MotherSchools Kosovo

Parenting for Peace in Pristina & Kaçanik

Women without Borders

Impact Report | 2022

MOTHERSCHOOLS KOSOVO

PARENTING FOR PEACE IN PRISTINA & KAÇANIK

WOMEN WITHOUT BORDERS

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Contact Details

For questions or queries, please contact:
E: office@wwb.org
T: + 43 1 5334551

About Women without Borders

Women without Borders (WwB) is an international non-profit organisation headquartered in Vienna. WwB focuses on Women Leadership, Capacity Building, Gender Based Violence, Intercultural Dialogue, and Preventing Violent Extremism. We commit and apply ourselves to: Working from the bottom up and empowering the women leaders of tomorrow at the individual, community, and global levels; supporting and inspiring women in the process of moving from victimhood towards agency; advocating for a future without fear, suppression, and violence against women; introducing and normalising the idea of mothers as the first line of defence against extremism in their homes and communities; bringing the voices of impactful local leaders to the attention of the world.

About Jahjaga Foundation

The mission of Jahjaga Foundation (JF), a non-governmental organisation founded in 2018 by the Former President of Kosovo Atifete Jahjaga, is to contribute to the democratisation process in Kosovo through social inclusiveness, support for marginalised groups, and creating conditions for peace in the region. JF works on the strategic advocacy on these issues, mobilising and empowering marginalised groups, and facilitating and coordinating relations between civil society organisations and state as well as regional institutions.

Acknowledgements

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ABSTRACT

In the Western Balkans, messages of religious militancy have resonated profoundly with vulnerable youth populations and gained considerable traction in isolated communities over recent years. Despite having no previous history of violent extremism, Kosovo's capital of Pristina and communities along its border with North Macedonia proved particularly susceptible to recruitment efforts by ISIS. Violent extremist groups took advantage of voids in and pressures on identities that have been and continue to be shaped by struggles with the lingering legacies of violent conflict and a history of shifting geopolitical circumstance. Recruiters immersed themselves in and paid particular attention to Kosovo's complex social-political makeup to effectively target and radicalise vulnerable youth. The country witnessed one of Europe's highest per capita rates of individuals who left to the war zones in Iraq and Syria. The recent wave of returnees to Kosovo has become a grave concern for communities and the government alike, as the situation threatens to introduce new toxic ideologies, exacerbate the issue in already affected areas, and bring violent extremism into new communities across the region.

This impact report first considers how the threat of violent extremism emerged following Kosovo's war with Serbia. It finds that Kosovo had not previously boasted a distinctly local tradition of religious militancy. The sudden surge in radicalisation leading up to the demise of the caliphate was rooted in decades of external influence and infiltration. An increase in ultra-conservative Islamic ideologies, Jihadi networks, and Kosovar extremists look to have been the product of an interplay among three broad factors: external religious influences; collective memories and trauma that ISIS propagandists later exploited by drawing, inter alia, on wartime rape, notions of masculinity, and linking local grievances to a greater pan-Islamic identity and struggle; and demographically and socioeconomically driven grievances at the community level. Family-based approaches can address the resulting dual need of making communities and their families both tolerant and resilient. On the one hand, tolerance is required to ensure returnees willing to be reintegrated are not pushed further towards the margins of society. On the other hand, familial resilience is essential to recognise and respond to early warning signs in real time and safeguard families and neighbourhoods in the process.

Against this background and responding to the community-level spread of violent extremism, this impact report goes on to outline how Women without Borders (WwB) in cooperation with local implementing partner Jahjaga Foundation (JF) rolled out its 'MotherSchools: Parenting for Peace' Model in Pristina and Kaçanik between 2018 and 2020. Ahead of launching its three MotherSchools groups in parallel, WwB trained a pool of ten local professionals as prospective MotherSchools Teachers and Notetakers. Six of the qualified Teachers across three groups went on to deliver the Curriculum to sixty mothers who were concerned that their community environment could make their children susceptible to radicalisation. Upon graduating from the MotherSchools programme, the mothers as participants had each received at least forty hours of training to become role models and prevention stakeholders in their families and communities.

This impact report ultimately offers an overview of the MotherSchools project in Kosovo, presents WwB's impact findings with respect to the programme beneficiaries, and concludes with a series of recommendations put forward by project beneficiaries. Applying a qualitative data analysis (QDA) to the 113 semi-structured Entry and Exit Interviews conducted before and after the programme, WwB found improvements on three levels. On the personal level, mothers built up the necessary self-confidence and individual capacity to become a first line of defence against extremism in their homes and communities. At the family level, mothers restructured dynamics and adopted parenting styles that improved their relationships with their children and husbands. At the community level, they worked to develop prevention networks, broke the silence around and spread awareness of extremism, and strengthened resilience by disseminating their learnings beyond their families. As one of sixteen countries to adopt the programme, Kosovo is now a part of WwB's global effort to equip mothers with the knowledge and skills to become central violence prevention allies in at-risk communities.

ABBREVIATIONS

BIK	Bashkësia Islame e Kosovës; Islamic Community of Kosovo
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
CT	Counterterrorism
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
FTFs	Foreign Terrorist Fighters
GCERF	Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
KCSS	Kosovar Center for Security Studies
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army
LIP	Local Implementing Partner
MPVE	Mothers Preventing Violent Extremism
MS	MotherSchools
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
P/CVE	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
QDA	qualitative data analysis
SAVE	Sisters Against Violent Extremism
SJCRKC	Saudi Joint Committee for the Relief of Kosovo and Chechnya
WwB	Women without Borders

GLOSSARY

MotherSchools Model	Developed by WwB in 2012, and implemented across sixteen countries since, to reduce the spread of extremist ideologies by training mothers and activating their potential to intervene in the radicalisation process of their children. Each MotherSchools programme typically graduates a total of sixty mothers across three MotherSchools groups running in parallel.
Women without Borders	In charge of overall project and programme development, project management, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. As the project lead, WwB is responsible for the entire project lifecycle and the development and refinement of all programmatic elements for the implementation of the MotherSchools.
Local Implementing Partner	Tasked with coordinating local project management, mobilisation process, logistics, and implementation. LIPs are local non-profit organisations with an understanding of the challenges on the ground, and the capacity and capability to partner with WwB to deliver and scale MotherSchools locally.
MotherSchools Trainers	Trainers are part of the WwB team and deliver the MotherSchools Training of Trainers (ToT) Workshop in the project location to prepare prospective Teachers and Notetakers to deliver the MotherSchools Curriculum.
MotherSchools Participants	Mothers of adolescents and young adults who fear that their children may be susceptible to the lure of extremist groups. Participants each receive an average of forty hours of training across ten MotherSchools Sessions over the course of three months in order to become active MotherSchools Role Models and transfer their learnings to their families and communities.
MotherSchools Teachers	Teachers are local professionals and active members of their communities who deliver the MotherSchools Curriculum to Participants. They are identified jointly by the Local Implementing Partner, Mobilisers, and WwB. Following the completion of the WwB-run ToT Workshop, they are responsible for running a series of ten MotherSchools Sessions.
MotherSchools Notetakers	Observers in the MotherSchools Sessions responsible for keeping track of group dynamics and supporting the Teachers in the documentation and monitoring of the programme. They also partake in WwB's ToT and receive the necessary training to deliver weekly monitoring summaries.
MotherSchools Mobilisers	Individuals or grassrootslevel organisations working locally to assist in the process of identifying and mobilising suitable Trainers, Teachers, and Participants. Mobilisers engage with local partners and provide support at the grassroots level.

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SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The following is an overview of the project's main findings in three parts and acts as a high-level summary of Chapter 2, Insights to Impact. The below columns on the left present the Entry Interview analysis and provide the 'baseline context'—the point of departure of prospective Participants. The impact findings and analysis, in turn, is presented in the right-hand columns; these are based on the Exit Interviews. This side-by-side presentation of the findings gives a clearer impression of the Participants' transformation through the programme, as it allows the reader to compare baseline and impact findings. All insight and impact findings are based on WwB's qualitative data analysis (QDA) of Participant, Teacher, and Notetaker testimony from the 113 semi-structured Entry and Exit Interviews conducted by WwB with three groups across two communities of implementation in Kosovo.

MotherSchools Impact Journey

1. The Self | Overcoming Trauma, Addressing Gender-Based Violence, and Rebuilding Confidence in Safe Spaces
2. The Family | Removing Push Factors by Upgrading Parenting
3. The Community | Towards a Resilient, Inclusive, and Tolerant Environment

Living in the Shadows of War and Patriarchy Baseline Findings	**Inspiring Role Models in Safe Spaces** MotherSchools Impact
The future participants' biographies uncover a myriad of complex layers of wartime trauma resulting in isolation and social marginalisation that throughout their lifetimes had placed downward pressure on their sense of adequacy and ability. The motivation to join the programme can in some cases be traced back to the legacies of the war and society's neglect and even stigmatisation of women survivors.	Individual identity work through a group process and safe space environment has awoken in the graduates a deeper understanding of the personal perils and wider implications of self-neglect. Building trusted relationships and likeminded networks of mothers has broken up their sense of isolation, acted as a platform to address trauma, and boosted self-confidence levels and critical thinking abilities.
Negative impacts on the lives and trajectories of mothers in the aftermath of the 'liberation' tended to be sustained and deepened by conservative family and community milieus. Mothers spoke to how generational continuities trumped breaks with the past, citing early and arranged marriages, domestic violence, the denial of basic rights, and a plethora of other psychological and physical	In starting with 'the Self', the MotherSchools put in motion a step-by-step process to journey from intent and awareness to conviction and action. Now cognisant that effective 'Parenting for Peace' demands a solid personal identity foundation, graduates are paying attention to personal needs, rediscovering ambitions, and moving closer to a role model standing. In so doing, mothers are eroding the very narrow, superimposed identity

methods that preserve the culture of systemic violence against women.

Gender-based discrimination locked a high number of participants firmly into singular identity constructs, resulting in roles limited to the domestic sphere and identities reduced to wife- and motherhood. Prescribed roles served to restrict the social interactions and physical movements of mothers to the home, where they lived to serve in-laws and husbands.

constructs that had worked to silence and marginalise them in the first place.

Graduates have begun asserting their authority and voice to challenge the dynamics of systematic suppression that have encroached on the rights and inclusion of women for generations. Against this background, the mothers of Kosovo are taking considerable strides towards unlocking their potential in all areas of life, particularly in the security sphere.

Parenting Deficits and Information Gaps
Baseline Findings

The baseline data indicates that the family-level prevention framework was weakened by a range of deficits in parenting methods and family dynamics. On the one hand, the sense of isolation and vulnerability was augmented by counterproductive approaches at home, such as authoritarian styles than can have an isolating effect on adolescents. On the other hand, a missing culture of open communication between mothers and children appeared to have produced glaring information gaps that in turn exacerbated the concern levels of prospective participants.

A dominant theme centred around the frustration of mothers in recognising but not knowing how to deal with concerns and challenges. Where future participants pinpointed common warning signs and behavioural changes on the part of their children, they commonly expressed feelings of helplessness when contemplating possible reasons or solutions.

Beyond missing vital parenting tools and perspectives, however, some mothers were also lacking supportive allies in their husbands at home. Fathers in many cases appeared to be absent authority figures whose decision-maker role at times was even misappropriated by their wives, which only helped to further isolate fathers from their children.

Communicative Families, Fathers Included
MotherSchools Impact

Having absorbed the learnings around child psychology and family dynamics, graduates are cognisant of the need to shape parenting methods in accordance with the respective developmental stages and characters of their sons and daughters. Where mothers previously had been overbearing in their approaches, they are now purportedly affording their children more space and a greater degree of independence, replacing authoritarian with authoritative methods, and mastering communication styles that also function to safeguard their children.

Upgraded parenting techniques and improved family dynamics are reducing the push factor potential of family environments. New communication approaches are enabling mothers to broach taboo topics like violent extremism, advancing familial knowledge and awareness around recruitment tactics in the process. In some case, mothers are already acting on warning signs and conceivable extremist influences threatening their children and other family members.

To build a united front against extremism in their homes, participants are now also bringing their husbands more decidedly into the parenting fold. Where initially fathers tended to be a barrier to the safeguarding efforts of mothers, graduates appear to have asserted their authority and paved the way for men to follow their example. This is helping to erode traditional gender roles that drive a wedge between fathers and their children and leave mothers with the double burden of domestic and work-related duties as homemakers or professionals. In building a united front with their wives, fathers are now also learning about violent extremism and reducing their push factor potential.

