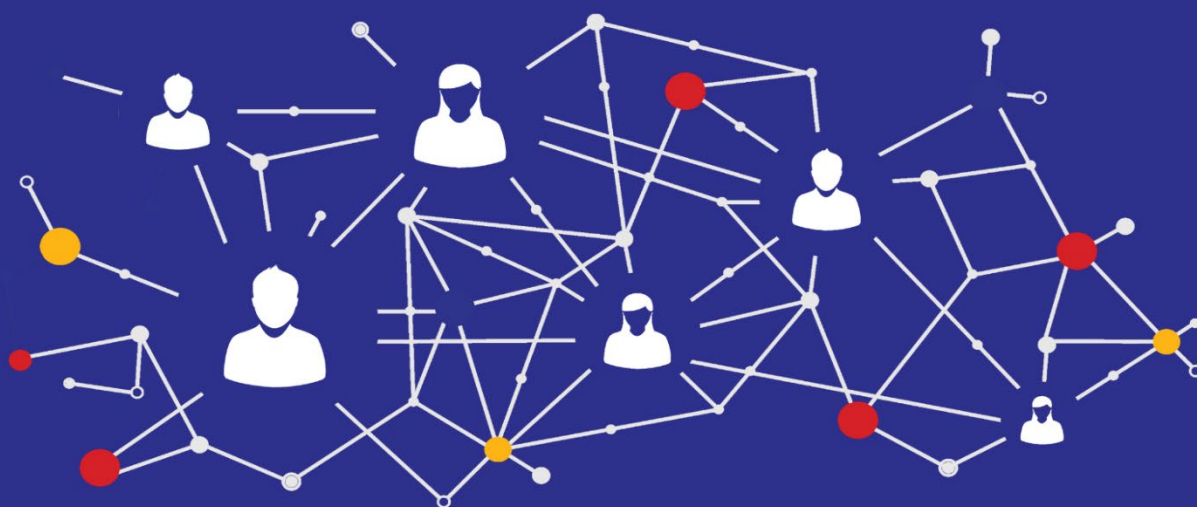


Empowering Local Prevention

The role of NGOs and Youth in Preventing Violent Extremism in Albania



Prepared by the Counseling Line for Women and Girls
May 2025

Table of Contents

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Empowering Local Prevention..... | 1 |
| The role of NGOs and Youth in Preventing Violent Extremism in Albania..... | 1 |
| 1. Executive Summary..... | 4 |
| Overview | 4 |
| Key Findings | 4 |
| Key Recommendations | 4 |
| 2. Introduction | 6 |
| Context..... | 6 |
| Central vs Local | 6 |
| The Critical Role of NGOs and Youth Organizations | 6 |
| Scope and Research Focus | 7 |
| Research- Identified Challenges and Strategic Opportunities..... | 7 |
| Policy recommendations | 8 |
| 3. Methodology..... | 10 |
| Relevant Actors | 10 |
| National Government Actors | 11 |
| Civil Society Organizations and NGOs..... | 12 |
| Educational Institutions | 13 |
| Method | 13 |
| Case Studies | 14 |
| Methodological Limitations | 15 |
| 4. Analysis & Discussion | 17 |
| Current role of NGOs and Youth..... | 17 |
| Importance in PVE..... | 19 |
| Opportunities for growth..... | 20 |
| National Strategies and Policy Alignment on Preventing Radicalization and Violent Extremism (P/CVE)..... | 22 |
| Challenges..... | 25 |
| Evidence from high-risk municipalities reveals that many youths feel left behind, underrepresented, and without real opportunities to influence community life, creating vulnerability to extremist narratives. | 27 |
| Geographic and Access Variations..... | 29 |
| Sustainability and Continuity Challenges..... | 29 |
| 5. Recommendations | 31 |
| For policy makers and local institutions | 31 |
| For NGOs and youth groups..... | 31 |
| For frontline workers | 32 |
| Additional Recommendations | 33 |
| 6. Conclusion..... | 34 |
| Summary of Key Points | 34 |

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| The Essential Role of NGOs and Youth in Prevention Efforts..... | 34 |
| Next steps: further research, practical next steps..... | 35 |

1. Executive Summary

Overview

Albania has developed a multi-faceted approach to preventing violent extremism, involving diverse stakeholders from government ministries to grassroots organizations. The research conducted reveals that CSOs like NGOs and youth mechanisms play crucial roles in building community resilience, particularly at the local level where they connect with at-risk populations. Key findings show these organizations help bridge gaps between government initiatives and community needs, though they face significant challenges including limited resources, operational difficulties, and coordination issues. Recommendations focus on strengthening partnerships between civil society and government, enhancing capacity building, ensuring sustainable funding, and improving coordination mechanisms to create more effective prevention frameworks.

Key Findings

Albania's NGOs and Youth Organizations have transformed from simple awareness-raising entities into sophisticated prevention actors that form the backbone of community-level resilience building. These organizations have developed comprehensive approaches that government institutions struggle to replicate, combining economic empowerment with community inclusion while addressing sensitive gender dimensions of extremism that traditional security-focused interventions often miss. The research reveals that these actors excel in areas where formal institutions face limitations. They build trust in communities where official agencies may lack credibility, provide specialized services to marginalized populations, and implement peer-to-peer approaches that prove more effective than traditional methods. Their ability to deliver measurable results—from increased income and self-confidence among returnees to behavioural changes regarding violence and discrimination—demonstrates their essential role in prevention efforts.

However, this potential remains constrained by systemic challenges. Organizations across the sector struggle with funding sustainability that traps them in short-term project cycles, undermining the long-term relationship-building they identify as crucial for success. Coordination between stakeholders remains ad-hoc rather than systematic, with significant variations in institutional readiness creating an uneven prevention landscape where success depends heavily on local leadership rather than national frameworks.

Key Recommendations

Albania's prevention effectiveness can be dramatically enhanced through strategic shifts that build on existing successes while addressing systemic barriers. The path forward requires government institutions to move beyond ad-hoc partnerships toward systematic engagement frameworks that provide predictable support for civil society's specialized capabilities. This means establishing standardized procedures for collaboration, creating sustainable funding mechanisms that replace short-term project cycles, and developing regional coordination structures that ensure consistent prevention capacity across the country. Civil society organizations must simultaneously strengthen their own coordination and capacity. By establishing formal networks for systematic collaboration, investing in specialized skills and modern monitoring technologies, and diversifying funding strategies beyond international

grants, these organizations can maximize their collective impact while building greater sustainability.

The most significant transformation requires moving from reactive crisis-response approaches to proactive prevention frameworks that integrate economic empowerment with community engagement. This means scaling successful youth-centered models that involve young people as decision-makers rather than passive recipients, addressing social stigma through comprehensive community strategies, and ensuring that prevention services genuinely serve beneficiary needs rather than project requirements.

Success depends on recognizing that effective prevention requires sustained relationship-building rather than project-based interventions, transforming Albania's current ecosystem of individual organizational competence into a coordinated national approach that leverages each actor's unique strengths while addressing shared challenges systematically.

2. Introduction

Context

Albania's vulnerability to violent extremism stems from its complex socio-political history, including the aftermath of communism's collapse, the Kosovo conflict, and influence from foreign religious movements. The country has experienced challenges related to political instability, economic hardship, and the spread of radical ideologies from neighbouring countries and the Middle East. While most Albanians oppose engagement in foreign armed conflicts, concerns persist about political corruption, foreign religious influences, and scepticism about global engagement, with some viewing international structures as tools for Western dominance over Muslim countries.

Central vs Local

The stakeholder mapping identified a clear distinction between central and local level prevention efforts, revealing both coordination opportunities and implementation gaps. At the central level, Albania has developed a comprehensive strategy for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE), including a 2023-2025 Action Plan addressing the needs of 37 individuals returning from conflict zones. The Center for the Coordination of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE CENTER) oversees national strategy implementation and coordinates inter-agency collaboration through 12 Regional Committees addressing local CVE challenges. At the local level, municipalities like Tirana, and Kamëz implement targeted initiatives through Local Safety Councils and youth mechanisms, though coordination between central and local efforts remains challenging. The research specifically notes that "a lack of multi-stakeholder cooperation and trust among central and local state actors" hampers effective prevention work. This coordination gap creates opportunities for enhanced integration between national frameworks and local implementation, particularly through systematic engagement with civil society organizations that operate effectively at both levels.

