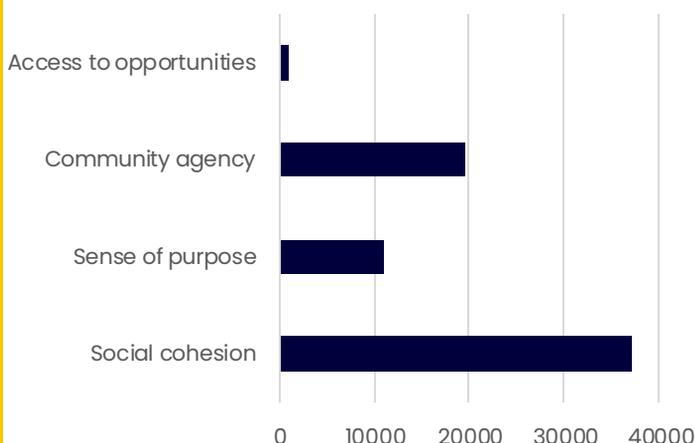


Figure 1: direct beneficiaries by focus area 2017-2021

Independent Evaluation of Kosovo Grants 2021

GCERF commissioned an independent evaluation of four grants in Kosovo in 2021. Key findings are presented below.

Project 1: FIQ

Key activity: entrepreneurship training

- **Significant positive impact**, especially among the direct project beneficiaries
- Survey results (21 respondents):
 - 85.7% considered that the training they received matched their needs
 - 52.4% **created a business/social enterprise**, 28.6% said that they are still trying
 - 47.6% reported that their leadership skills had significantly improved
 - 66.7% reporting that their **financial management skills** have significantly improved
 - 95.2% said that their networking skills improved
 - 66.7% reported that the trainings have had a **positive impact on their income**

Project 2: CBM

Key activities: network of change agents, informal educational programmes, media literacy trainings, building local stakeholders' capacity, economic empowerment

- The evaluator praised the careful selection of beneficiaries in close cooperation with local stakeholders (e.g. school teachers).
- The internship component of the project was in line with the needs of beneficiaries
- The project **complements other initiatives** aiming to address radicalisation and violent extremism, but it also fills an important need for greater CSO activism in South Mitrovica.
- Developing a **Local P/CVE Plan** provided local municipal authorities with a framework for P/CVE.
- Overall positive impact towards strengthening peaceful coexistence among different communities in Mitrovica, with key indicators such as propensity to justify use of violence or demonstrating positive inter-ethnic relations **exceeding intended outcomes**.

Project 3: ATRC

Key activities: raising awareness on PVE & RFTFs, publications, television shows, training journalists and law students, awareness raising of reintegration among youth

- ATRC became aware of a disjointed approach among stakeholders and sought to use its position and access to facilitate **inter-institutional cohesiveness**
- ATRC **fills an existing gap** or complements similar initiatives
- Media component added value to an important area for P/CVE in the context
- Journalists became more adept on reporting on terrorism, with increased neutrality and sensitivity to ward protecting individuals
- **Tackling misinformation** was a positive consequence
- Another outcome was a **push for greater accountability among institutional stakeholders in prevention and R&R**.

Independent Evaluation 2019

An independent evaluation of two grants was also conducted in Kosovo in 2019. The evaluation found that programmes were:

- Relevant and aligned with the P/CVE strategy
- Effective, with results including:
 - Increased municipal budget for youth-related activities as a result of training and advocacy
 - Returnees were humanised in the eyes of their peers.
 - Closer bonds between students from different communities
 - Students communicate more confidently with peers and parents, analysing different sources of information and taking concrete actions to improve the environment for themselves and their peer
- Sustainability was limited, although grants illustrated valuable lessons for the next round of funding and Community of Practice among grantees.

GCERF

Geneva, Switzerland

Find out more about becoming an investor, our work, and the collective impact we make at:

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