Ambiguously Aware, Ambivalent, and Apprehensive | Baseline Findings	**Resilient and Tolerant Communities** MotherSchools Impact
Future MotherSchools participants neither questioned nor feigned ignorance of past recruitment efforts in their country. Illustrative of how gravely and widely Kosovo has been impacted, a small number of prospective programme attendees cited personal encounters and evident manifestations.	The mothers of Kosovo have arrived at their community-wide role in security. Now acutely aware of their responsibility at all levels of society, graduates are employing their heightened confidence and competence, chipping away at self-imposed and real barriers like fear and subjugation, and discovering their role model and changemaker potential.
Despite the indication of a high baseline awareness and knowledge, when viewed as a collective, mothers appeared divided in their assessment of violent extremism as a concrete and enduring threat to their families and communities. A high number deemed their children and immediate environments to be altogether free of and immune to radical influences.	Moving from advancing to disseminating awareness, mothers report how their social environments are proving receptive and becoming sensitised to the Parenting for Peace philosophy. This ongoing knowledge transfer is benefiting yet more isolated individuals who in some cases had been denied the permission to attend by husbands or in-laws. Against this backdrop, graduates are viewing the end of the programme as the starting point of their community activism, with many either seeking to or already embarking on building larger and more informal networks of mothers.
An ambivalence towards the issue looked to stem from a mixture of factors, ranging from extremism's association with religion in public discourses to the perception that radicalisation was an external problem that happened elsewhere. In probing possible signs of extremism, knowledge gaps and a propensity to stereotype became clear.	In stark contrast to their baseline point of departure, graduates are discovering the virtue of embracing and spreading a culture of tolerance and communication to counter the very polarisation that has been feeding cycles of extremism. While not altogether dispelling sudden changes in appearances as conceivably symptomatic of conservative outside influences, mothers are now reducing prejudiced and one-dimensional modes of thinking.
Violent extremism's taboo topic status not only produced information gaps; it also appeared to feed fear, uncertainty, and a culture of intolerance that could be gleaned from attitudes towards the repatriation of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) and their anticipated reintegration into communities of origin.	

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE ORIGINS OF RADICALISATION IN KOSOVO

> *When it comes to radicalisation in Kosovo, specifically the past five to six years, this was exported from outside sources. There were so many factors … We had a war as well, but we had no Mujahedeen units. It was here a cause for freedom from Serbia. After the war, 1999, it was all these first signs that started to become more focal, because they had more space to have humanitarian aid come in from Saudi Arabia. There were also Imams from Western Balkan countries who studied at the American University in Egypt. These Imams have returned to Kosovo and started to preach a different way of belief, having a huge impact on the youth. They were invited, for example, to Kosovo to give lectures to the communities.*
>
> *– Vesë Kelmendi, Jahjaga Foundation's MotherSchools Project Manager, Expert Interview*[1]

The advent of radicalisation in Kosovo has been linked to the successful infiltration of foreign groupings seeking to politicise Islam. The first noticeable wave of radicalisation began to emerge following the 1998–1999 war with Serbia, when religion began acquiring a more public character. With the organisation of religious life having hitherto been the preserve of a unified Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK), the period between the war and Kosovo's declaration of independence also saw the emergence of a new ideological stream that stood in direct opposition to the status quo. In the postwar years, BIK gradually split into two schools of thought: the old tradition that sought to sustain its own form of Islam by drawing on the five-century old Ottoman Empire's Hanedi legacy on the one hand, and the persuasion that believed Kosovo's Islamic community should be viewed in terms of a global body that went beyond the nation and therefore needed to absorb outside influences on the other hand.[2]

Since Kosovo became heavily dependent on humanitarian aid following the war, Gulf countries in particular were able to use their support as a vehicle to impact everyday religious life and practices in some of the country's most impoverished Muslim communities. Dozens of religious charities sprung up across the country, many of them Saudi-funded. Beyond relief, these organisations began to build orphanages, schools, community centres, hospitals, and mosques promoting Wahhabism. In all, more than one hundred unlicensed mosques were built

[1] Vesë Kelmendi, expert interview, Pristina, Kosovo, 20 February 2020.
[2] Jakupi, Rudine and Kraja, Garentina, 'Accounting for the Difference: Vulnerability and Resilience to Violent Extremism in Kosovo; Country Case Study 3' (published research report, Berghof Foundation and Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS), 2018): 8.

in Kosovo within a decade. Financial support was also provided to families who agreed to have their female members wear the hijab.[3] In exchange for aid, some members of targeted communities thus began to attend religious schools and adopt foreign Islamic customs and dress codes. Saudi Arabian influence, for example, targeted lower-income communities in Kosovo by means of the Saudi Joint Committee for the Relief of Kosovo and Chechnya (SJCRKC), which advocated a conservative tradition of Islam that aimed to politicise, and to breed intolerance towards secularism and plurality. The Committee's operations were shut down in 2003 when it emerged that it was being used as a front to run covert missions in the country.[4] The Committee was also found to be linked to al-Qaeda operatives. Prior to its expulsion from Kosovo, SJCRKC reportedly built some ninety-eight schools.[5]

Yet the issue of foreign religious influence continued unabated. Funds concealed as humanitarian aid and scholarship opportunities prepared the ground for ideological indoctrination. While public opinion towards and the government's ties with the US and European countries have been positive for the most part, 'isolation and insufficient socio-economic investment along with insufficient educational opportunities have pushed young people to look eastwards by attending Turkish and Saudi schools and returning to Kosovo with a mission of spreading radical Islam'. When Western development money began to wane, support from Turkey and the Gulf was welcomed to fill the void. Saudi Arabia returned to the scene, and in 2013 the Islamic Development Bank signed a deal with Kosovo, which stipulated that forty million dollars would be allocated to development activities 'in accordance with the principles of Shari'ah'.[6] Newly built mosques also required clerics, and thus Kosovo's foreign-funded religious infrastructure boom was accompanied by scholarships to Middle Eastern countries. Given the lack of educational opportunities, bright students went abroad, and many returned as graduates with Salafi traits who, in turn, 'have created a steady supply of hardliner clerics for the growing network of mosques and madrassas across the country'. In the summer of 2014, a governmental crackdown on Imams suspected of preaching extremist ideologies and recruiting jihadists revealed that most, and possibly all, had been educated in the Middle East.

[3] Adrian Shtuni, 'Breaking Down the Ethnic Albanian Foreign Fighters Phenomenon', *Soundings* 98/4 (2015): 463.
[4] Gëzim Visoka, 'Kosovo: Between Western and Non-Western States', in Florian Bieber and Nikolaos Tzifakis (eds.), *The Western Balkans in the World: Linkages and Relations with External Actors* (London, 2019), pp. 10—11.
[5] Adrian Shtuni, 'Breaking Down the Ethnic Albanian Foreign Fighters Phenomenon', *Soundings* 98/4 (2015): 463.
[6] Gëzim Visoka, 'Kosovo: Between Western and Non-Western States', in Florian Bieber and Nikolaos Tzifakis (eds.), *The Western Balkans in the World: Linkages and Relations with External Actors* (London, 2019), p. 11.

All of the suspects had close ties to a network of fourteen charities and cultural associations that were shut down due to their supposed links to Islamist groups, like the Muslim Brotherhood.[7]

When Kosovo released its National Strategy on P/CVE in September 2015, the government revealed that in large part it also viewed radicalisation in Kosovo as an externally driven phenomenon 'done by some NGO, local and foreign organizations and individuals that have embraced the radical views'. It further noted that individuals 'with public influence, who were given the title of spiritual leaders, continue to play a special role in spreading radical extremist teachings', and that 'the radicalism that is identified by religious aspect represents one of the main risks that might lead to extremism and terrorism and might disrupt the religious tolerance that exists in Kosovo'.[8] Foreign religious influences since 1999, it appears, prepared the ground for ISIS recruitment in no small measure. Internal squabbles and the swift deterioration of BIK's authority over time look to have exacerbated the problem. These growing cracks could be exploited by ideologues from within BIK's new school of thought that welcomed outside influence, and by radical guest preachers, among other actors, who came from as far away as Pakistan. External influences were further aided by the advent of democratic rule, whereby radicals could use to their advantage free speech, religious freedom, and freedom of association.[9] Mounting disunity within BIK, its dwindling influence, and the rise of parallel religious structures opened up various entry points through which ISIS could channel its recruitment narratives. In adapting to the Kosovar context, radicals could thus employ selective local narratives and dynamics to fashion a broader pan-Islamic identity and humanitarian or indeed fraternal duty to fight in Syria and Iraq. As elsewhere, mobilising historical grievances became a tenant of the recruitment strategy in Kosovo. In drawing on collective memories of the 1990s Balkan wars, ISIS propagandists became especially adept at exploiting wartime grievances. One of their dominant tactics was to create a series of wartime parallels.

Kosovo-specific vulnerabilities that weighed especially heavy on the population came to the fore. The fact that Serbian forces raped an estimated twenty-thousand Albanian women

[7] Adrian Shtuni, 'Breaking Down the Ethnic Albanian Foreign Fighters Phenomenon', *Soundings* 98/4 (2015): 463.

[8] The Government of the Republic of Kosovo, 'Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism 2015—2020' (published national strategy, Pristina, 2015): 10. http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/STRATEGY_parandalim_-_ENG.pdf.

[9] Rudine Jakupi and Garentina Kraja, 'Accounting for the Difference: Vulnerability and Resilience to Violent Extremism in Kosovo; Country Case Study 3' (published research report, Berghof Foundation and Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS), 2018): 8—9.

during the Kosovo war was swiftly picked up and embedded into the wider narrative of worldwide Muslim persecution by Christians. Garentina Kraja, former political adviser to Atifete Jahjaga during her presidency, contends that recruiters focused heavily on 'past grievances pertaining to the 1998-1999 war such as wartime rape and the perceived bias against Muslims'.[10] Traditional notions of masculinity in Kosovo also acted as a contributing factor in attracting young men to extremism. The country, Adrian Shtuni argues, 'is dominated by an entrenched patriarchal mindset where rigid gender norms place harsh expectations on young men'.[11] A community-level research study from 2017 found that societal expectations of men to fend for their families coupled with an insecure job market and limited opportunities have created tension in Kosovar homes and communities. Study participants expressed how 'getting caught up in different phenomena'—such as extremist groupings—was a logical consequence of the government's failing to create jobs and guarantee better life conditions. Respondents suggested that improved conditions would also take away parental anxiety that children were seeking alternative opportunities.[12]

This points to how parents have a responsibility to tackle drivers that are within their sphere of control, including breaking generational cycles that have sustained patriarchal mindsets, and adequately addressing trauma to ensure that narratives are not misappropriated and mobilised by recruiters. In turn, and with a view to the future, more resilient youths who have been dissuaded from a path of violence and destruction appear more likely to contribute to improving Kosovo's living conditions and democratic outlook at all levels of society.

1.2 THE CASE FOR FAMILY-BASED PREVENTION

Delving deeper into local drivers in affected communities makes apparent that the individual motivations for joining radical groupings often can be traced back to familial factors. A study by the International Republican Institute (IRI), for instance, found that returned foreign fighters often recounted how they had experienced family-related loss, trauma, and tragedy ahead of their departures. Examples include an interview partner whose parents died when she was a

[10] Garentina Kraja, 'The Islamic State Narrative in Kosovo Deconstructed One Story at a Time' (published research report, Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS), September 2017): 6.
[11] Adrian Shtuni, 'Dynamics of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism in Kosovo' (Special Report 397, United States Institute of Peace, December 2016): 10.
[12] International Republican Institute, 'Understanding Local Drivers of Violent Extremism in Kosovo' (published research report, Spring 2017): 22.

teenager, and one who lost his mother and whose father had been tortured by the Serbian army during the Kosovo war. With wartime legacies in mind, two of the interviewed returnees also purported to have been motivated by a sense of solidarity to support the Syrian people in standing up against Assad.[13] A sense of revenge for injustices perpetrated against family members also prevailed as a motivating factor.

The central role of family and community dynamics in the field of violent extremism is highlighted by ongoing efforts to resettle FTFs and their family members. A recent KCSS report argues that successes in the (re)integration of most individuals by early 2020—orphaned children included—are owed chiefly to deep community and family bonds. 'These development[s] show', the report argues, 'that reintegration of the returnees is most effective when it is not entirely orchestrated or managed by government, but it is facilitated by community and the well-kept family ties'. Despite these positive findings, the authors nevertheless see that the government has not sufficiently coordinated with and included civil society. Based on four focus group discussions in Prizren, Mitrovica, Gjilan, and Kaçanik, the researchers conclude that 'all citizens are welcoming of the returnees and harbor no discriminatory approaches that would impede their reintegration'.[14]

Yet other enquiries into community attitudes towards returnees have painted a less welcoming picture. In 2019, a public perception study of foreign fighters found that 65 per cent of respondents considered that returnees posed a risk to the national security, while 53 per cent said that they would not accept the presence of formers in their surroundings. While attitudes towards women and minors are more favourable, 30 per cent would nevertheless not welcome them.[15] This points to a troubling trend: communities of origin that reject the presence of returnees could prove in the long run to be a serious roadblock in the resocialisation process of those who have returned, threating to further isolate the already isolated in the process.