The analysis reveals that successful prevention requires bridging this central-local divide through systematic frameworks that leverage the specialized capabilities of community-based organizations while aligning with national strategic priorities.

The Critical Role of NGOs and Youth Organizations

NGOs and Youth Organizations are indispensable at the local level due to their direct community connections and targeted approaches that government institutions often cannot replicate. Organizations like the Counselling Line for Women and Girls provide specialized services addressing gender dimensions of prevention, while youth mechanisms demonstrate unique potential to engage vulnerable young people through peer-to-peer approaches that prove more effective than traditional institutional methods.

These organizations understand local contexts and can identify early warning signs of radicalization while building trust in communities where official agencies may face credibility challenges. The country research reveals that NGOs have developed comprehensive approaches combining economic empowerment with community inclusion, working directly with women returned from conflict zones while conducting workshops with youth in high-risk

municipalities. Their vocational training programs have resulted in measurable increases in income, self-confidence, and community engagement among beneficiaries.

Simultaneously, local institutions, particularly municipalities, contribute significantly to these efforts. The Municipality of Kamëz exemplifies successful cooperation by actively collaborating with the **Kamëz Youth Council**, focusing on addressing youth-related challenges and fostering social cohesion. This partnership demonstrates that systematic cooperation between local authorities and Youth Organizations is vital for strengthening community resilience and provides a replicable model for other municipalities.

Youth Organizations particularly demonstrate transformative potential when young people serve as decision-makers rather than passive recipients, with evidence showing that active participation in debates, training, and community activities significantly increases sense of belonging and social responsibility—key protective factors against extremism.

Scope and Research Focus

This research examines how NGOs and youth mechanisms currently function within Albania's prevention landscape, identifying successful approaches and intervention models through systematic analysis of organizational experiences and collaboration patterns. The analysis explores their contributions to strengthening community resilience, with particular focus on municipalities like Tirana, Kamëz and Rogozhina where various initiatives have been implemented and documented.

The research methodology combines comprehensive stakeholder mapping with structured questionnaires administered to three main categories: NGOs, public institutions, and Youth Organizations. This approach enables systematic data collection across stakeholder categories while maintaining consistency in core questions about collaboration, effectiveness, and barriers in P/CVE work. Case studies of successful Youth Organizations provide concrete examples of effective prevention models that demonstrate measurable impact and replication potential.

This work aligns with Albania's 2023-2025 P/CVE Action Plan and builds upon existing efforts coordinated through the Center for the Coordination of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE CENTER), while identifying opportunities for enhanced coordination and systematic scaling of successful approaches.

Research- Identified Challenges and Strategic Opportunities

Through systematic research combining stakeholder mapping and structured questionnaires, this analysis investigates barriers to effective NGO and youth engagement in prevention efforts while identifying strategic opportunities for enhancement. The initial stakeholder mapping identified resource limitations that constrain program scope and sustainability, operational constraints affecting implementation quality, and coordination difficulties across various stakeholders. The country research findings confirm and expand upon these initial observations, revealing additional layers of complexity.

Confirmed Challenges from Country Research

The questionnaire responses validate initial findings while providing greater specificity about implementation barriers. **Resource limitations** are confirmed through concrete organizational experiences, with NGOs noting that projects funded for limited periods make it difficult to provide long-term support for individuals and families requiring extended reintegration processes. Youth Organizations report that funding limitations prevent program expansion and force focus on short-term projects, limiting long-term impact and intervention continuity.

Coordination difficulties are substantiated by detailed organizational experiences revealing significant geographic and institutional variations in collaboration capacity. While some public institutions have established collaborative frameworks, several others indicate minimal or no current NGO cooperation, demonstrating coordination gaps not fully captured in initial mapping.

The country-level investigation reveals **additional challenges** not prominently featured in the stakeholder mapping. **Trust-building barriers** emerge as critical, with Youth Organizations identifying lack of trust among young people toward institutions and difficulty engaging those most at risk due to distrust or social isolation. Social stigma toward returnees represents a community-level barrier requiring specialized approaches beyond institutional coordination.

Strategic Opportunities Enhanced by Country Research

The country research confirms initial opportunities while revealing concrete examples of successful approaches ready for scaling. **Youth engagement opportunities** are validated through successful models where NGOs provide evidence that when young people are actively involved in debates, training, and community activities, their sense of belonging and social responsibility increases significantly. Whereas Youth Organizations demonstrate successful participatory approaches where youth serve as activity co-creators from ideation to implementation and evaluation.

Economic empowerment integration emerges as a significant opportunity, with NGOs demonstrating successful vocational training programs that resulted in measurable increases in income, self-confidence, and community engagement among women returned from conflict zones. **Gender-focused prevention approaches** show particular promise, with specialized organizations demonstrating leadership in addressing dimensions of extremism that traditional security-focused interventions often miss.

Enhanced cross-sector partnership potential is revealed through specific institutional willingness for cooperation. Some Public units express openness to increased collaboration frequency and expanded joint activities, while the Municipality-Youth Council partnership demonstrates replicable models for formal cooperation agreements. The

Policy recommendations

Based on comprehensive stakeholder analysis identifying key actors from government ministries, international organizations, CSOs, religious institutions, and local communities,

combined with detailed country research examining organizational experiences and collaboration patterns, this research provides actionable recommendations for strengthening cooperation between these entities.

The recommendations focus on enhancing local prevention capacity, particularly in the key municipalities highlighted in the research, and creating more sustainable approaches to violent extremism prevention. For government and policy coordination, the research reveals specific requirements for systematic partnership frameworks, supported by evidence of institutional variations where some public institutions report established collaboration while several others indicate early-stage or non-existent cooperation.

For civil society and community engagement, the research confirms civil society's crucial role while revealing specific capacity building needs. Organizations like **Youth Organizations identify lack of modern technologies for program monitoring and evaluation, while others** note the need for specialized capacities in P/CVE issues. Again, several successful Municipality-Youth Council partnerships provide concrete models for replication, while challenges reported across different municipalities inform specific approaches for addressing geographic variations in prevention capacity.

This comprehensive foundation enables the development of evidence-based recommendations that build on documented successes while addressing systematic barriers to effective prevention work.

3. Methodology

Relevant Actors

Building on previous stakeholder mapping, this research used targeted questionnaires to engage three main groups: NGOs/CSOs, public institutions, and Youth Organizations. The initial mapping provided desk research on Albania's policy landscape, creating a strong foundation for this report.

This research mapped key actors in Albania's countering violent extremism (P/CVE) work. The mapping revealed four main types of stakeholders: government institutions, civil society organizations, religious institutions, and educational bodies.

At the national level, ministries like Interior, Justice, Health and Social Protection, and Education work together through the Center for Coordination of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE CENTER). Local work happens through municipalities like Tirana, Kukës, and Kamëz.

Civil society organizations provide community-level support. Research and advocacy groups like the Institute for Democracy and Mediation work alongside specialized organizations such as the Counselling Line for Women and Girls, which focus on gender issues in extremism. Youth Organizations like the Youth Centers in Kamëz, Tirana and Rrogozhina work directly with at-risk young people.

Each type of actor plays a different but important role in preventing radicalization and violent extremism.

National Government Actors

National Government Ministries

- **Ministry of Interior** – plays a central role in counter-terrorism efforts, coordinates law enforcement agencies, and works with international partners. Established a counter-terrorism task force to monitor and disrupt extremist networks.
- **Ministry of Justice** - Responsible for legal reforms related to P/CVE, manages offenders including returnees from conflict zones, and oversees rehabilitation programs. Established specialized courts for terrorism-related cases.
- **Ministry of Defence** - Enhances counter-terrorism capabilities through international collaboration and protection of critical infrastructure. Participates in joint military exercises with NATO.
- **Ministry of Health and Social Protection** - Addresses underlying social and psychological factors of radicalization, improves mental health services, and supports vulnerable populations. Launched community-based mental health programs for early detection of radicalization risk factors.
- **Ministry of Education** - Incorporates P/CVE themes into the national curriculum, developing materials promoting critical thinking, tolerance, and civic responsibility.
- **Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs** - Manages international relations and represents Albania in European and global forums. Aligns national CVE policies with international standards.
- **Ministry of Youth and Children** - Provides programs focusing on youth engagement and empowerment to prevent radicalization, particularly in vulnerable municipalities like Kukës.