Challenges in attitudes notwithstanding, family-based interventions at the community level have found broad appeal among scholars and policy shapers over recent years. Focusing on returning FTFs in Kosovo and Southern Serbia, Anne Speckhard and Ardian Shajkovci argue the case for enlisting family members—specifically mothers, sisters, and wives—in counternarrative efforts and 'equipping them to argue persuasively against terrorist

[13] International Republican Institute, 'Understanding Local Drivers of Violent Extremism in Kosovo' (published research report, Spring 2017): 19.
[14] Skënder Perteshi and Ramadan Ilazi, 'Unpacking Kosovo's response to returnees from the war zones in Syria and Iraq' (published research report, Kosovar Centre for Security Studies, January 2020): 8.
[15] Vesë Kelmendi, 'Citizens Perceptions on New Threats of Violent Extremism in Kosovo' (published research report, Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS), February 2019): 15—18.

propaganda'. From their interviews on the ground, they learned that the respondents saw how mothers in particular 'have a great emotional pull on their children' and thus appear to be effective counter-messaging agents at the early stages of radicalisation. The authors argue that mothers require support to be effective and reach their potential in this respect, noting that 'the aforementioned actors need tools and training to help them speak and act effectively against terrorist groups and to delegitimize them inside their families and communities'.[16] The International Republican Institute highlights the importance of including family members, noting that families can guide the government's reintegration process through nuanced insight and 'also support the government by collaborating to provide a support system for returnees as they go through the process of deradicalization'.[17] To create an atmosphere of community tolerance, however, including family members beyond those directly affected is just as important, since returnees may otherwise once again feel themselves pushed towards the margins of society. Beyond this, a long-term view of the situation is required. Family-based prevention work needs to be pursued despite the presence of returnees and thus also in anticipation of the distinct possibility that concerned but not directly affected families will be targeted in the foreseeable future.

As late as 2017, the US Department of State still deemed that Kosovo faced 'a growing threat of terrorism'.[18] While the recruitment in Kosovo has subsided in recent years, the factors and conditions that previously had made it possible to enlist foreign fighters have not disappeared. First, recent waves of returnees to Kosovo have become a grave concern for communities and the government, who worry that the situation threatens to introduce new toxic ideologies, exacerbate the issue in already affected areas, and bring violent extremism into other communities across the region. Second, Kosovo's ongoing exposure to radical influences from neighbouring North Macedonia makes prevention more necessary, which is discussed at length in section 1.5 'Communities of Implementation' below.

Although radicalisation in Kosovo is a recent phenomenon, its communities proved to be particularly susceptible to recruitment efforts. Witnessing one of Europe's highest per capita rates of individuals who left for the war zones in Iraq and Syria, estimates place the

[16] Anne Speckhard and Ardian Shajkovci, 'The Balkan Jihad Recruitment to Violent Extremism and Issues Facing Returning Foreign Fighters in Kosovo and Southern Serbia', *Soundings* 101/2, 2018: 98–99.
[17] International Republican Institute, 'Understanding Local Drivers of Violent Extremism in Kosovo' (published research report, Spring 2017): 24.
[18] United States Department of State, 'Country Reports on Terrorism 2017' (published report, Bureau of Counterterrorism, 2018): 97.

number of Kosovo citizens who went to fight abroad above four hundred.[19] In the light of lower levels of extremist recruitment in recent years, Kosovo—like other countries in the region—is in a period of relative calm during which community-based prevention efforts are most relevant and effective. During this stage, communities tend still to be more receptive to P/CVE programming, thus reducing the barriers to entry. Community access and trust-building are prerequisites to successfully reaching at-risk individuals, strengthening local resilience, spreading awareness of early warning signs, and positioning local-level actors as prevention actors overall. With a view to the future, early prevention and intervention groundwork ultimately makes it possible to go beyond fighting the symptoms of terrorism by focusing on where they take root, and to thus effect changes long before radicalisation surpasses the stage at which hard power becomes the only viable response. In other words, communities have the power to outsmart recruiters by addressing vulnerabilities and reclaiming misappropriated tools and methods.

A thus far missing aspect in many vulnerable communities has revolved around building up the necessary awareness, confidence, and practical skills of family members to become prevention actors in their homes and communities. The above discussion points to how little attention has been paid to the upbringing of adolescents in communities. Mostly family-related experiences like trauma and loss are cited, but little in the way of family dynamics and the push factor potential of mothers and fathers. Although continuously overlooked, parenting practices can be a deciding factor in the radicalisation process. Authoritarian parenting styles as well as communication gaps among family and community members, for instance, can act as a central driver that further isolates children and motivates them to emulate or adopt violent methods. In the absence of addressing these root causes in at-risk communities, structures and dynamics strengthening the youth's susceptibility to recruiters inevitably are sustained across generations.

In the context of Kosovo, family-based approaches can address the dual need of making communities and their families both tolerant and resilient. On the one hand, tolerance is required to ensure returnees who are willing to be reintegrated are not pushed further towards the margins of society. On the other hand, resilience is essential so parents in particular—whether affected or not—can recognise early warning signs in real time and respond accordingly when and where necessary to safeguard their families and neighbourhoods.

[19] Skënder Perteshi and Ramadan Ilazi, 'Unpacking Kosovo's response to returnees from the war zones in Syria and Iraq' (published research report, Kosovar Centre for Security Studies, January 2020): 7.

1.3 THE MOTHERSCHOOLS MODEL

To address gaps in contemporary security strategies, Women without Borders developed the evidence-based and continuously evolving 'MotherSchools: Parenting for Peace' Model. The programme has since its inception in 2012 worked to engage concerned and affected mothers of adolescents and young adults whose environment has made them prone to recruitment efforts. This community-based resilience building approach, which to date has been implemented in sixteen countries affected by terrorism, positions mothers as role models and the first responders to burgeoning signs of extremism in their homes and neighbourhoods.

The MotherSchools Curriculum employs developmental psychology, self-confidence training, and theoretical sessions to define radicalisation and prevention at the individual, family, and community levels. The Sessions allow mothers to re-visit, re-evaluate, and re-shape their notion of parenting by learning about the psychological dynamics and stages of childhood and adolescence. In refining their communication skills in the familial context, the programme equips mothers to react to early warning signs and grievances that can lead to radicalisation. Mothers also learn how to introduce and develop alternative narratives that foster a positive youth culture and strengthen resilience. In so doing, MotherSchools empower women to demonstrate leadership and promote family and community tolerance, forgiveness, and cohesion.

The programme guides participants through a process of gradual awareness-building in three successive stages: starting with the self, moving on to the family and community, and finally arriving at the individual's role in security. Sessions include exercises that facilitate dialogue, information exchanges, and critical reflection using context-based techniques that apply to the participants' daily lives. In communities where youths are being misappropriated by extremist organisations and face the risk of being recruited and radicalised, the MotherSchools programme provides this training to groups of mothers to harness their hitherto untapped potential of identifying nascent indications and intervening in the initial stages of the process. Beyond creating actionable networks of women prevention stakeholders, the integrated and comprehensive nature of the Model ensures that local capacity is advanced in tandem.

1.4 MOTHERSCHOOLS IMPLEMENTATION

Owing to the demand for family-based prevention programming in Kosovo, WwB and its local implementation partner Jahjaga Foundation implemented the country's first MotherSchools programme iteration in Pristina and Kaçanik with the support of the Department of State's Counter-Terrorism Bureau. This effort was part of a multi-country project additionally spanning Bangladesh, Montenegro, and North Macedonia. The MotherSchools Kosovo roll-out is the subject of this impact report. Between 2018 and 2020, a total of three MotherSchools groups convened in Kaçanik and Pristina, with two groups running in parallel in Pristina. The end-to-end deployment was achieved through the following five steps: Programming & Local Assessment; MotherSchools Trainings; MotherSchools Roll-Out; Graduation Ceremony and Social Outreach; and Monitoring and Evaluation.

The findings presented in this report highlight how central contributing factors leading to radicalisation in Kosovar communities have been addressed through the MotherSchools Model. In a broader sense, the impact is the product of WwB's efforts in two central respects. First, in terms of local capacity built by virtue of training Jahjaga Foundation staff in project management and coordination, and by WwB Trainers delivering its ToT Workshop to a pool of professionals, resulting in ten prospective Teachers and Notetakers, including one substitute. Second, regarding knowledge transfer, whereby six of the qualified Teachers were chosen to deliver the Curriculum to three groups of mothers over the course of ten sessions. This effort culminated in around fifty mothers completing and graduating from the programme. Graduates each received over forty hours of training to become role models and prevention stakeholders in their homes and neighbourhoods.

1.5 COMMUNITIES OF IMPLEMENTATION

To appreciate the acute need for prevention work in Pristina and Kaçanik, a consideration of the community-level context is necessary, particularly in the case of the latter site of implementation. In countries where MotherSchools are rolled out for the first time, an expansion to more rural, harder-to-access areas typically is reserved for subsequent iterations. The following section therefore offers a brief geography-centred overview of the radicalisation

landscape to inform the reader why WwB and JF went beyond merely implementing in the capital city. With a view to building stakeholder networks, a long-term presence, and the capacity to reach other neglected and vulnerable communities, Pristina is a logical point of departure for initiating new prevention efforts. Aside from being the capital and where JF is headquartered, however, it demands attention for having witnessed a high number of foreign fighters leave for Syria and Iraq; when factoring in Prizren's departures, Kosovo's two most populated cities together produced around sixty per cent of all foreign fighter departures.

Despite the considerable numbers in Pristina as well as a broad distribution of recruits across Kosovo in general, the highest per capita concentration of foreign fighters originated from municipalities along the North Macedonian border, making up some thirty-five per cent in total. Proportional to population size, the most affected municipalities were Elez Han, Kaçanik, Gjilan, Vitina, and Obilić.[20] Geography appears to be a central factor accounting for high radicalisation rates along the south-eastern border with North Macedonia. The closer proximity of these recruiting hotspots to Skopje than Pristina offers one explanation: Kosovo's south-eastern municipalities fell more directly into the sphere of influence of radical preachers in Skopje and BIK's authority could thus be challenged through the infiltration of radical influences from across the border. In stark contrast to Kosovo and the influence of BIK, the Albanian community in North Macedonia has a deeper tradition of religious conservatism that has been shaped by various parallel structures. Tight-knit relations with the Albanian community across the border meant that local authorities and BIK found it more difficult to counteract these influences in south-eastern municipalities.[21] As a local BIK official noted,

> *The spirit of Kaçanik, Hani i Elezit and Ferizaj is the spirit of Macedonia. You can't divide a people with an axe. The friendships, the ties, the relations of this part of Kosovo have always been with Skopje. Until 1992, we had no notion of Kosovo. Which means our relations then and now are with Skopje. They're familial ties, but also of business … I believe our problem is our ties to Skopje because of our proximity to it and in Macedonia a more religious spirit prevails.*[22]

The protagonists of the ISIS radicalisation machinery in Kosovo purportedly all enjoyed close ties with North Macedonian preachers. Many of the chief Kosovar recruiters came from Gjilan and Kaçanik. They sought to undermine the authority of the BIK by building alternative

[20] Behara Xharra and Nita Gojani, 'Understanding Push and Pull Factors in Kosovo: Primary interviews with returned foreign fighters and their families' (published report, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), November 2017): 19.
[21] Rudine Jakupi and Garentina Kraja, 'Accounting for the Difference: Vulnerability and Resilience to Violent Extremism in Kosovo; Country Case Study 3' (published research report, Berghof Foundation and Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS), 2018): 10—12.
[22] BIK official [anonymous], quoted in ibid.: 12.

religious frameworks and embarking on a series of activities. The recruiters preached and lectured in illegal mosques, invited radical imams as guest lecturers from North Macedonia, grew their recruitment networks across the eastern part of the country, and operated outside of formal religious structures through NGOs. Organisations like 'Nektar', located in Hani i Elezit, supposedly acted as a front for violent extremist recruitment efforts and made it possible to attract and indoctrinate members.[23] Vesë Kelmendi, a P/CVE expert from Pristina, supports the notion that radical Imams from North Macedonia are central players in spreading violent extremist views across Kosovo. Kelmendi sees that they have gone beyond the public sphere and as far as permeating the private lives of community members: 'You can see for example that they were invited not only into mosques but also into private places, where somehow these groups make them feel comfortable. This is how they began to develop their narratives and how they tackled the communities in groups'.[24]

Given the degree of vulnerability and affectedness of communities in the southern part of the country, WwB and JF sought to build a presence as early as this first iteration of the MotherSchools Kosovo chapter. JF's experience and knowledge of the local context in Kaçanik, coupled with the fact that several of its inhabitants travelled to Syria and Iraq, made this isolated and conservative municipality an ideal place for implementation, and thus also for building a regional presence and local-level awareness of the Parenting for Peace philosophy.

1.6 Impact Analysis and Presentation of Findings

To capture the transformation of programme beneficiaries over time, this report presents the qualitative data analysis (QDA) findings of 113 semi-structured interviews that were conducted with all Participants, Teachers, and Notetakers before and after the MotherSchools roll-out. The Entry Interviews, conducted prior to the start of the programme, were analysed to establish the 'baseline context', which refers to the Participants' point of departure in terms of awareness, confidence, competence. The Exit Interviews conducted following programme completion were analysed to determine the 'distance travelled' by graduates, and thus to establish the overall impact of the MotherSchools implementation rounds across all groups. The QDA method made it possible to code against significant themes and identify the following

[23] Ibid.: 11.
[24] Vesë Kelmendi, expert interview, Pristina, Kosovo, 20 February 2020.

building blocks that proved integral to developing the prevention potential of mothers, with a view to positioning them as familial and community role models who work to reduce the spread of violent extremism in Kosovo.

1. The Self | Overcoming Trauma, Addressing Gender-Based Violence, and Rebuilding Confidence in Safe Spaces
2. The Family | Removing Push Factors by Upgrading Parenting
3. The Community | Towards a Resilient, Inclusive, and Tolerant Environment

The impact findings are structured thematically and semi-chronologically in the above manner to trace how Teachers employed the Curriculum to take Participants through a process of gradual awareness-building, moving successively from 'the Self' to the family, and ultimately arriving at the community level. The final analysis thus provides a comprehensive understanding of changes in attitude and behaviour, knowledge gained, and direct action taken. The interviews were conducted by WwB at the respective session venues as well as virtually due to coronavirus-related restrictions. Each WwB interviewer, when necessary, had a translator to assist the interview process. On average, each of the Entry and Exit interviews lasted over an hour. Most interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. In all cases where WwB did not receive consent to record, interviews were transcribed in real time, with the participants' consent to do so. This effort ultimately resulted in well over 113 hours of transcribed conversations. The two data sets—i.e. all Entry and all Exit interviews in written form—were processed by WwB using the 'f4 Analyse' software; a data analysis tool that enables coding against themes to identify common patterns and concepts across all interviews. The themes WwB coded against include self-confidence and self-esteem; family dynamics; parent-child relationships and communication; conceptual understanding of concepts like radicalisation and violent extremism; and perception and knowledge of threats in their community. This report offers a summary and interpretation of the resulting findings to capture and better understand participants' changes in terms of, inter alia, attitudes, awareness levels, knowledge base, behaviour, and familial and community dynamics.

The findings in the subsequent 'Insights to Impact' chapter provide conclusive evidence that MotherSchools in Kosovo have advanced WwB's theory of change in no small measure. Namely, that by equipping mothers with the competence and confidence to translate their

unique potential into action, they will become the first line of defence against extremism in at-risk communities around the globe.

1.7 Challenges, Gaps, and Data Limitations

This section briefly considers possible and established shortcomings—including external and internal factors—relating to the community and country contexts, and to MotherSchools-related activities. Covid-19 presented a serious external challenge, resulting in the temporary suspension of all MotherSchools programming, including the MotherSchools Teacher and Notetakers ToT and MotherSchools Roll-out. The situation in Kosovo was extremely serious. To sustain the positive momentum that had been created, WwB and Jahjaga Foundation worked closely with Teachers and Notetakers to keep mothers engaged in the meantime. While the pandemic acted as a severe obstacle in terms of consistent attendance and reaching the highest possible number of mothers, mothers were offered support to become sufficiently familiar with online platforms, and to attend the graduation ceremonies, which was held virtually. As part of the preparation phase for resuming MotherSchools, WwB developed a comprehensive Teacher Covid Guide and a three-tier implementation strategy (offline, hybrid, and online) to ensure a smooth and continuous rollout of MotherSchools and to avoid any further delays or pause in activities. A strategy session was held by WwB with Teachers and Notetakers to address challenges and discuss concerns and mitigation strategies before roll-out. Yet some groups did not withstand the half-year hiatus, making it necessary to re-mobilise new groups of mothers in some cases. Adding to this, where lockdowns prohibited in-person meet-ups, some mothers were hindered due to a lack of technological know-how or equipment, and some felt less ready to speak openly presumably due to factors including but not limited to high domestic violence rates in the communities of implementation and fears of being overheard. Despite setbacks, WwB, Jahjaga Foundation, and the Teachers succeeded in addressing these challenges in a timely and efficient manner, thus ensuring that ultimately the MotherSchools programme persevered, and that all objectives were met.

Moving beyond external factors, the data collection and interpretation process conducted by WwB through Entry and Exit interviews with all Actors and Participants demands scrutiny; it must be critically examined since even the most laborious efforts and meticulous approaches result in discernible, inherent, and even hidden data limitations and gaps. This final part of the section therefore serves to caution and remind the reader that the

insights and impact findings presented in the subsequent chapter offer qualitative interpretations of the participants' personal views and insights based on all 88 interviews conducted.

A noteworthy data limitation stems from the fact that the bulk of all interviews were conducted with the support of Jahjaga Foundation staff, Teachers, and Notetakers who translated WwB staff questions. On the one hand, the benefits of employing trusted interpreters arguably tend to outweigh the shortcomings, as they can offer valuable background context, they understand and have access to the interviewee's community, and may thus be a source of trust that helps to evoke more open and honest responses. On the other hand, culturally defined linguistic differences as well as translations and individual interpreter styles, inevitably lead to a degree of questions and answers being 'lost in translation'. Beyond this, working with non-professional interpreters can result in a higher probability that some of the nuances or cultural context is lost, especially when the local interpreters possess limited knowledge of concepts like radicalisation and violent extremism. This challenge was further compounded by the fact that Exit interviews could not be held in person and had to be conducted by phone due to pandemic-related international travel restrictions.

That WwB staff are foreign to Kosovo may have had an impact on the readiness of interviewees to open up. Yet being 'foreign' to a community where notions of honour and reputation inhibit many from speaking freely also can prove to be an advantage. The authenticity of answers may have been further skewed by factors such the interviewee's possible perception of the Entry and Exit interviews as a formal means of assessment, which can prompt respondents to concentrate on what they may deem to be expected of them in such a situation, such as seeking 'the correct' rather than offering 'the truthful' answer. There are plenty of other data limitations to consider, such effects of an inherent chain of individual biases through which information passes in sequence: from interviewer to translator to interviewee, and vice versa. Or the biases of interviewers who pose questions and follow a line of enquiry that inevitably will at times fall short of taking into account cultural norms and practices that are not theirs.

With the aforementioned as well as other apparent and conceivable limitations in mind, readers of this report should be aware that quoted statements as well as WwB's interpretations and conclusions ought to be considered with some degree of critical assessment. Not all responses on the part of the interviewees and not all resulting conclusions based on the QDA method can be taken entirely at face value. It is important for readers to ask themselves critical

questions, and to consider other data limitations. Nevertheless, when coding against certain themes, one can determine whether other mothers who were not part of the same group may have remarked similar changes. That is to say, the impact evaluation and conclusions put forward in this report are based on a series of statements, typically referred to as ‘clusters’. Statements or ‘telling stories’ can therefore be viewed as representative of such clusters.

Finally, the reader of this report should bear in mind that an inherent bias in Exit data may be the result of the so-called ‘Hello-Goodbye-Effect’. In the context of this programme, the ecstatic rush that often accompanies a mother’s graduation from this education programme can lead to exaggerated expressions in terms of personal, familial, and community changes. To ensure that purported improvements have not been exaggerated and with a view to understanding longer-term impact, this would require a return to communities of implementation for targeted follow-up interviews with programme beneficiaries in one or more years down the line, which would however be beyond the scope of this project.

2. INSIGHTS TO IMPACT

> *You need additional training as a mother. Maybe you don't know the methods on how to identify threats … you need to pay attention to these things and I think this is why it is important to raise this voice. It is everybody's role; not just of the state, or the municipality, or the police. First, this begins in our homes, and we, as mothers, need to know every developmental stage of our child—is it just a moment or is it continuing and becoming a concern? Because there can be aggressive behaviour during the development phase, but sometimes it is nothing to worry about. Children are trying to show something but if it is continuous and you see something that you recognise of concern, and you don't know how to deal with it, you should ask for help, and to engage fathers as well—especially here in our society where mothers are born with all the responsibility. It's not good to have this all on our shoulders, but to share with husbands or whoever we live, and to discuss it as a family and openly.*[25]
>
> *– MotherSchools Teacher, Kaçanik, Entry Interview*

This chapter evaluates the insights and impact findings of the MotherSchools Kosovo programme. The analysis is the product of a qualitative data analysis (QDA) of the 113 semi-structured Entry and Exit interviews with Participants, Teachers, and Notetakers. Each of the three chapters represent an integral building block of the mothers' transformation into security stakeholders. Every section, in turn, is divided into two parts to gauge 'distance travelled' by the mothers; the qualitative data analysis findings of the Entry and Exit Interviews are presented sequentially. Following a brief thematic introduction to each building block, the first part of each section maps out the baseline context, which can be understood as the point of departure of prospective Participants in terms of confidence, knowledge, and practical skills levels. This analysis provides background details and insights into individual, family, and community dynamics prior to the start of the MotherSchools sessions. The second part of each section presents the MotherSchools impact findings to trace the extent of the graduates' personal transformations and their impact on family and community dynamics overall. The following themes are generally structured in a chronological manner to reflect how each thematic layer is an essential building block that complements the next, moving from 'the Self', to the family, and finally the community level: 'Overcoming Trauma, Addressing Gender-Based Violence, and Rebuilding Confidence in Safe Spaces'; 'Removing Push Factors by Upgrading Parenting'; and 'Towards a Resilient, Inclusive, and Tolerant Environment'.

[25] 200206 XK MST EnUK 1 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 37.

2.1 THE SELF | OVERCOMING TRAUMA, ADDRESSING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE, AND REBUILDING CONFIDENCE IN SAFE SPACES

> *We met the mothers two weeks before the start of the MotherSchools. We met for a coffee. And they were really interested in this. They asked me, 'Do you have kids?' I said, 'No'. Then I said, 'I have a gender studies background'. And then they asked me, 'Why are there not so many women in politics?' And they would have different answers themselves: some blamed women; some blamed the system. Some understood they are victims of the system; some had this internalised oppression, thinking that they deserve to be in this position. But some of the women already challenged this. That is amazing.*[26]
>
> *– MotherSchools Teacher, Pristina, Entry Interview*

> *Now if I ask my kids to do something and my husband interrupts and says, 'This is a woman's job', I will talk back and say, 'No, it is not; we are all equal'. This is a thing that I learned in the MotherSchools; that we should be treated equally. It is not that I did not know that we are not equal, but I was not as eager to fight for it or talk back. When I was younger, I wanted to finish my school and my education, but I could not and I did not talk back because of the mentality. I was not allowed to finish it. But now, my daughter-in-law is finishing her studies and I have spoken to my son and her, and I of course am encouraging them to finish their education, regardless of the gender. I am giving them my full support and I said that they should treat their kids equally in the future. … The MotherSchools raised awareness through talking to each other and listening to other women.*[27]
>
> *– MotherSchools Graduate, Kaçanik, Exit Interview*

Individual identity work through a group process marks the beginning of the MotherSchools journey. This translates into supporting mothers to assume an effective and informed role in security at home and beyond by means of self-confidence and competence training. Advancing self-confidence and revisiting identity constructs acts as the foundation to overcoming perceived personal limits and supports the process of moving from victimhood to agency. When coupled with knowledge and practical tools, the resulting formula embodies the MotherSchools theory of change, namely that self-confident and competent mothers position themselves as the first line of defence in the fight against extremism. Starting with 'the Self' is a prerequisite. For even where an individual may possess knowledge of early warning signs and a theoretical understanding of how to respond, insufficient conviction and low self-trust can make the difference between rendering someone an upstander or bystander. The paralysing effect of low self-esteem demands identifying and addressing the chief symptoms. This includes questioning self- and community-imposed identity constructs that confine women as mothers to a singular conception of their role. The MotherSchools education therefore has a

[26] 200205 XK MST EnRK 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 29.
[27] 201208 XK MSP ExLK 2 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 106 – 108.

strong taboo-breaking dialogue function by providing a platform and safe space to unearth, discuss, and work to remove possible barriers holding participants back from achieving their potential and exploring their multiple roles beyond the domestic sphere. The first of our three 'insights to impact' sections trace how participants, through a safe space environment, addressed a multitude of roadblocks, ranging from wartime trauma and gender-based violence to fear, feelings of helplessness, and resignation. And how their new networks of trusted allies—cohorts of likeminded mothers—set in motion a process of empowerment at the individual and group levels. This moved the graduates decidedly closer towards the goal of becoming role model security allies in their homes and everyday environments.