Central Government Agencies

- **General Directorate of Prisons** - Manages incarceration and rehabilitation of terrorism offenders, implementing deradicalization programs including religious counselling and vocational training.
- **National Probation Service** - Manages incarceration and rehabilitation of terrorism offenders, implementing deradicalization programs including religious counselling and vocational training.
- **Center for Coordination of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE CENTER/QKEDH)** - The primary coordinator of Albania's P/CVE strategy, facilitating inter-agency collaboration and establishing 12 Regional Committees for local CVE challenges.
- **National Youth Agency & Youth Councils** – They focus on youth development and empowerment, coordinating programs that encourage civic engagement and leadership development while addressing issues like violent extremism.

Local Government Units – Case Studies

- **Tirana Municipality** - As the capital, plays a central role in policy implementation, delivering social services and community engagement initiatives. Adopted the "Strategy for Youth 2019-2025" for inclusive youth environments.
- **Kukes Municipality** - Faces unique socio-economic challenges including high unemployment. Proactive in addressing these through local initiatives focusing on community engagement and youth development.

- **Kamez Municipality** - Struggles with providing social care services due to limited revenues and complex social structure. Has taken steps to support youth-led businesses and collaborate with the Kamza Youth Council.

Civil Society Organizations and NGOs

Local

- **Institute for Democracy and Mediation** - Leading CSO focusing on research, advocacy, and capacity building in P/CVE. Conducted research on drivers of radicalization in Albania.
- **Counselling Line for Women and Girls** - Supports reintegration of women and children returnees, provides psychosocial support and legal aid services.
- **Woman Center for Development and Culture Albania** - Based in Elbasan, they examine gender aspects of violent extremism through research on Albanian women's issues and implement community-based reintegration programs for families returning from Syria.

Local Youth Organizations

- **Youth Center Kukës** - Grassroots organization in Kukës that mobilizes local youth, facilitates P/CVE discussions, and implements community-led initiatives addressing regional socio-economic challenges.
- **Tirana Youth Center** - Youth-focused organization in the capital that empowers young people through engagement activities and serves as a vital stakeholder in Tirana's youth development strategy against radicalization.
- **Kamez Youth Center** - Community-based youth organization in Kamëz Municipality that promotes tolerance, critical thinking and social inclusion through peer-to-peer support models, human rights training, and participatory programming where young people serve as co-creators of prevention activities addressing local vulnerabilities to extremism.

International

- **International Association for Solidarity (SHIS)** – Established in 1998, they counter violent extremism through educational interventions including their PEACE program in Durrës, Lezha and Tirana, promoting human rights as alternatives to extremist ideologies.
- **International Organization for Migration (IOM) Albania** - They work with both governmental and civil society partners to prevent radicalization, focusing on reintegration of returning foreign terrorist fighters while maintaining formal partnership with the Coordination Centre for Countering Violent Extremism.
- **Terres des Hommes** – Operating since 1993, they focus on child rights and have expanded to develop rehabilitation models for returnees from conflict zones while building youth resilience through educational initiatives.
- **Albanian Helsinki Committee** - Monitors human rights and provides legal assistance in P/CVE context. Advocates for vulnerable groups including returnees.

Religious Institutions

- **Muslim Community of Albania** - Provides religious guidance and promotes peace. Works to counter extremist ideologies through moderate interpretations of Islam.
- **Interreligious Council of Albania** - Promotes dialogue and cooperation among different religious communities, fostering tolerance and interfaith understanding.

Educational Institutions

Public

- **University of Tirana** - Contributes through research and education, with academic programs focused on social sciences including courses on countering violent extremism.

Private

- **Albanian Institute for International Studies (AIIS)** - Leading think tank focusing on security issues including P/CVE, conducting research and providing policy analysis that shapes national security policies.

Method

Based on the previously developed comprehensive stakeholder mapping, this Country Research strategically identified and engaged key stakeholders through targeted questionnaires distributed to three main categories: NGOs/CSOs, public institutions, and Youth Organizations. The initial mapping exercise provided thorough desk research on Albania's policy landscape and strategic frameworks, establishing a solid foundation for this country report.

The questionnaire methodology involved:

- **NGO/CSO questionnaires** focusing on organizational roles, collaboration experiences, challenges in P/CVE work, and recommendations for improvement.
- **Institutional questionnaires** targeting government agencies to assess their cooperation with civil society and perception of NGO contributions.
- **Youth organization questionnaires** examining youth engagement approaches, community connections, and prevention activities.

This structured approach enabled systematic data collection across stakeholder categories while maintaining consistency in core questions about collaboration, effectiveness, and barriers in P/CVE work. The questionnaires were designed to capture qualitative insights (through open-ended responses), providing a comprehensive view of the P/CVE ecosystem in Albania.

Case Study Development Through Youth Organization Questionnaires: To complement this approach, the research developed detailed case studies through the structured questionnaires administered to youth-based institutions in three municipalities: Tirana Youth Council, Rrogozhina and Kamza Youth Council. These comprehensive open-ended questionnaires served as the primary data collection tool for case study development, capturing essential perspectives and experiences with existing prevention initiatives. The in-depth responses provided critical understanding of how national policies translate into local

contexts and impact youth engagement, forming the empirical foundation for the case study analysis presented in this report.

Case Studies

The following two case studies examine successful prevention approaches implemented by two Youth Organizations in Albania, based on direct questionnaire responses and documented organizational experiences. These cases demonstrate effective models of youth engagement in preventing violent extremism at the local level.

Case Study 1: Tirana Youth Council

Organization: Tirana Youth Council

Location: Tirana Municipality

Operational Focus: Gender-sensitive prevention and community dialogue

The Youth Organizations operates within Albania's capital, implementing a comprehensive prevention strategy that integrates awareness-raising with targeted interventions addressing gender-based violence and extremism. The organization's approach centres on training programs focused on tolerance, awareness activities, and dialogue promotion among young people within the community.

Programming Approach - The Council has developed specialized programming that addresses gender dimensions of prevention work. Their awareness programs target gender equality, girls' empowerment, and prevention of gender-based violence, with the organization reporting measurable influence on reducing radical and violent attitudes linked to extremism. Programming is designed to address locally identified needs, including domestic violence, gender inequalities, and limited access to psychological and social support services.

Innovation in Cross-Border Engagement- A notable initiative involved organizing a podcast featuring young people from Kosovo and North Macedonia to address digital violence. This cross-border collaboration provided a platform for youth to share experiences and perspectives while building capacity to identify and respond to emerging forms of online violence and extremism.

Impact Assessment Methods- The organization employs systematic evaluation approaches including direct feedback collection from participants, periodic assessments, continuous participation tracking, and behavioural change observation regarding attitudes toward violence and discrimination. This multi-method approach enables ongoing program adjustment and outcome documentation.

Collaboration Framework- The Council maintains cooperative relationships with local government institutions in P/CVE efforts, building partnerships through awareness activities and training programs. Additionally, the organization engages in collaborative networks with other NGOs and civil society organizations, implementing joint projects, exchanging expertise and resources, and developing cooperation frameworks to enhance community impact.

Case Study 2: Keshilli Rinor Kamez

Organization: Kamez Youth Council

Location: Kamëz Municipality

Operational Focus: Peer-to-peer support and participatory programming

Youth Organizations operates in Kamëz Municipality, implementing a community-integrated approach emphasizing peer-to-peer learning and participatory program development. The organization focuses on youth activities promoting tolerance, critical thinking, and social inclusion through comprehensive capacity-building initiatives.

Capacity Building Programming- The organization implements human rights training, civic participation programs, and conflict management education aimed at raising youth awareness about extremism consequences while promoting inclusion and dialogue as alternatives to radicalization. Programming addresses local youth needs including limited opportunities, isolation, and social insecurity through targeted interventions creating spaces for voice, inclusion, and cooperation.

Peer-to-Peer Model- A distinctive feature of the Council's approach involves peer-to-peer activities where young people provide mutual support through support groups and self-confidence training. The organization reports this horizontal approach as more effective than traditional methods. Community activities incorporating art, sport, and public debate serve as vehicles for social integration of vulnerable youth populations.

Participatory Development Framework- The organization maintains systematic youth involvement throughout program cycles, conducting preliminary consultations, focus groups, and ensuring young people serve as co-creators from ideation through implementation and evaluation phases. This participatory approach ensures programming relevance and youth ownership of prevention activities.

Evaluation Methodology- Impact assessment utilizes pre-and-post activity questionnaires, brief participant interviews, and continuous feedback mechanisms to document changes in self-assessment, social engagement, and challenge-facing abilities among participants.

Partnership Networks- The Council has established productive partnerships at multiple levels, maintaining cooperative relationships with Kamëz Municipality on activities promoting inclusion, education, and violent extremism prevention through youth programming. The organization also engages in regular collaboration with organizations including World Vision and Arsis, implementing training, awareness campaigns, and youth empowerment activities.

Methodological Limitations

While this research provides valuable insights into Albania's P/CVE landscape, several methodological limitations should be acknowledged:

- **Geographical and Sampling Constraints** - The case study's focus on specific municipalities (Tirana, and Kamëz) may not fully capture regional variations across Albania, particularly in rural areas where extremism dynamics might differ. This geographical limitation potentially restricts the generalizability of findings to the broader national context.
- **Stakeholder Self-Reporting** - Reliance on stakeholder self-reporting through questionnaires introduces potential bias, as organizations may present their work in a favorable light or emphasize successes while minimizing challenges. This methodological approach, while valuable for understanding institutional perspectives, may not always reflect objective assessment of program effectiveness.
- **Limited Beneficiary Input** - Despite engagement with Youth Organizations, the methodology offers limited direct input from program beneficiaries or individuals with personal experience of radicalization or deradicalization processes. This gap restricts understanding of how prevention initiatives are experienced by their intended recipients.
- **Temporal and Contextual Limitations** - The point-in-time assessment provides a snapshot of current P/CVE efforts without longitudinal data to evaluate program effectiveness over time. Additionally, the institutional focus may overlook informal community networks and cultural factors influencing prevention efforts. The sensitive nature of CVE work may have also constrained candid feedback from government agencies or organizations dependent on official support.

Regardless of these limitations, this methodology provides valuable insights into Albania's P/CVE institutional architecture and stakeholder ecosystem that would be difficult to obtain through other means. The multi-level approach combining desk research and structured questionnaires enables triangulation of findings and offers a comprehensive understanding of how national policies translate into local implementation. By prioritizing civil society perspectives alongside governmental frameworks, the research captures the critical interplay between official strategies and grassroots implementation. Furthermore, the focus on youth-centered organizations adds a crucial dimension to understanding prevention efforts targeting one of the most vulnerable populations. These methodological strengths ensure that despite acknowledged limitations, the research contributes significantly to mapping Albania's P/CVE landscape and identifying opportunities for enhanced coordination and effectiveness.

4. Analysis & Discussion

Current role of NGOs and Youth

The questionnaire responses reveal that NGOs and Youth Organizations have evolved from basic awareness-raising to sophisticated, multi-dimensional prevention approaches that combine direct service delivery, community trust-building, and specialized interventions tailored to local contexts - filling critical gaps that government institutions cannot address alone.

Diverse and Specialized Prevention Approaches

NGOs and Youth Organizations in Albania demonstrate sophisticated approaches to P/CVE work that extend beyond traditional awareness campaigns. NGOs exemplify comprehensive approaches by combining economic empowerment with community inclusion, working directly with women returned from conflict zones while conducting workshops and focus groups with youth in high-risk municipalities. Their vocational training programs, including soap-making and artisanal crafts training for women returned from Syrian camps, have resulted in measurable increases in income, self-confidence, and community engagement.

NGOs also demonstrate specialized gender-focused approaches, emphasizing women and girls as key actors in building secure and resilient communities through psychosocial counselling, training programs, and awareness campaigns. Their work integrates theological counselling with psychosocial support, showing how religious guidance can be effectively combined with mental health approaches.

NGOs further demonstrate comprehensive programming that combines communication training and counter-narrative development with direct psychosocial support services. Their approach includes training for CVE centres and frontline workers on effective communication strategies, empowering religious communities to address extremism challenges through positive messaging, awareness campaigns to improve public perception toward returnees and reduce stigmatization, and psychosocial support for returned children through art and music therapy and digital diary creation for emotional expression.

Youth Organizations contribute through targeted community engagement. They implement interventions such as training on tolerance, awareness activities, and dialogue promotion among young people, while running awareness programs on gender equality, girls' empowerment, and gender-based violence prevention. Whereas other focus on youth activities promoting tolerance, critical thinking, and social inclusion through human rights training, civic participation programs, and conflict management education.

Systematic Impact Measurement and Professional Approaches

Organizations demonstrate increasingly sophisticated monitoring and evaluation approaches. NGOs employ comprehensive impact measurement including pre-and-post assessments for direct beneficiaries, in-depth interviews to assess perceived impact, individualized reintegration progress monitoring across emotional wellbeing, skills

development, and economic/social inclusion, plus regular reporting with institutional partners to evaluate cross-sectoral cooperation.

Youth Organizations also employ systematic measurement approaches, they measure impact through direct feedback from young people, periodic assessments, continuous participation tracking, and observed behavioural changes regarding violence and discrimination attitudes. Other directly report to use pre-and-post activity questionnaires, brief participant interviews, and continuous feedback to understand changes in self-assessment, social engagement, and challenge-facing abilities.

Service Provision and Community Bridge-Building

NGOs consistently provide direct services that complement government efforts, with particular strength in reaching marginalized communities, with one NGO reporting to having built sustainable experience through Rehabilitation and Reintegration program for returnees from conflict zones, reporting positive results with visible improvements in beneficiary situations.

Also Youth Organizations demonstrate effectiveness in peer-to-peer approaches reporting that these activities, where young people help each other through support groups and self-confidence training, have proven more effective than other traditional approaches. Community activities focused on art, sport, and public debate have helped integrate vulnerable youth socially. Youth Organizations seem to agree that approaches combining emotional support with active youth involvement, such as discussion groups, individual counselling sessions, and community awareness activities, yields the best results.

Multi-Stakeholder Coordination Success

Youth Organizations report positive collaboration experiences with local government institutions, describing cooperative and constructive experiences with local government institutions in P/CVE efforts, having built strong relationships with local actors through awareness activities, training, and community dialogue to address risks and specific area needs. Youth Organizations also report cooperative experiences, especially in youth awareness activities, with some Municipalities actively collaborating on activities promoting inclusion, education, and violent extremism prevention through youth programs.

Both type of entities organizations reports fruitful experiences with other civil society organizations. Youth Organizations describe very positive and fruitful collaboration with other NGOs through joint projects, expertise and resource exchange, and cooperation networks to increase community impact. Youth Organizations reports regular and effective cooperation, especially with NGOs, carrying out training, awareness campaigns, and activities focused on youth empowerment and violence prevention.

NGOs also report particularly successful collaboration with local actors, religious communities, state institutions, and civil society organizations, noting that active involvement of local leaders and religious institutions as key partners in prevention processes has been a significant strength. Their approach demonstrates effective coordination in capacity building

and awareness campaigns, plus information sharing between actors, showing how religious communities can be systematically integrated into prevention frameworks.

Importance in PVE

The convergent perspectives from NGOs, Youth Organizations, and government institutions demonstrate that civil society actors serve as essential intermediaries who provide specialized expertise, build community trust, and deliver services that formal institutions struggle to replicate - with government agencies explicitly acknowledging their dependence on NGO complementary capacity.

Gender-Focused Prevention Leadership

NGO questionnaire responses reveal critical leadership roles in addressing gender dimensions of extremism. NGOs also emphasize women and girls as key actors in building secure and resilient communities, with specialized focus on empowering their role in prevention and resolution of extremist phenomena. This gender-sensitive approach addresses gaps that traditional security-focused interventions often miss.