LIVING IN THE SHADOWS OF WAR AND PATRIARCHY | BASELINE CONTEXT

> *I belong to the generation that saw the war stop dreams. Because I wanted to have an education and to have a better job but unfortunately it was a war situation in Kosovo. Now the only thing that I am proud of are my children, because I have very good boys who are good and kind to the community, and well-respected as well. And that is the only thing that I am proud of—to be a mother.*[28]
>
> *– MotherSchools Participant, Kaçanik, Entry Interview*

> *First it caught my attention that it was 'MotherSchools', and I thought, 'We should not reinforce motherhood as the only identity of women'. But when I checked the organisation's website I could see how women were interacting together and how important it is for the mothers to come together to challenge motherhood rather than reinforcing it. And here in Kosovo, especially, we have these set ideas of what motherhood means that is usually very submissive; they do not have agency in their house. Having these women in one place and talking with them about what motherhood is—that is powerful. We have women who never had the chance to go to school, because here you have kids, and your job is to take care of them and that's it. So this is why I found this really interesting, because working with women as mothers can be really empowering. They can find new identities and their agency as women. Not to limit themselves in life anymore.*[29]
>
> *– MotherSchools Teacher, Pristina, Entry Interview*

The future participants' biographies uncover a myriad of complex layers of wartime trauma resulting in isolation and social marginalisation that throughout their lifetimes had placed downward pressure on their sense of adequacy and ability. The motivation to join the programme can in some cases be traced back to the legacies of the war and

[28] 200207 XK MSP EnES 4 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 22.
[29] 200205 XK MST EnRK 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 22.

society's neglect and even stigmatisation of women survivors. The postwar fates of civilians tend to be a stark reminder that 'wars do not end when the fighting stops', as the historian David Stafford once wrote.[30] Following NATO's intervention in 1999, Kosovo's 'liberation' became a process rather than a moment in time. For the enduring human cost of the conflict has been immeasurable, and the legacies continue to deeply impact Kosovo Albanian women survivors in particular and on multiples levels. The stories of future MotherSchools participants who found the courage to speak about their experiences during the entry conversations serve to illustrate just how gravely confidence levels and their lives in general have suffered as a result. This is owed in no small part to how the community environment, driven by notions of shame and patriarchal honour, has silenced the voices and marginalised the trauma of women survivors and witnesses of the crimes. Viewing the sense of Self through the lens of wartime legacies proves effective as a starting point to better understanding the contexts of mothers in Kosovar communities.

A mother from Pristina pointed to the connection between her feelings of inadequacy as a mother and her poor physical and mental health resulting from being raped during the war. 'I am a victim of the war and I plan to give my children my best', she said and began to cry. 'I was not good with my health, and everything concerned me, even my children; I couldn't give the best love, the best parent love as it is needed … I have the feeling that I wasn't the best mother'. Between her tears she retold what had happened, and that she had been with her daughter and pregnant with a second child. 'Since I was raped by the military, there was nothing interesting anymore, nothing is beautiful since then … I can look good but inside me I am destroyed', she concluded. After returning from North Macedonia to where she and her daughter had fled, they were left with but a burned down house and a life to rebuild. At the time of the interview, she had only been in therapy sporadically and on medication for a year.[31] Even those who received a degree of psychological attention reported feeling socially isolated and alone in their trauma. Making matters worse, not all had taken the step of seeking professional support, thus leaving some with little to no support in dealing with the aftermath.

Joining a group of fellow mothers, as another survivor from Pristina explained, was a means 'to get more social with other women in the community to make it easier to carry pain that I carry every day since I got raped'. She relayed being raped for three days in the following terms: 'I was raped with my mother, sister, sister-in-law—the wife of my brother—and my

[30] David Stafford, *Endgame 1945: Victory, Retribution, Liberation* (London, 2007), p. xi.
[31] 200205 XK MSP EnUK 2 | Pristina, Paragraph 40 – 54.

niece who was thirteen years old. … I got pregnant from the rapist; my girl is now twenty years old. My husband told me, "You got raped, so I don't want you in my life anymore". At first, I didn't like my daughter, but now I do—she's mine… Three of my daughters know that I was raped. The youngest one knows that I was raped, but she doesn't know that she is the child'. While living with the burden of not telling her daughter, she disclosed how she did this based on 'the feeling that she would get disappointed with life too'. The mother's story also points to societal postwar cynicism that saw family and community members punish rather than support survivors. In the mother's case, first by her husband and subsequently by her environment that led her to live in shame, silence, and suffering. 'The community doesn't help me', she explained, noting how for six years she had not left her home: 'I had scars' from being cut with the knives of the rapists, 'and they said, "Every time you clean your eyes, you will think of us"'. On top of this, cementing the lack of faith in state institutions, the mother revealed how she had sought justice by taking the perpetrators to court, 'but they didn't get punished for what they did to me and others'.[32]

The lives and afterlives of the communities of implementation should be viewed through the lens of continuity for women with similar experiences. Unresolved trauma and insufficient support at various levels still appears to shape the realities of many, leaving survivors isolated, silenced, and out of sight. Against this background, the importance of a safe space environment becomes even more apparent, as does the aforementioned mother's other reason for signing up: 'I am doing it for my girls, because for me it would be better if I wasn't here'.[33] Based on the entry interviews alone, an analysis of the lingering legacies of the war with respect to its impact on the confidence and potential of prospective MotherSchools participants could be the subject of a book. When taking all stories shared during the interviews into account, it becomes clear that most have been significantly impacted in one way or another. Statements to the effect of 'it was wartime when I finished primary school, so I didn't continue after' and 'our house burned down' were common across all groups.[34]

Negative impacts on the lives and trajectories of mothers in the aftermath of the 'liberation' tended to be sustained and deepened by conservative family and community milieus. Mothers spoke to how generational continuities trumped breaks with the past, citing early and arranged marriages, domestic violence, the denial of basic rights, and a plethora of other psychological and physical methods that preserve the culture of

[32] 200205 XK MSP EnUK 3 | Pristina, Paragraph 17 – 24, 57 – 70.
[33] 200205 XK MSP EnUK 3 | Pristina, Paragraph 77 – 90.
[34] 200207 XK MSP EnMO 2 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 6; 200207 XK MSP EnRK 2 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 23.

systemic violence against women. After the dreams and aspirations of a generation had been undermined by the war, socio-economic pressures in its wake tended to come at the expense of women. 'Even though I was the best student after finishing primary school, my parents didn't allow me to finish my studies', a Kaçanik participant recalled, 'we were very poor and we couldn't educate our males, let alone a woman at that time'.[35] A high proportion of future participants were not afforded the basic right of education by their family because of their gender. The story of a Pristina mother appeared to be the norm, with families pressuring their daughters into early marriages and disarming their potential at a young age: 'I couldn't go into high school because they didn't let me, and when I was seventeen years old, they married me off … When I was nineteen, I had the first kid and had to grow up and deal, and now I have to do everything to get my kids a better life since I didn't have it'.[36] As is the case with structural violence, underpinned by psychological and physical abuse, every community member played a role in the cycle of gender-based subjugation. In perfect albeit destructive harmony, families laid the groundwork, husbands took over, and in-laws chimed in to create an orchestra of suppression.

The reality, as mothers exposed, is that the abuse against women and girls has continued unabated, with one future participant noting how 'parents are not allowing their daughters to continue their studies, especially in rural areas of Kaçanik, and after stopping them from going to school, as soon as they are sixteen, the girls get married off'.[37] A prospective Notetaker also shed light on this generational dimension through her personal family history: 'My grandmother was fifteen when she got married; her husband was twenty-six and the authority. She can never say no to anything, was constantly scared—"Maybe he will beat me". It is something that can be passed on … we do have high rates of women being killed by their husbands in Kosovo and high rates of domestic violence; less and less cases are being reported in rural areas'.[38] Corroborating this, a Pristina participant-to-be asserted, 'Domestic violence is the biggest problem here', adding 'domestic violence is rising; I think it is rising'.[39] While mothers were divided as to whether conditions for women were improving, few denied that violence in various forms was present. Not least because it can become a push factor for children as witnesses in their homes—as will be discussed in detail in the next chapter on family dynamics—domestic violence is an issue with society-wide implications. More by design than

[35] 200205 XK MSP EnES 1 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 3 – 6.
[36] 200205 XK MSP EnES 2 | Pristina, Paragraph 99.
[37] 200207 XK MSP EnRK 4 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 58.
[38] 200205 XK MSN EnMO 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 62 – 63.
[39] 200206 XK MSP EnMO 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 67.

chance, areas with high rates of 'home grown' violence tend to contribute to the vulnerability of communities and in turn make them more opportune grounds for recruitment.

Gender-based discrimination locked a high number of participants firmly into singular identity constructs, resulting in roles limited to the domestic sphere and identities reduced to wife- and motherhood. Prescribed roles served to restrict the social interactions and physical movements of mothers to the home, where they lived to serve in-laws and husbands. The physical isolation and absence of trusted friendship groups were a product of prescribed roles, with many being driven by the fear of being shunned for not keeping up with community expectations. 'Because they are not expected to have friends; they are expected to stay home, they will be labelled if they have a lot of friends', a future Pristina Notetaker said before relaying how her mother had been impacted by this generational malaise: 'My mum doesn't have a lot of friends because she was taught by her mother and her parents-in-law that she should stay home'. The fear of being shamed was key in dissuading women from raising their voice and going against community norms, since 'there are people saying, if a woman says something about what is disturbing her, there are people that will say, "Oh, she's damaged, because she raises her voice, because she tells us her concerns'.[40]

Several mothers spoke freely about their personal roadblocks and these destructive dynamics during their entry interviews, often singling out their husbands and in-laws as the gatekeepers and barriers. Some talked about the long-term consequences, including to their health, like the following mother: 'Unless my father-in-law gave the green light, we couldn't even leave the house … I developed an ear infection and I had to keep it that way for up to a month because I wasn't allowed to go to visit the doctor—I had to keep serving everyone tea in the family of up to thirty people', leaving her with permanent damage and the need for an operation that she has yet to have.[41] The community of Kaçanik, which tended overall to take the more conservative approach to women's rights, appeared until recently to have a blanket ban on women being free to decide on their movements ('Three years ago, women in my community were not allowed to go out and take the bus to go wherever they wanted to go because they would be perceived as not great mothers or wives, as people believe that women should stay at home and take care of the home and their children. It was my personal experience, and I am telling the truth').[42]

[40] 200205 XK MSN EnLK 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 78 – 82, 55 – 59.
[41] 200207 XK MSP EnES 1 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 79 – 82.
[42] 200207 XK MSP EnRK 4 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 58

Ultimately, a lifetime in the service of anyone but themselves left many mothers without a trusted network and far from having asserted their voice and reached their potential. The entry interviews clearly indicated that self-confidence levels were being supressed by familial and community factors and actors. In the absence of, inter alia, self-respect, hobbies, and personal aspirations, many defined themselves through—and made their confidence contingent on—the lives and decisions of their husbands and children. In the telling words of a Pristina mother, 'The most influence comes from my husband and this determines whether I feel good or bad … even though I am a housewife he always tries to create a higher reputation for me to the kids and to other relatives in the family'.[43] Questions around pride and confidence frequently prompted interviewees to mention their children, and to discuss the lack of support they had received to pursue an education beyond primary or high school. While the latter ranked as the most frequent sources of low self-confidence, it also acted as a motivating factor to begin to challenge barriers, with several hoping that the MotherSchools provided an opportunity to work on themselves for the sake of their children. Given how inextricably linked their identities were to the actions and inactions of their children, however, a number of future participants were unable yet to define themselves beyond merely motherhood. 'The biggest challenge that I fear to face is that my children could be unsuccessful in the future', as a mother noted, speaking to a general attitude that tends to reflect the deeper impact of conservative community dynamics, namely that mothers often are fearful because they tend to be blamed but rarely celebrated for their children's failures and successes, respectively.[44]

INSPIRING ROLE MODELS IN SAFE SPACES | MOTHERSCHOOLS IMPACT

> *What has changed is that now I speak more; I am not silent. Because sometimes things are imposed on us due to the situation we are in, or the economic situation, and sometimes I also have to be silent because I do not have another option. But now, after going through MotherSchools, I am aware that I am not an object—that I do not have to listen to anyone else. Just because I have been through a situation doesn't mean that I must close my eyes and pretend that I don't hear things. In our society, if you get divorced, whether you are an educated woman or an uneducated woman, people will treat you differently. But then after the MotherSchools, I realised that although I am in this situation, I will be able to find a job and not close my eyes to the opportunities I am given.*[45]

[43] 200205 XK MSP EnLK 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 34 – 35.
[44] 200206 XK MSP EnUK 3 | Pristina, Paragraph 23.
[45] 201209 XK MSP ExMO 2 | Pristina, Paragraph 89.

– MotherSchools Graduate, Pristina, Exit Interview

> *During the sessions we discussed that we are afraid to talk in our families or don't talk about them too much. When I used to go to the sessions and came back, I felt relieved because we were able to ask questions and get the answers to our questions without being discriminated or laughed at. On the contrary. We were being listened to and feeling comfortable sharing our opinions. We came from different backgrounds, social or professional or academic, and we all had different daily lives. We were able to share everything and feeling comfortable sharing. MotherSchools has taught us that communication is the best thing that people can do to one another—to make them feel comfortable and confident to discuss their opinions. We need to discuss.*[46]
>
> *– MotherSchools Graduate, Kaçanik, Exit Interview*

Individual identity work through a group process and safe space environment has awoken in the graduates a deeper understanding of the personal perils and wider implications of self-neglect. Building trusted relationships and likeminded networks of mothers has broken up their sense of isolation, acted as a platform to address trauma, and boosted self-confidence levels and critical thinking abilities. With the baseline departure in mind, merely the act of breaking up the physical and social isolation of mothers through weekly MotherSchools sessions has been a significant feat. This was facilitated by the MotherSchools ground rules, which acted as the foundation of trust building. Hereby, all members of each group were bound by a code of confidentiality to ensure that personal stories did not leave the safe space and were not carried into communities to fuel the rumour mill ('Outside of the school, these women hesitated to talk about their problems and personal stories, however within the school it is this trust that allowed them to express themselves freely and learn from each other's stories').[47] For many this had been the first opportunity to prioritise their own wellbeing, briefly breaking with the habitual routine of living under the watchful eyes and in the service of others. 'This was my first time participating in a group and sharing my problems and opinions without feeling judged', a Kaçanik graduate shared during her exit interview, while a fellow graduate from Pristina revealed, 'It was the first time in my forty-four years that I had something to do … previously there were some topics that had never crossed my mind'.[48] Given that the idea of friendships had been tarnished by negative experiences, being able to speak their mind without fearing social repercussions 'serves as emotional therapy for them', as a Teacher put forward.[49] As such, the safe space provided a

[46] 201208 XK MSP ExUK 2 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 100.
[47] 201208 XK MST ExES 2 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 112.
[48] 201208 XK MSP ExRK2 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 91; 201209 XK MSP ExRK2 | Pristina, Paragraph 85.
[49] 201215 XK MST ExES 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 128.

platform to work towards regaining strength and a sense of self-worth in order, for instance, to address trauma through storytelling and advance critical thinking. 'The most important part in our group was communication; we were able to share our stories', a graduate stated, recalling, 'I shared the story about my daughter, how I gave birth to her in wartime Kosovo, and it was something I kept with me for years. And when I finally read it out, I felt so relieved'.[50] Mothers who previously lacked a sounding board now found themselves in a supportive environment conducive to reflection and recovery.

In starting with the Self, the MotherSchools put in motion a step-by-step process to journey from intent and awareness to conviction and action. Now cognisant that effective 'Parenting for Peace' demands a solid personal identity foundation, graduates are paying attention to personal needs, rediscovering ambitions, and moving closer to a role model standing. In so doing, mothers are eroding the very narrow, superimposed identity constructs that had worked to silence and marginalise them in the first place.

This heightened attention to self-care became evident in a wide array of statements like that of a Pristina graduate: 'Something that has caught my attention during these trainings is that I wasn't giving myself enough space for just myself. You cannot be a good parent if you do not take time for yourself as well. I always tried my best and I always was thinking I was doing my best, but then I stopped and saw that if I don't deal with myself then I am not doing my best'.[51] Beyond embracing this newfound awareness, graduates are reporting on how they have begun to make tangible changes to embolden their identities. Mothers who are homemakers have become especially active in this respect. Whereas some had reported feeling inferior and stuck during the entry interviews, many appear now to be dedicating time to themselves. A mother recalled how 'it hit me because we have so little focus on ourselves'.[52] Graduates have not only become more cognisant of their numerous contributions at home and beyond; they are also overcoming perceived limits to their role model potential. 'Before this', in the words of a Kaçanik graduate, 'we weren't even given an opportunity to think about other roles; it was all about the home and taking care of the children'. The MotherSchools, she explained, 'gave me more confidence' to provide advice as a community member and grandmother, and within the women's association of which she is a part.[53] A clear process of moving from realisation to action can be observed across all groups, showing how mothers are daring to do more than to

[50] 201209 XK MSP ExJK 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 110.
[51] 201215 XK MSP ExES 2 | Pristina, Paragraph 163.
[52] 201209 XK MSP ExMO 3 | Pristina, Paragraph 89.
[53] 201208 XK MSP ExMO 1 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 89.

dream: 'Before this it was just a dream and I didn't believe it, but now I say, "everything could happen"'.[54] A few graduates suggested that the MotherSchools had motivated them to act on their aspirations. One mother, for instance, is now intent on seeking employment, attributing this to her heightened self-confidence ('So now, it has given me the motivation to want even more and to find a job so that I can be more independent').[55] Another graduate is looking to 'get involved in politics', as a Teacher recalled: 'She said she is ready now, "I reached all my life objectives and want to try politics"', adding, 'Speaking in general, all the mothers seem to have grown, even though at the beginning they were modest … But then everything changed: they were free to share their thoughts and starting from just telling their names they reached this point where they shared with us their future intentions. You could see them grow every session'.[56] Beyond the mothers, the trainings also impact individuals within and outside of the groups. Along these lines, a Pristina Notetaker concluded that the experience has given her a new perspective: 'I am also looking for opportunities in education development and gender studies, because I feel like MotherSchools has shaped that opinion for me—that I have to do something to contribute to the situation; the education part in Kosovo'.[57]

Graduates have begun asserting their authority and voice to challenge the dynamics of systematic suppression that have encroached on the rights and inclusion of women for generations. Against this background, the mothers of Kosovo are taking considerable strides towards unlocking their potential in all areas of life, particularly in the security sphere. In the private and public realms alike, mothers are finding that they are speaking up in ways that previously they had deemed unthinkable. To this effect, mothers provided examples of interactions with colleagues, husbands, and other individuals in their lives. A big part of this has been the ability to remove fear from the equation. Inspired by her new network of mothers, a graduate expressed how she felt 'more freedom' and how now when she found herself in the company of others 'I could talk and not worry if I say something wrong or not'.[58] A high cluster of statements likewise emerged around confidence shifts vis-à-vis husbands, with graduates observing a new ability to express themselves 'freely' and 'more powerfully' in everyday interactions: 'I can say my self-confidence has increased. For example, whenever I would talk to my husband or had a problem with him, I would not stand up for my opinions. And MotherSchools has taught me that communication is important in solving family

[54] 201209 XK MSP ExUK 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 113 – 114.
[55] 201209 XK MSP ExRK2 | Pristina, Paragraph 126.
[56] 201215 XK MST ExRK1 | Pristina, Paragraph 28.
[57] 201208 XK MSN ExUK 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 94.
[58] 201208 XK MSP ExRK1 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 115.

problems'.[59] Another especially compelling story relayed by a Pristina Notetaker, which deserves to be quoted in full, speaks to how some have already prompted behavioural and attitudinal changes in their partners: 'One of the mothers shared the story about her husband, how he used to come home late from work and expect everything to be ready. After MotherSchools and understanding how to be a "good enough mother", she said, "I wanted to be a good enough wife as well, so I decided to take care of myself". That's when she started taking a rest when she came home from work. Then her husband was at first, "Why isn't lunch ready, where is my dinner?" But he slowly started to understand that he had to give his portion of contribution to the household. And by the end of the sessions, the Teacher asked the mother, "How is it going?" and the mother said, "It is going perfectly; he is a fast learner"'.[60]

Building on this section, which has discussed their development of 'the Self', subsequent impact sections will more closely examine how the graduates are applying heightened confidence, practical skills, and critical thinking to explore their changemaking potential beyond the safe space of the MotherSchools. 'The ones who had doubts in their role in security and other areas', as a Teacher found, 'are now more aware how important and how big their role is'.[61] The remaining 'insights to impact' analysis will explore how their role unfolded and the ways in which mothers are translating this newfound confidence and awareness into action, going from 'securing themselves' to working towards securing their homes and neighbourhoods.

[59] 201208 XK MSP ExRK2 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 89.
[60] 201208 XK MSN ExUK 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 97.
[61] 201209 XK MST ExUK 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 104.

2.2 THE FAMILY | REMOVING PUSH FACTORS BY UPGRADING PARENTING

> *In cases where domestic violence is seen as something normal, extremism has already started there. … In this instance, those children will be raised in silence, physical violence, or verbal violence. And automatically these children can become the criminals of the future. The collective violence over time can turn into another form of violence. And if this happens in every family, the future with the same perspective means it can happen to all of us.*[62]
>
> *– MotherSchools Graduate, Kaçanik, Exit Interview*

> *I think that youth are attracted to extremism because as children they had different encounters and problems within their families, such as domestic violence. This pushes them towards extremism, and the society as a whole struggles. To solve this problem, parents should be more engaged with their children's activities … Parents being up to date on what their children are up to would be one of the solutions. Another one is not just saying, 'Don't do it!' but talking to them about the reasons. … I am not happy with the level of communication that parents of my community have with their children. I am aware that parents have a lot of responsibilities, but the lack of time that is given to children affects them in many ways. As such, I talked and discussed to other parents about the lessons we got from MotherSchools and gave them tips on how to solve those problems.*[63]
>
> *– MotherSchools Graduate, Pristina, Exit Interview*

As the mothers of Pristina and Kaçanik highlight above, communication and tolerance can be taught at home, as can violence and prejudice. While the trajectories of communities, societies, and future generations are linked to parenting styles and family dynamics, these are the preserve of the private sphere. This in turn renders their push factor potential more difficult to probe and uncover than community-level factors like poverty and drugs. In this view, family violence and counterproductive parenting techniques are 'hidden drivers' of violent extremism. The MotherSchools method, as the previous section has shown, through its local-level parenting approach, manages to create the trust necessary to permeate this otherwise inaccessible realm. The resulting insights are unique in that they allow us to trace the intimate journey by which participants remove barriers to their prevention role and begin effecting changes that work to safeguard their homes, communities, and future generations.

[62] 201208 XK MSP ExMO 3 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 95 – 96.
[63] 201215 XK MSP ExRK1 | Pristina, Paragraph 142.

> *I think that mothers would have an impact on this [spread of violent extremism] only if they would know how to talk to their children from a really young age. And to tell them what is good and what is bad; to teach them that it is not necessary to go and fight in wars that have nothing to do with your country and family. And in general, to teach them that they do not have to be scared to talk about these topics with them so that they get informed in time.*[64]
>
> *– MotherSchools Participant, Pristina, Entry Interview*

> *Even though I married off my two older daughters due to our economic situation, we married them on the condition that they would be able to continue their studies and the husbands would be able to provide for them. One lives in Saudi Arabia and one in Germany. They were really good students and had the highest grades. We had no other option.*[65]
>
> *– MotherSchools Participant, Kaçanik, Entry Interview*

The baseline data indicates that the family-level prevention framework was weakened by a range of deficits in parenting methods and family dynamics. On the one hand, the sense of isolation and vulnerability was augmented by counterproductive approaches at home, such as authoritarian styles than can have an isolating effect on adolescents. On the other hand, a missing culture of open communication between mothers and children appeared to have produced glaring information gaps that in turn exacerbated the concern levels of prospective participants. Concerns over their children entering the period of adolescence figured as a chief motivation among participants to attend the MotherSchools. When asked about how negative influences might impact their children, they generally expressed feeling anxious but tended to place the blame on external factors beyond their immediate control, including peer groups and illicit substances. 'Because my kids are right at that age where they can fall under the negative influences', a future Kaçanik participant explained, 'they make me very worried—especially the drugs and the negative things', while a fellow mother from her town said, 'I am worried because I do not know with whom my children are becoming friends or where they are staying and which cafeterias and what sort of drinks they are served'.[66] Where mothers conceded to feeling apprehensive about the prospect of their children becoming exposed to radical influences, drivers external to the family once again came to the fore. In Pristina, mothers were most open about their fears surrounding violent extremism: 'I am so concerned about radicalism and extremism and especially drugs, because since a girl and the

[64] 200205 XK MSP EnLK 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 79.
[65] 200207 XK MSP EnGN 1 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 25 – 27.
[66] 200207 XK MSP EnMO 2 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 62; 200207 XK MSP EnRK 1 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 64.

older boy are adolescents, you don't know with whom they are going to school—with what friends—and if they get to try for example drugs. It is so hard to take them out of that challenge'.[67]

Despite the mothers' dedication and best efforts to protect their children, the methods some had been applying are inadvertently undermining their safeguarding aims. This is a significant consideration in that counterproductive parenting styles can have adverse and isolating effects on children. As such, parents can become a push factor element, especially when they choose force or yelling over constructive communication as a form of discipline, which in the communities of implementation was not altogether absent ('Sometimes it happens that I am very nervous and I slap them—not hard—but most of the time I try to be strict and get the thing that I want').[68] Across all groups of mothers, authoritarian rather than authoritative approaches could be gleaned from the interviews. Far from embodying the 'lighthouse' metaphor from the MotherSchools curriculum, some mothers hinted at being excessively controlling and overbearing towards their sons and daughters. To quote a Pristina MotherSchools candidate's response when asked how she went about safeguarding her children, 'I control them; call them a lot on the phone, video calls too. And when they come home, I try to control their bags too'.[69] Future participants were not altogether oblivious of the possible ramifications of parenting deficits, with a mother from Pristina acknowledging, 'I think that sometimes I can do something that can hurt them but I don't know what, and I want to have better conversations with them and to work with them well'.[70]

Exceptions notwithstanding, responses tended to underscore how few had considered the impact of family dynamics and parenting approaches on rendering their children less or indeed more prone to outside influences. Overall, the dynamics garnered from the entry data speak to a clear link and interrelationship between parental information gaps and familial communication deficits. While some mothers proposed not knowing enough about their children's challenges, such information voids often are a product of parenting limitations and familial environments that deter children from opening up in the first place.