Institutional Gap-Filling and Complementary Expertise

Cross-analysis of responses reveals that NGOs fill critical gaps in specialized service provision. Some NGOs report close cooperation with local institutions and various governmental agencies in handling different cases, with good readiness for cooperation and use of referral mechanisms enabling coordinated interventions. However, they also identify ongoing challenges including lack of regular training, sufficient resources, and unified inter-institutional approaches.

From the institutional perspective, Public Institutions confirm this complementary role, noting that NGOs provide supplementary support in their work with pre-trial detainees, and that collaboration with NGOs has been fruitful, particularly through joint educational projects that strengthen their rehabilitative role. Public Institutions emphasize that their collaboration with NGOs represents very important and necessary cooperation, particularly in their rehabilitation and reintegration function for individuals convicted of violent extremism.

Some further elaborates on this complementary relationship, noting that their collaboration with NGOs is essential, as they bring additional support in addressing pre-trial detainee needs through joint projects offering educational programs that strengthen rehabilitative roles.

Trust Building in Sensitive Contexts

Both NGO and government responses highlight civil society's crucial role in building trust within communities where official institutions may face credibility challenges. NGOs note their success in working with returnees and communities requires time, empathy, and sustained field presence to build trust relationships - capacity that formal institutions often cannot replicate.

Public Institutions acknowledge this complementary relationship, noting that their collaboration with NGOs has enabled them to provide more comprehensive support to individuals in their care, recognizing that NGO expertise in community engagement and specialized approaches enhances their own institutional capacity.

Community-Specific Contextual Approaches

Organizations demonstrate understanding that effective practices must be based on community needs, culture, and specificities rather than importing ready-made models. NGOs emphasize that practices that work must be based on community needs, culture, and specificities, not imported as ready-made models.

Opportunities for growth

Despite existing challenges, all stakeholder categories identify significant untapped potential for scaling successful interventions, with institutional willingness to enhance partnerships, proven youth engagement models ready for replication, and clear pathways for developing more proactive, holistic prevention approaches that integrate economic empowerment with community resilience-building.

Safe Spaces for Critical Youth Engagement

NGOs document significant findings from their high-risk municipality interventions, identifying that numerous young people experience marginalization, lack of representation, and limited meaningful opportunities for community engagement. When they are actively involved in debates, training, creative and community activities, the sense of belonging and social responsibility increases significantly - key factors in preventing extremism.

This finding is corroborated by youth organization experiences. Youth Organizations emphasize creating safe environments and involving youth in decision-making while adapting programs according to their needs and interests. Others report success through preliminary consultations, focus groups, and involving young people in every project phase from ideation to implementation and evaluation, with young people always serving as activity co-creators.

Youth Organizations have proven effective at establishing these spaces through tangible initiatives. The Tirana Youth Council's podcast project exemplifies this success, bringing together young people from Kosovo and North Macedonia to tackle digital violence by sharing their personal experiences and perspectives, building awareness, promoting community response, and developing their capacity to recognize and combat emerging forms of violence.

Enhanced Institutional Coordination Opportunities

Public Institutions demonstrate institutional openness to enhanced cooperation, expressing willingness to increase collaboration frequency and expand joint activities with NGOs. They suggest opportunities for more sustained partnerships including increased activity frequency, sustainable financing for long-term projects, and clear role definition from planning to implementation phases.

Some even provide concrete improvement recommendations, emphasizing that collaboration can be improved through increasing joint activity frequency and securing sustainable financial resources for long-term projects, plus better coordination and more regular information exchange for more effective planning and implementation of programs addressing pre-trial detainee needs.

Similarly, NGOs indicate that combining formal and informal training and educational initiatives creates meaningful opportunities for young people to reflect on prevailing attitudes, engage in personal development, and articulate their views and identities.

Proactive vs. Reactive Approaches

The institutional responses reveal an important distinction between proactive and reactive approaches to collaboration.

Public Institutions specialists emphasize that one should not wait to face cases of radicalism or violent extremism to start collaboration. Experience exchange and knowledge of operational fields and competencies of institutions executing alternative sentences is essential in fruitful cooperation. This perspective suggests significant opportunities for developing anticipatory collaboration frameworks rather than crisis-response partnerships.

Holistic Treatment Approaches

Public Institutions specialists highlight the need for stabilized cooperation with broader, holistic, functional, and effective approaches in the function of treatment and rehabilitation of persons convicted of criminal offenses in terrorism fields (radicalism and violent extremism). This indicates opportunities for developing more comprehensive intervention models that integrate multiple institutional and NGO capabilities.

Economic Empowerment Integration

NGOs demonstrate successful integration of economic empowerment with prevention work, suggesting opportunities for scaling approaches that combine vocational training, small grants, and self-employment support as direct methods to prevent marginalization and radicalization.

National Strategies and Policy Alignment on Preventing Radicalization and Violent Extremism (P/CVE)

Albania has taken substantial policy and institutional steps to align its national development priorities with efforts to prevent radicalization and violent extremism (P/CVE), particularly in light of its ongoing EU accession process and broader regional security concerns.

National Policy Frameworks

Albania's primary strategic instrument in the field is the **Intersectoral Strategy for the Prevention of Violent Extremism and the Fight against Terrorism 2023–2025**, which outlines a multi-agency, preventive approach. The strategy emphasizes the importance of collaboration among state institutions, religious communities, and civil society organizations to counter radicalizing narratives and promote social cohesion (Albanian Daily News, 2025).¹ In line with recommendations from the European Commission's TAIEX review, in 2023 the Albanian government has also **proposed the establishment of the Agency for Counter-Terrorism and Extremism (AKTE)**, an agency intended to institutionalize national threat assessments and improve inter-agency coordination in the field of counter-terrorism. This initiative complements broader efforts to update Albania's National Security Strategy and to strengthen domestic legislation on terrorism and its financing², like demonstrated its commitment to international counter-terrorism efforts by aligning with the European Union's Joint Action Plan on Counter-Terrorism for the Western Balkans.³

EU Integration and Policy Conditionality

Albania's efforts in countering violent extremism are embedded within its broader EU accession commitments. The **European Commission's 2024 Enlargement Package** welcomed Albania's progress in opening negotiations on the *Fundamentals* cluster, particularly emphasizing the rule of law, protection of fundamental rights, and judicial reform.⁴ These areas are directly connected to the state's capacity to prevent radicalization by ensuring governance, accountability, and human rights protections. Furthermore, the EU has pledged over **€920 million in financial assistance** under the **Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans**, with Albania receiving an early tranche of €64.5 million to support its reform roadmap.⁵ This funding supports institutional resilience, rule of law, youth empowerment, and education—key pillars for long-term P/CVE efforts.

Regional and International Cooperation

Albania remains an active contributor to regional and global counter-extremism frameworks. The country participates in **Council of Europe initiatives** to enhance the capacity of prison and probation systems in addressing radicalization, particularly through rehabilitation

¹ Albanian Daily News (2025). *Director Meidani Participates in Important Meeting Against Violent Extremism*.

² CVE Albania. (2023). *Director Meidani at the Meeting of Regional Coordinators on Violent Extremism in Budva*. Retrieved from <https://cve.gov.al/montenegro-cve-director-meidani-at-the-meeting-of-regional-coordinators-on-violent-extremism-in-budva/?lang=en>

³ European Commission. (2022). *Revised Implementing Arrangement under the Joint Action Plan on Counter-Terrorism for the Western Balkans*. Retrieved from https://www.eumonitor.eu/9353000/1/j4nvirkkr58fyw_j9vvik7m1c3gyxp/vm7fnikld5yy

⁴ European Commission (2024). *2024 Enlargement Package*.