A dominant theme centred around the frustration of mothers in recognising but not knowing how to deal with concerns and challenges. Where future participants pinpointed common warning signs and behavioural changes on the part of their children,

[67] 200206 XK MSP EnUK 4 | Pristina, Paragraph 74 – 80.
[68] 200207 XK MSP EnES 2 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 74.
[69] 200206 XK MSP EnUK 4 | Pristina, Paragraph 74 – 80.
[70] 200206 XK MSP EnES 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 39.

they commonly expressed feelings of helplessness when contemplating possible reasons or solutions. Beyond missing vital parenting tools and perspectives, however, some mothers were also lacking supportive allies in their husbands at home. Fathers in many cases appeared to be absent authority figures whose decision-maker role at times was even misappropriated by their wives, which only helped to further isolate fathers from their children. When considering parental concerns, one of the Kaçanik mothers, for instance, found that her sixteen-year-old son had begun to change during high school, finding that 'he started to become a problematic person'. The mother felt at a loss when trying to identify what had caused her son to stop listening to her, and to start hanging out with 'problematic friends'. She also expressed surprise, 'since my family have money and wealth … he has the books like the most expensive ones, and they have new phones; they live a life like they are really rich'.[71] A missing feature in such statements included a consideration of the foundation of mother-child relationships. Material and other compensation mechanisms by parents cannot successfully offset for a lack of time spent and insufficient emotional investment. On the contrary, such methods may only serve to further isolate a child. 'Maybe because of the fact that the parents don't spend time with their kids and discuss the situation with their children', a prospective Pristina Notetaker observed, 'they could be manipulated', and concluded that developing a tradition of discussion and conversation could be a natural antidote.[72]

Feelings of helplessness and a diminished sense of agency was intensified in some cases by the absence of parenting allies, namely men, as supportive husbands to their wives and present fathers in the lives of their children. The image of the father as 'a miracle from god', as one mother described her husband, could not be upheld by an analysis of the entry data.[73] A close inspection revealed that a high number of fathers for the most part did not positively impact family dynamics or indeed play an active role at home. On the theme of 'the absent father', several mothers reported that their husbands were mainly at work or had left altogether. 'It has been seven years since their father left … he's married with someone else now and has another family, he left me pregnant here … what concerns me the most is that he doesn't communicate with my girls', a mother from Pristina reported, while a mother from Kaçanik noted how her husband had likewise abandoned the family to move abroad.[74] Even where they

[71] 200207 XK MSP EnES 3 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 50 – 56.
[72] 200206 XK MSP EnGN 4 | Pristina, Paragraph 80.
[73] 200205 XK MSP EnGN 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 51.
[74] 200206 XK MSP EnUK 3 | Pristina, Paragraph 40; 200207 XK MSP EnES 1 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 34 – 39.

have been present, however, child-father bonds purportedly were marked by a certain emotional distance, as evidence by statements like 'He doesn't deal with them that much'.[75]

The image of the 'authoritarian father' emerged in yet greater measures. Husbands as fathers were deemed in the estimation of several mothers to be the sole decision-makers, bearers of wisdom, and the family authority figures whom children respected but feared. The authority of mothers can suffer from a counterintuitive logic of hierarchies that also reinforces and sustains patriarchal systems. 'Even though when I say something they may not listen to me', a Pristina mother explained, 'and my husband can say exactly the same thing and they accept it'.[76] The group's future Notetaker echoed this sentiment, finding that 'there are a lot of families in Kosovo where children do not take advice from their mum' but turn to their fathers on topics like their career. She added that this is underpinned by the fact that mothers do not understand their value and contribution to families and societies.[77] Possibly due in part to low self-esteem, a number of future participants provided examples of how they perpetuated this system, which in turn helped only to draw a wedge between fathers and their children: 'I feel good when he gives the last word, because even if he says something wrong it will not be my responsibility if it goes wrong. … Whenever my daughters ask me something I always tell them, "There is your father; go ask him"', a Kaçanik mother relayed, while a fellow prospective participant went yet a step further: 'I always told my husband when he came home if there was a problem to deal with … I could have done it, but I wanted my kids to fear someone, to know what it is like. Even when I yelled at the kids my husband said that was nice, because they deserved it'.[78] Against the background of such intricate dynamics, it becomes clear that mothers do have a part to play in shaping father-child relationships and thus also the potential to bring their husbands deeper into the parenting realm.

COMMUNICATIVE FAMILIES, FATHERS INCLUDED | MOTHERSCHOOLS IMPACT

> *The school has convinced me more about my methods in parenting. I have earned self-confidence and through the school I have felt the support of other women. But I think the biggest impact it had was on my husband. I as a woman tried to talk to him. When I shared with him the experiences of other mothers, how they coped with their problems, it has helped me to change his approach to our children. … And I could see then that this has touched him*

[75] 200207 XK MSP EnMO 3 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 53.
[76] 200206 XK MSP EnGN 4 | Pristina, Paragraph 33.
[77] 200205 XK MSN EnLK 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 102.
[78] 200207 XK MSP EnMO 4 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 30; 200207 XK MSP EnGN 2 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 39 – 42.

emotionally and made him change his approach. … He used to judge much more before, but now he thinks more deeply and has a more sensitive approach to our children and more careful behaviour … and he is not only being less judgemental now but also listens to what they say more. This has an impact. Men usually do not express themselves too much.[79]

– MotherSchools Graduate, Pristina, Exit Interview

My husband's uncle's son was showing signs of extremism. And whenever we would go there to have tea or something, nobody would talk to him because he was so closed off. I would always try to make him talk to me and tell him how I used to take care of him and change his diapers. But now he no longer wants to talk. We believe that his aunt—on his mother's sister—was an extremist in Syria and was trying to get him to go. Not just me but also having help from his family, we would try to convince him to stop being an extremist. If it was someone close to me, and because a lot of reasons why people become extremists is financial, even if I did not have money, I would take my last cent to stop him taking money from the recruiter or that foundation. I would offer it instead.[80]

– MotherSchools Graduate, Kaçanik, Exit Interview

Having absorbed the learnings around child psychology and family dynamics, graduates are cognisant of the need to shape parenting methods in accordance with the respective developmental stages and characters of their sons and daughters. Where mothers previously had been overbearing in their approaches, they are now purportedly affording their children more space and a greater degree of independence, replacing authoritarian with authoritative methods, and mastering communication styles that also function to safeguard their children. In the formative period of their children's identity formation, mothers are taking on board practical tools and concepts like the 'lighthouse' metaphor, which sees mothers as a support mechanism to which their children can always turn as they explore the high seas of adolescence and early adulthood; as the lighthouse is a permanent fixture, however, it will not follow them around. One mother noted, 'I have been strict in cases when maybe it was not necessary and now I understand that they are young', which has convinced her to allow them to 'become more independent and to see things from a different point of view'.[81] A fellow graduate, concerned about her older son, recognised that her authoritarian stance had been alienating him: 'I wanted to control him and I was more aggressive, and now I changed and I sit with him and we discuss things so I don't yell at him anymore'.[82] Their transformation has been especially noticeable in the nuanced communication culture that graduates are adopting, which serves to foster independence and safeguard alike without

[79] 201215 XK MSP ExRK2 | Pristina, Paragraph 107.
[80] 201208 XK MSP ExRK4 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 134.
[81] 201215 XK MSP ExRK1 | Pristina, Paragraph 118.
[82] 201208 XK MSP ExMO 1 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 106.

removing the foundation of structure and direction that would leave perilous voids for recruiters to fill ('I am stricter when it comes to different topics, meaning I am more authoritative—but MotherSchools has taught me to be more lenient in terms of allowing space to my children in topics that are not that serious and concerning and dangerous').[83]

The following excerpt from a Pristina graduate is representative of how mothers have begun to master the art of keeping a watchful eye while teaching tolerance and allowing their children to express themselves freely: 'I discussed various topics with my children. I asked them about their approach to different topics to see how my children would react if for instance someone offends his family, or if someone violated his rights. If there is a sign that my child is judgemental of other people and thinks that opinion of others are not worth it because they think differently, I would see this as a first sign that something is changing my child. Because these people teach the youth to hate people who think differently. Through discussion, I can see the way my child reacts and see this as a sign when something is changing'.[84] The graduate's analysis points to how trust and a strong communication culture is also an important source of information for mothers in their capacity as prevention allies, alerting them to possible warning signs that their children may not even have registered.

Now that graduates are aware of how family dynamics can play into the hands of recruiters, they feel a greater responsibility to assume a role in 'parenting for peace'. Their deeper knowledge of drivers has sensitised mothers to the complex interplay of dynamics in the radicalisation process, including how family violence and marital imbalances can negatively impact the identity of children. This is critical at a time when, in the words of a Pristina graduate, 'the youth is creating a personality of their own, which is not stable or defined, and in this period other people can impact them and convince them to take different ideas, such ideas as extremism'.[85] As such, a Kaçanik graduate while discussing the drivers of extremism, explained, 'I think a big factor is when parents argue and have no connection with each other, and then the child will close off'.[86]

The following three excerpts from graduates across all groups illustrates how effective parenting as a prevention tool has become a central reference point for the mothers of Kosovo in the fight against extremism: 'The lack of freedom of communicating within the family, sharing their problems, is what forces children to express themselves to someone else; to find

[83] 201215 XK MSP ExRK1 | Pristina, Paragraph 116.
[84] 201215 XK MSP ExRK2 | Pristina, Paragraph 129.
[85] 201215 XK MSP ExLK 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 135.
[86] 201208 XK MSP ExRK4 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 137 – 138.

a group of people who will listen to them'; 'I think that the children are not free to speak with parents; they cannot express open opinions, because they are triggered by parents who are very strict. Extremists can then manipulate teenagers'; 'The biggest threat is a lack of closeness with the children. If the child doesn't feel free to express his wish, express his opinion, this can be dangerous, because they are at an age where they attempt to do things, but they don't have anyone to talk to. … Because a child can have friendships, but you won't be able to know who his or her friends are, and there can be one bad influence that can make him follow. And the children will think, "If I tell my mother or father, they will just yell at me, so I will just try it myself".[87] In general, the mothers now possess a far deeper knowledge of context-specific push and pull factors, also on how family structures and geographic circumstance can converge in places like Kaçanik. 'Seeing that Hani Elizit and Kaçanik are close to the [North] Macedonian border', a graduate explained, 'we have the most cases of extremists, because they come from Macedonia and a lot of our girls are married from families who come from Macedonia, where there are the highest number of extremists'.[88]

Upgraded parenting techniques and improved family dynamics are reducing the push factor potential of family environments. New communication approaches are enabling mothers to broach taboo topics like violent extremism, advancing familial knowledge and awareness around recruitment tactics in the process. In some case, mothers are already acting on warning signs and conceivable extremist influences threatening their children and other family members. The exit interviews suggest that the mothers' heightened self-confidence and knowledge have instilled in them the conviction that they are now well-positioned to detect the early warning signs and intervene if their children are at risk of becoming radicalised. 'I hope I never have to face this', a Kaçanik graduate noted, 'but if it happened, I am sure that I would see the early signs and may be able to prevent it while it still in the early stages, and I am sure I would be able to prevent it earlier compared to other mothers who haven't learned all of the things I have'.[89] Indeed, mothers across all groups have arrived at the understanding that families are an integral part of the early prevention security architecture. In the words of a Pristina graduate, 'Families play an important role in prevention and detecting these early warning signs because if we educate our children enough with regard to these topics then we wouldn't have children or youth joining terrorist

[87] 201208 XK MST ExES 2 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 235 – 237; 201209 XK MSP ExES 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 153 – 154; 201209 XK MSP ExES 2 | Pristina, Paragraph 106.
[88] 201208 XK MSP ExRK4 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 134.
[89] 201208 XK MSP ExMO 1 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 140.