⁵ Web Balkans. (2025, May 17). *Albania receives €64.5 million in pre-financing under the Growth Plan*. Retrieved from <https://webalkans.eu/en/news/albania-receives-e64-5-million-in-pre-financing-under-the-growth-plan>

programs for violent extremist prisoner.⁶ Additionally, Albania is a member of the **Global Coalition Against Daesh** and has committed to the UN's counter-terrorism instruments. Albania demonstrates its firm opposition to violent extremism by co-sponsoring UN counter-terrorism resolutions, including UN Security Council Resolution 2178, reflecting its dedication to preventing support for Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) while supporting the rehabilitation, reintegration, and resocialization of FTF families within Albania through both policy and practice (Global Coalition, 2024)⁷.

Civil Society and Community-Level Engagement

Civil society plays a crucial role in implementing soft-power P/CVE initiatives. Organizations such as the **Center for Security and Peace Albania** provide counselling and support to individuals and families vulnerable to radicalization. Their work includes community-based education, youth engagement, and psychosocial services (ViolentExtremism.al, 2025)⁸. Furthermore, the **Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM)** has developed local-level guidelines for preventing radicalization, focusing on community policing, institutional trust-building, and reintegration of returnees from conflict zones (IDM Albania, 2024)⁹.

Strategic Political Positioning

Albania's commitment to security, regional cooperation, and democratic values was further demonstrated by its hosting of the **6th European Political Community Summit in May 2025**. The summit focused on common European challenges, including democratic security, migration, and youth resilience—all directly relevant to the prevention of radicalization^{10, 11}.

Potential for scaling local successes across the region

The research identifies concrete models ready for replication, particularly NGOs integrated approach combining economic empowerment with community inclusion, and the successful peer-to-peer models demonstrated by Youth Councils. These participatory approaches where youth serve as co-creators from ideation to implementation show measurable impact potential for scaling across similar municipal contexts.

Specific opportunities highlighted in case studies

The Municipality-Youth Council partnerships provide a concrete replication model for formal cooperation agreements, demonstrating how local governments can systematically collaborate with Youth Organizations in prevention efforts. The **Tirana Youth Council's** cross-border podcast initiative with youth from Kosovo and North Macedonia shows innovative

⁶ Council of Europe (2025). *Albanian Prison Staff Enhances Capacities for VEP Rehabilitation*. Retrived from URL: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cooperation-in-police-and-deprivation-of-liberty/-/albanian-prison-directors-and-chiefs-of-prison-police-increased-their-knowledge-on-leadership-and-prison-management-in-line-with-council-of-europe-standards>

⁷ Global Coalition Against Daesh (2024). *Partner Country: Albania*.

⁸ Center for Security and Peace Albania (2025). *Programs on Counseling and Support for At-Risk Individuals*.

⁹ Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM) (2024). *Guideline on Prevention of Radicalization and Reintegration of Returnees*.

¹⁰ Reuters (2025). *Small, Aspirational Albania Hosts Giant European Summit*.

¹¹ Wikipedia (2025). *6th European Political Community Summit*.

approaches to addressing digital violence that could be adapted for regional cooperation frameworks addressing online extremism prevention.

Challenges

The questionnaire and interview responses reveal a paradox where all stakeholders recognize the value of multi-sectoral collaboration yet face systemic barriers including fragmented coordination mechanisms, short-term funding cycles, and significant variations in institutional readiness - creating a prevention ecosystem that operates below its potential despite individual organizational competence.

Coordination and Communication Barriers

While positive collaboration examples exist, the responses expose a landscape of ad-hoc partnerships rather than systematic coordination, with even successful collaborations hampered by bureaucratic processes, communication gaps, and misaligned institutional priorities. The most consistently reported challenge across respondents is inadequate coordination between stakeholders. NGOs identify ongoing challenges including lack of regular training, sufficient resources, and unified inter-institutional approaches, despite generally positive cooperation experiences.

From the institutional side, Public Institutions acknowledges coordination challenges, noting that while their collaboration with NGOs has been successful, there is potential for increased activity frequency and better sustainable financing for long-term projects.

Some Public Institutions specialists provide specific insights into coordination challenges, noting that effective collaboration requires open communication, joint planning, and clear role definition, plus building trust and project continuity as essential for achieving long-term results. However, several. Others indicate they are still in early stages of establishing cooperation with NGOs or have no current NGO cooperation, suggesting significant coordination gaps exist across different institutional levels and locations.

Youth Organizations identify specific coordination barriers. Youth Organizations report main obstacles in coordination with local authorities and stakeholders including long bureaucracy, lack of continuous communication, different interests that sometimes create conflicts, and limited institutional capacities to fulfil duties. Others similarly note challenges with lack of continuous communication, different priorities, and institutional burden that often make regular coordination and long-term planning difficult.

Resource Constraints and Sustainability Challenges

The universal concern about funding sustainability across all stakeholder categories indicates a prevention sector trapped in project-based cycles that undermine the long-term relationship-building and trust development that all organizations identify as essential for effective P/CVE work.

▪ Short-term Funding Cycles

NGOs identify funding as directly impacting intervention continuity and scaling. Often, projects are funded for limited periods, making it difficult to provide long-term support for individuals and families needing long reintegration processes and sustainable psycho-social

support. Similarly, they identify limited resources available for psychosocial support and specialized treatment as a critical constraint, particularly affecting vulnerable groups such as returned children and women who require intensive, long-term therapeutic interventions that current funding structures cannot adequately support.

Public Institutions echo these sustainability concerns from an institutional perspective, emphasizing the need for sustainable financing for long-term projects to ensure effective collaboration with NGOs. The institution recognizes that short-term project cycles limit joint prevention and rehabilitation effort effectiveness.

Youth Organizations face similar constraints. Youth Organizations report that funding limitations prevent program expansion and development, while others notes that financial limitations limit activity continuity and sustainability concerns force focus on short-term and limited projects, limiting long-term impact and intervention continuity.

▪ Operational Resource Gaps

NGOs report that limited resources affect not only program scope but also staff retention and technical capacity building, creating cascading effects on service quality and organizational stability. Public Institutions confirm this challenge from an institutional perspective, noting that adequate resource allocation is essential for maintaining effective partnerships and joint programming with civil society organizations.

Youth Organizations identify specific capacity gaps. Youth Organizations report the most important gaps as lack of sustainable funds for long-term programs, need for further team skill development in complex issues like violent extremism, and lack of modern technologies for effective program monitoring and evaluation. They further identify lack of sustainable financial resources and specialized capacities for sensitive issues such as P/CVE.

▪ Quality and Effectiveness Concerns in Service Delivery

Beyond resource constraints, institutional responses reveal concerns about service quality and effectiveness. Public Institution specialists emphasize that NGO provision of psychological treatment should be done to the extent that it serves the beneficiary, to avoid turning this service into a tool just to be offered. Treatment frequency is also influential. This highlights challenges around ensuring that NGO services genuinely meet beneficiary needs rather than existing merely to fulfil project requirements.

Social and Community-Level Barriers

Organizations face a double challenge of overcoming both community stigma toward returnees and resistance from the most vulnerable youth populations, requiring specialized approaches that balance sensitivity with effectiveness - challenges that no single organization can address alone.

- **Stigma and Social Isolation of Returnees**

NGOs identify stigma and social isolation of returnees and their families as hindering their community inclusion and slowing down reintegration processes as a primary challenge. They note that social perceptions remain one of the biggest challenges, with stigmatization of returned individuals and their families affecting the reintegration process and creating barriers to their full community inclusion. NGOs also highlight that limited psychosocial support and specialized treatment resources particularly affect returned children and women, compounding the social stigma challenges these vulnerable groups already face during reintegration processes.

- **Gender-Specific Engagement Challenges**

Organizations report specific difficulties in engaging women, with NGOs noting difficulties in engaging women, who often hesitate to become part of programs, requiring specialized outreach approaches and extended relationship-building efforts.

- **Youth Marginalization and Representation Gaps**

Evidence from high-risk municipalities reveals that many youths feel left behind, underrepresented, and without real opportunities to influence community life, creating vulnerability to extremist narratives.

- **Trust and Engagement Challenges with Vulnerable Groups**

Organizations face significant challenges in building trust and engaging the most vulnerable youth populations. Youth Organizations identify key challenges including lack of trust of some young people towards institutions, cultural resistance to sensitive topics, lack of sufficient resources for specialized programs, and difficulties in identifying and involving young people most at risk.

Other similarly report challenges with stigma towards the topic, lack of information, and difficulty engaging young people who are most at risk due to distrust or social isolation. This highlights the difficulty organizations face in reaching those most vulnerable to radicalization, who often exhibit the greatest resistance to engagement.

Institutional and Political Context Challenges

The responses reveal underlying uncertainty about political sustainability of P/CVE work, with organizations walking a careful line between maintaining effectiveness and avoiding political complications - a dynamic that may constrain innovation and long-term strategic planning.

- **Political Dynamics and Institutional Priorities**

Organizations note that while political dynamics have not created direct obstacles, they may influence institutional priorities and attention paid to sensitive issues such as preventing violent extremism. This suggests underlying uncertainty about political support sustainability.

Youth Organizations report that external factors significantly impact their work effectiveness. Youth Organizations note that political dynamics sometimes affect priorities and cooperation with institutions, while community perceptions can positively or negatively affect program acceptance, requiring work to build trust and educate the community about work importance. Other organizations similarly report that political dynamics sometimes prevent institutional support, while community perceptions can bring resistance to topics like extremism.

- [Recognition and Legitimacy Issues](#)

Organizations, particularly youth-focused ones, report challenges in gaining formal recognition from government institutions and being included in official prevention initiatives, indicating gaps in institutional understanding of grassroots prevention work.

- [Victims. Vs. Offender Treatment Approaches](#)

Public Institutions specialists highlight critical concerns regarding appropriate treatment methodologies, emphasizing that NGOs should avoid limiting their approach to merely providing services or financial assistance to individuals who have been prosecuted for terrorism-related criminal activities. They advocate for distinguishing treatment approaches between victims and offenders. This indicates the complexity of creating suitable intervention strategies that can differentiate between various target groups while preventing stigmatization.

[Capacity and Technical Limitations](#)

The capacity gaps identified span both civil society and government institutions, suggesting that effective P/CVE requires not just better coordination but also systematic capacity development that enables all actors to maximize their complementary strengths.

Both NGO and institutional responses identify capacity gaps across stakeholder categories. NGOs require enhanced technical skills in specialized areas, while government institutions indicate limited understanding of how to effectively engage and utilize civil society expertise.

Public Institutions specifically acknowledge the need for capacity building, suggesting that enhanced collaboration requires clear role definition from planning to implementation phases. This indicates that even willing institutions need better frameworks for understanding how to optimize NGO partnerships and expertise utilization. Some further emphasizes that effective collaboration requires open communication, joint planning, and clear role definition along with building trust and ensuring project continuity.

This indicates that even willing institutions need better frameworks for understanding how to optimize NGO partnerships and expertise utilization.

Geographic and Access Variations

The stark variations in collaboration quality across different locations and institutional units indicate that Albania's P/CVE effectiveness depends heavily on local leadership and capacity rather than systematic national approaches - creating an uneven prevention landscape.

Responses reveal significant variations in collaboration levels and resource availability across different municipalities. Organizations operating outside major urban centers report greater challenges in accessing government support and coordination opportunities, while government institutions acknowledge limited presence and programming in certain geographic areas.

The institutional responses particularly highlight this variation, with some units reporting active and fruitful collaboration while some Public Institutions units indicate minimal or no current NGO partnerships, suggesting geographic disparities in institutional capacity and engagement levels.

Sustainability and Continuity Challenges

The fundamental tension between the need for sustained, trust-based prevention work and the reality of short-term, project-based funding creates a structural impediment that undermines the very relationship-building that all stakeholders identify as crucial for success.

The combination of short-term funding cycles, political uncertainties, and resource constraints creates significant challenges for maintaining long-term prevention work. NGOs emphasize that successful collaboration requires time, empathy, and sustained field presence to build trust relationships, but current funding and coordination structures often cannot support such sustained engagement.

Specific challenges highlighted in case studies

Youth Organizations report struggling with **trust-building** barriers, noting that some young people demonstrate distrust toward institutions while communities show cultural resistance to sensitive topics. The organization faces difficulty in identifying and engaging the most at-risk youth populations.

Resource constraints further compound these challenges, with the Council lacking sufficient funding for specialized programs and modern technologies for program monitoring, while also requiring enhanced staff capacity in complex extremism-related issues.

Coordination presents additional obstacles for the some Youth-Councils, which reports lengthy bureaucratic processes, inconsistent communication with stakeholders, and conflicting institutional interests that create operational tensions, sometime leading to duplication of efforts. External factors further complicate their work, as political dynamics sometimes affect institutional cooperation priorities, while varying community perceptions can either support or hinder program acceptance.

Youth Organizations face parallel but distinct challenges, particularly around **community-level stigma** toward extremism topics and widespread lack of information that hampers engagement efforts. The organization struggles significantly with reaching at-risk youth who exhibit distrust or social isolation, making targeted interventions difficult to implement effectively.

Financial sustainability emerges as a critical constraint for Youth-Councils, with funding limitations forcing focus on short-term projects that limit long-term impact and program continuity. Coordination challenges mirror those of NGOs, including inconsistent communication, divergent stakeholder priorities, and institutional burden that complicates regular coordination and strategic planning.

Both organizations identify capacity gaps as fundamental limitations, requiring specialized training in P/CVE approaches, at-risk youth engagement techniques, and partnership development with institutions and communities. Political dynamics and community resistance to extremism-related topics create external pressures that affect both organizations' ability to secure institutional support and community acceptance.

These challenges reveal systemic barriers that prevent Youth Organizations from maximizing their prevention potential, particularly around sustainable funding, specialized capacity building, and community engagement in sensitive prevention work.

5. Recommendations

For policy makers and local institutions

Develop Systematic Partnership Frameworks for Civil Society Engagement - Establish standardized procedures for NGO engagement that include clear criteria for partnership establishment, defined roles and responsibilities, and regular review mechanisms. This addresses the significant variations in institutional readiness revealed in questionnaire responses, where some Public Institutions report established collaboration while several others indicate they are still in early stages of establishing cooperation with NGOs or have no current cooperation at all.

Create Sustainable Funding Mechanisms for Prevention Services - Government institutions should explore contracting mechanisms for specialized prevention services and create more predictable funding streams to reduce dependence on short-term international grants. This directly responds to concerns raised by NGOs about projects being funded for limited periods making it difficult to provide long-term support, and similar sustainability challenges reported by Youth Organizations regarding how funding limitations prevent program expansion and force focus on short-term projects.

Establish Regional Coordination and Capacity Standardization - Create regional coordination structures that facilitate knowledge sharing and resource optimization while ensuring consistent institutional capacity for civil society engagement across different locations and units. Questionnaire responses reveal that institutional capacity varies significantly even within the same institutional system, with some units having established partnerships while others lack basic cooperation frameworks, creating an uneven prevention landscape.

Develop Proactive Communication and Collaboration Systems - Create systematic communication platforms for real-time information sharing and joint training while establishing anticipatory collaboration frameworks before crisis situations arise. This addresses communication barriers identified by Youth Organizations including bureaucratic delays and lack of continuous communication and responds to Public Institutions specialists' emphasis that organizations should begin collaboration before facing extremism cases, as experience exchange is essential for effective cooperation.

Develop Comprehensive Support Systems for Vulnerable Returnees - Create dedicated psychosocial support programs and specialized treatment services for vulnerable groups, particularly returned children and women, incorporating innovative approaches such as art and music therapy combined with digital diary creation for emotional expression. This addresses the gap identified by **NGOs** regarding limited resources for psychosocial support and specialized treatment for these populations.

For NGOs and youth groups

Strengthen Organizational Systems and Coordination - Establish formal networks for regular information exchange and collaborative programming while developing robust monitoring systems that document activities, reach, and outcomes to reduce duplication and maximize

impact. Addressing the gaps raised by youth-based organizations that while reporting positive collaboration experiences with other NGOs and organizations emphasize how this coordination is not systematic across all organizations in the sector.

Diversify and Stabilize Resource Mobilization - Explore multiple funding sources including domestic partnerships, service contracts with government agencies, and collaborative funding applications. This recommendation responds to universal funding sustainability concerns expressed across all stakeholder categories, with organizations noting how project-based cycles undermine the long-term relationship-building that all organizations identify as essential for effective P/CVE work.

Build Specialized Technical and Communication Expertise - Invest in staff development for specialized areas including P/CVE technical skills, public communication strategies, and counter-narrative development. This addresses capacity gaps identified by Youth Organizations regarding lack of specialized capacities for sensitive P/CVE issues, while building on the successful integrated approach demonstrated by NGOs that combines communication training with psychosocial support services to address both community-level stigma and individual healing needs.

Develop Targeted Engagement Strategies for Vulnerable Populations - Create specialized outreach approaches for hard-to-reach populations, particularly women and at-risk youth who may be hesitant to participate in programs. This addresses challenges reported by NGOs regarding difficulties in engaging women who often hesitate to become part of programs, and concerns from both Youth Organizations about reaching young people most at risk due to distrust or social isolation.

For frontline workers

Participate in Cross-Sector Professional Development - Engage in professional development opportunities that bring together practitioners from different organizational contexts to share approaches and build collective expertise. This recommendation addresses the varied approaches and expertise levels indicated in responses, particularly building on successful peer-to-peer models reported by Youth Organizations where young people helping each other through support groups proved more effective than traditional approaches.

Develop Trust-Building Competencies for Vulnerable Populations - Build specialized skills for engaging with populations that exhibit resistance or distrust toward institutions and programs. This directly addresses challenges identified by Youth Organizations regarding lack of trust among some young people toward institutions, cultural resistance to sensitive topics, and stigma that makes engagement difficult.

Contribute to Evidence-Based Practice Development - Systematically document experiences and interventions to build the evidence base for effective prevention approaches in the Albanian context. This builds on successful innovation examples like the digital violence podcast organized by the Tirana Youth-Council with young people from Kosovo and North Macedonia, encouraging replication and scaling of effective practices.

Additional Recommendations

Ensure Quality and Holistic Service Delivery - Establish mechanisms to ensure prevention services genuinely meet beneficiary needs while creating comprehensive intervention models that integrate multiple institutional and NGO capabilities and maintain appropriate differentiation between target populations. This responds to concerns raised by Public Institutions specialists about ensuring NGO psychological treatment services serve beneficiaries rather than becoming tools just to be offered, emphasizing the importance of appropriate treatment frequency and effectiveness.

Create Inclusive Community Environments - Develop comprehensive community engagement strategies that address stigma toward returnees while creating safe spaces for youth participation in decision-making processes from ideation to implementation and evaluation. This builds on evidence from NGOs showing that when young people are actively involved in debates, training, and community activities, their sense of belonging and social responsibility increases significantly, and successful participatory approaches reported by Youth Organizations.

Integrate Economic Empowerment with Prevention Programming - Scale approaches that combine vocational training, skills development, and economic support as direct methods to prevent marginalization and radicalization. This builds on successful integration demonstrated by NGOs through their vocational training programs including soap-making and artisanal crafts training, which resulted in measurable increases in income, self-confidence, and community engagement among women returned from conflict zones.

6. Conclusion

Summary of Key Points

This research demonstrates that Albania has developed a multi-faceted prevention ecosystem where NGOs and Youth Organizations have evolved from basic awareness-raising entities into sophisticated actors forming the backbone of community-level resilience building. The analysis reveals that these organizations have developed specialized approaches that government institutions struggle to replicate, combining economic empowerment with community inclusion while addressing sensitive dimensions of extremism that traditional security-focused interventions often miss. The evidence shows that civil society actors excel in areas where formal institutions face limitations: building trust in communities where official agencies may lack credibility, providing specialized services to marginalized populations, and implementing peer-to-peer approaches that prove more effective than traditional methods. **NGOs** demonstrates measurable results through vocational training programs that resulted in increased income, self-confidence, and community engagement among women returned from conflict zones. NGOs showcase integrated approaches combining communication training with psychosocial support services. Youth Organizations like the Tirana and Kamez Youth Councils report that peer-to-peer activities prove more effective than traditional approaches, with participatory programming creating measurable behavioural changes regarding violence and discrimination attitudes.

However, this potential remains constrained by systemic challenges that create a prevention landscape operating below capacity despite individual organizational competence. Organizations across the sector struggle with funding sustainability that traps them in short-term project cycles, undermining the long-term relationship-building they identify as crucial for success. Coordination between stakeholders remains ad-hoc rather than systematic, with significant variations in institutional readiness—with some reporting established collaboration while several others indicating minimal or no current NGO cooperation—creating an uneven prevention landscape where success depends heavily on local leadership rather than national frameworks.

The research confirms initial stakeholder mapping findings while revealing additional complexity: trust-building barriers with vulnerable populations, bureaucratic obstacles that hamper coordination, and social stigma challenges requiring specialized community-level approaches. Simultaneously, it identifies opportunities for scaling successful interventions, including proven youth engagement models, institutional willingness for enhanced cooperation, and pathways for developing proactive prevention frameworks.

The Essential Role of NGOs and Youth in Prevention Efforts

The convergent perspectives establish that NGOs and Youth Organizations are not supplementary actors but essential intermediaries whose specialized capabilities are indispensable for effective prevention work. These organizations serve as critical bridges between government initiatives and community needs, with government agencies explicitly acknowledging their dependence on civil society's complementary capacity. Successful prevention requires the unique combination of trust-building capacity, community contextual understanding, and specialized service delivery that these organizations provide.

Their gender-focused prevention leadership addresses dimensions of extremism that traditional approaches miss, while peer-to-peer youth engagement methods demonstrate superior effectiveness compared to institutional alternatives. **Youth Organizations** provides evidence that young people helping each other through support groups proved more effective than traditional approaches, while **NGOs** shows that when young people actively participate in debates, training, and community activities, their sense of belonging and social responsibility increases significantly—key protective factors against extremism.

The institutional acknowledgment from government agencies that their collaboration with NGOs represents essential rather than optional cooperation confirms that effective prevention in Albania's context requires systematic integration of civil society capabilities rather than parallel programming. This research establishes that sustainable prevention approaches must be built on strengthened civil society capacity and enhanced multi-stakeholder coordination.

Next steps: further research, practical next steps

Further Research Priorities

Albania's prevention evidence base would benefit from longitudinal impact evaluations of specific intervention models, particularly those involving youth engagement and economic empowerment integration. Research examining the differential effectiveness of peer-to-peer versus traditional approaches across different community contexts would inform more targeted programming. Systematic analysis of the relationship between funding sustainability and prevention outcomes could provide crucial evidence for policy advocacy regarding sustainable financing mechanisms.

Research into specific mechanisms through which trust-building occurs between civil society organizations and vulnerable populations would enhance understanding of successful engagement strategies. Geographic analysis of prevention capacity variations could inform more equitable resource distribution and coordination frameworks.

Immediate Practical Next Steps

The transformation of Albania's prevention effectiveness requires coordinated action across multiple levels. Government institutions should prioritize developing systematic partnership frameworks with standardized procedures for civil society engagement, moving beyond the current ad-hoc approach that creates significant variations in cooperation quality. Establishing sustainable funding mechanisms through contracting for specialized prevention services would address universal sustainability concerns that undermine relationship-building essential for prevention work.

Civil Society Organizations should establish formal coordination networks to systematize successful but informal cooperation already occurring between organizations. Investment in specialized capacity building, particularly in monitoring and evaluation technologies and trauma-informed approaches, would enhance both service quality and impact demonstration capabilities. Diversification of funding strategies beyond international grants toward

domestic partnerships and government service contracts would build greater organizational sustainability.

Strategic Integration Requirements

Success depends on recognizing that effective prevention requires sustained relationship-building rather than project-based interventions, transforming Albania's current ecosystem of individual organizational competence into a coordinated national approach. This transformation requires political commitment to treating civil society engagement as essential infrastructure rather than optional partnership, with corresponding investment in systematic frameworks that support rather than constrain the specialized capabilities these organizations provide.

The path forward demands moving from reactive crisis-response approaches to proactive prevention frameworks that integrate economic empowerment with community engagement, scaling successful models while addressing systemic barriers that currently prevent the prevention ecosystem from reaching its full potential.

SmartlyConnected!