organisations or becoming extremists'.[90] Beyond intervening in the process, therefore, prevention requires a degree of awareness surrounding the threat, also on the part of children who often may not be sensitised to a recruiter's manipulation tactics. The aforementioned mother recalled how she had come to discuss the dynamics of recruitment with her daughter after she became curious when the topic came up in a movie they were watching, 'so I sat her down and started explaining recruitment and everything else'.[91] Some cases, however, had looked to have been acute, demanding mothers to act before raising awareness. One of the Teachers from Kaçanik relayed the story of a mother whose son supposedly had been exposed to possible extremist influences. In her account, the mother had become concerned about him spending time playing video games with a man whom she deemed a possible threat. Yet beyond merely intervening and 'being protective' by preventing her son from visiting him again—since 'she thought that this man has something to do with extremism'—the mother used this opportunity to educate him on the topic of violent extremism and 'how you can go down the wrong path'.[92]

During the exit interviews, several graduates opened up about family members who were or had been engaged in extremism. These stories highlight how effective the local-level MotherSchools approach is in identifying hidden manifestations of toxic influences even where there is a sense that the issue has subsided due for instance to the demise of the caliphate. Why concern levels in Kaçanik remain relatively high becomes clear when considering the graduates' frank revelations. One Kaçanik mother could list a whole range of personal cases, past and ongoing: 'My dear friend is a teacher while her father and brother are in Syria … My friend's sister is in Syria as well … I also have many family members who are extremists'. She also noted how the programme had taught her to better identify the manifestations, and that one of her family members had been exhibiting signs of engagement while she was attending the MotherSchools, 'but we took him back to the safe path'.[93] Those who had not been personally confronted with the topic at the very latest began speaking about it in the wake of the 2020 terror attack in the heart of Vienna. As the Notetaker from Kaçanik observed, 'This was very eye-opening for the participants and I noticed one mother she said, "Until now it was a taboo topic and even if I tried to talk about it, I would be shut by others". But when the attacks happened in Vienna she said, "We were all in front of the TV with the children and the children

[90] 201209 XK MSP ExMO 3 | Pristina, Paragraph 138.
[91] 201209 XK MSP ExMO 3 | Pristina, Paragraph 138.
[92] 201208 XK MST ExES 2 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 285.
[93] 201208 XK MSP ExRK4 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 133.

were asking questions like 'What kind of people do you think did this?'". And she said, "It served us—it forced us—to face the topic of extremism and to talk about it within the family"'.[94]

To build a united front against extremism in their homes, participants are now also bringing their husbands more decidedly into the parenting fold. Where initially fathers tended to be a barrier to the safeguarding efforts of mothers, graduates appear to have asserted their authority and paved the way for men to follow their example. This is helping to erode traditional gender roles that drive a wedge between fathers and their children and leave mothers with the double burden of domestic and work-related duties as homemakers or professionals. In building a united front with their wives, fathers are now also learning about violent extremism and reducing their push factor potential. The realisation through the session learnings and homework set in that 'we usually speak about the mother, about the role of the wife—the female only—but then we forget about the fathers'.[95] Yet the 'barriers to entry', so to speak, are high in traditional Kosovar families where domestic violence and rigid gender roles are not uncommon. Against this background, it follows that younger mothers 'were telling stories where their husbands were helping them more with housework or helping with taking care of children' while in the case of 'the older mothers, since their husbands were also older, it was more difficult to change them'.[96] Nevertheless, improvements across all age groups can be gleaned from the exit data, 'especially during the pandemic, where the husbands were helping them also with housework'.[97] Overall, mothers are noticing attitudinal and behaviour shifts on the part of husbands that stand in stark contrast to baseline points of departure.

Going back to the early stages of the MotherSchools training, a Teacher from Pristina recalled how during the in-person sessions at the local library, participants had been sharing how their husbands had felt threatened and even attempted to dissuade them from joining and suggested they were wasting their time. A mother had shared how when her son asked for help with his homework her husband would chime in passive aggressively, saying, 'Oh son, leave your mum alone because she is going to that school to talk bad about your father'. Whereas fathers originally tended to undermine their partners, mother nevertheless persevered, starting with asserting their voice: 'And then she said that she responded with, "I don't blame you as

[94] 201208 XK MSN ExUK 2 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 127 – 128.
[95] 201209 XK MST ExUK 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 36.
[96] 201208 XK MST ExES 2 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 152.
[97] 201208 XK MST ExES 2 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 152.

long as I am still married to you", and I think that took a bit of confidence to say that because a lot of mothers don't do that usually'. The group 'appreciated and applauded' the mother for breaking with gendered subservience by showing courage and taking these first steps to challenge his attitude.[98]

Ironically, the inclusion of fathers appears in some cases to have been successful precisely because some previously had not been encouraged to assume an active role. A study Women without Borders conducted on the potential of East African fathers to challenge extremism sheds some light on a possible universal dynamic in this regard. The research findings revealed that fathers are often absent as well as ambivalent and insecure about their parenting identity and role, resulting, inter alia, in their withdrawal and shirking of responsibilities. Along similar lines, a Pristina graduate, upon realising that she had inadvertently isolated her husband, proceeded to engage and include him. Prompted by the MotherSchools to engage in more activities, as her Teacher recalled, 'One of the mothers started doing everything with her children but the father was not being included, so she invited him and wanted him to participate as well. They together as a family started this tradition where they would gather once a week and share stories and whatever they have been doing at school and work. And she said that this practice is creating a special bond between them'.[99] Across all groups, graduates found that 'the approach of my husband has changed', especially with respect to communication styles. This included fathers purportedly being more mellow towards their children and contemplating their own push factor potential ('Now after going through this school and talking with him, he realised the impact that the way you say something can have … He is softer now').[100] A wide variety of similar examples were cited by graduates, their Teachers, and Notetakers, with all pointing to noticeable shifts towards more cohesive, gender-equal, and communicative dynamics. While restructuring families demands time and effort, it is also a generational task that begins with authoritative role model parenting. Finally, the exit interviews also indicate that more serious hidden push factors have been addressed through the MotherSchools—including a case of domestic violence—and that graduates will fight for their rights to lead by example—for their children, other women in their communities, and, by extension, the parents of tomorrow. On this note, to conclude with a quote by a Teacher from Kaçanik,

[98] 201215 XK MST ExES 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 99 - 101
[99] 201208 XK MSN ExUK 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 45.
[100] 201215 XK MSP ExRK2 | Pristina, Paragraph 107.

I was really very thankful to the mother who in the beginning told us that she had domestic violence within the family because of different circumstances, but now they live together and it changed completely. So now they are very open with each other and they, I think, are past the conflict, and this was the proper example when we discussed that sometimes conflict brings also peace. Because she said, 'If I wouldn't have raised my concerns and so on, maybe I would be again be in this situation'. So this was a good example of a mother who was a victim before, but now, she was really is the leader in the group, and she took this as a strength to move forward, not as something to keep her in her victimisation part. She learnt a lot how to move forward. And also in the last sessions, she mentioned that maybe, she believed that there are mothers who didn't share everything with us, because they don't have the courage to do so, but she said that's why I wanted just to show an example that it is normal, we go in different kind of situations in our lives but it's better to speak and to find a solution, which was a positive example.[101]

[101] 201208 XK MST ExES 1 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 104 – 105.

2.3 THE COMMUNITY | TOWARDS A RESILIENT, INCLUSIVE, AND TOLERANT ENVIRONMENT

> *The school was like a therapy for me as a mother on how to see this issue [of violent extremism] from different perspectives. And how to notice the early signs related to terrorism. The school itself taught me how to start working from our family to create peace and love. Also, it taught me how to accept those who have tried something like this [returnees], and how to include them in the society again. It was like an academy for me. The fact is that before I was harsher when it came to these people and the people who force people to go down this path. The school taught me to think differently. Everyone can be a victim, and we need to think of ways to prevent this and bring them back into society.*[102]
>
> *– MotherSchools Graduate, Pristina, Exit Interview*

When assessing the community-level impact of MotherSchools programmes, an understanding of context-specific factors helps to shed light on how far the needle has moved in the respective sites of implementation; the degree to which toxic influences, misinformation, and other common drivers of extremism have been addressed through conversations or indeed actions. Observed and purported changes, captured through exit data, can be both behavioural like the uprooting of recruitment hotspots and attitudinal like impacting the way a community views or indeed approaches a whole range of topics. Since WwB's Parenting for Peace curricula are designed with context-specific adaptability in mind, groups go on to apply the competence and confidence trainings to their everyday lives and circumstances, shaping discussions and strategies in accordance with contemporary, urgent, and local needs. This final impact section thus shows how participants—having gone through the successive stages of the MotherSchools training, moving from the Self to parenting and familial safeguarding responsibilities—have arrived at contemplating their broader, societal role, particularly in the context of security. In Pristina and Kaçanik, the arguably most significant contribution lay in the attitudinal sphere: treating silence and trauma. By gaining a nuanced understanding of radicalisation dynamics and broaching taboo topics, for instance, participants succeeded in becoming more tolerant and critically aware of aspects relating to religion and returnees, and to transfer their awareness and knowledge of parenting and violent extremism to the broader community. Ultimately, as a holistic view of all 'baseline to impact' sections suggests, graduates are now embracing the well-known mantra 'the personal is political' at all levels: addressing personal trauma, neglect, and gender-based discrimination with the support of their new MotherSchools network; becoming role models at home with a view to breaking generational cycles of normalised

[102] 201215 XK MSP ExRK2 | Pristina, Paragraph 129.

violence; and asserting their voice beyond a familial setting to spread awareness of toxic influences in their communities and inspire women-led networks of likeminded allies.

AMBIGUOUSLY AWARE, AMBIVALENT & APPREHENSIVE | BASELINE CONTEXT

> *There is this woman here, a shoemaker, who had to put on a hijab because people from ISIS sent her ultimatums that she had to or they will kill her—because her personality did not correspond to her husband who was fighting for ISIS in Syria. She was living here and has two sons. We are suspicious because we have not seen or heard from her in a month. … They broke into her store about two months ago as a warning sign of what will happen if she does not get a hijab. They did not reveal their identity but based on the circumstances and correlation between the events and the fact that her husband lives in Syria we believe that this is what happened. Because word of mouth travels fast here in this small place, we would have heard of her or seen her, but we did not. There is little to no discussion about this, because if I start talking, or anyone else starts talking about such issues, people will ask for factual evidence. I would like to have a special class for teaching students on these issues.*[103]
>
> *– MotherSchools Participant, Kaçanik, Entry Interview*

> *I had a friend, and her cousin was married to a man who went to Syria to fight. She kept calling him to come back to her and the kids. And when he came back, he said, 'Okay, so we are going to celebrate, I booked some tickets to go to Turkey'. And they said okay, you know. And the place exploded, and they died. Because he was so brainwashed he even manipulated his own family. … My friend said she had no clue why her cousin's husband went … The only thing that comes in my mind, in Kosovo, is the economy. For a man like him, maybe, you don't feel you provide enough for the family … My friend told me so openly because she was so stressed … Here we tend not to care what other people are going through. We don't want that emotional burden. We just be like: 'No, thank you. My kids are fine!'*[104]
>
> *– MotherSchools Participant, Pristina, Entry Interview*

Future MotherSchools participants neither questioned nor feigned ignorance of past recruitment efforts in their country. Illustrative of how gravely and widely Kosovo has been impacted, a small number of prospective programme attendees cited personal encounters and evident manifestations. Likely owed to Kosovo's notoriety as a former hotspot of radicalisation that saw some four hundred individuals leave for Syria and Iraq, future MotherSchools participants generally neither questioned nor denied that their country had grappled with the issue. The media frenzy around returnees at the time also ensured that public awareness would not wane for some time. 'I know from what I heard from the media', a future Notetaker said, 'there are a lot of people that are recruited to fight for ISIS, and they even had a case where one of the men from Kaçanik became famous in a bad way as a jihadist in Syria,

[103] 200207 XK MSP EnRK 4 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 74.
[104] 200216 XK MSN EnMO 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 191 – 192.

and I heard they also had cases of people who returned, and that didn't go too well either'.[105] Even while few spoke freely beyond the level of hearsay, the readiness among a handful of future participants to provide anecdotal evidence of past and ongoing signs of radicalisation—including the above excerpts—hinted at the ongoing demand for prevention work in the communities of implementation.

The presence of common drivers of radicalisation could also be identified through these accounts. A future participant from Kaçanik relayed how her sister's husband had been killed while fighting in Syria, leaving behind his wife and three children. 'He was fighter in Kosovo in the war and a very nice person; he liked to help people, even in his everyday life he helped us', as she explained, before going on to discuss his motivations: 'He was attracted to go because they sent to him videos of people who were suffering, and he wanted to help. … No one knew about it—he only hugged the children before he decided to go. When the community of Kaçanik heard about it, they were all surprised because he was such a kind person, so respected in the community'.[106] Beyond falling victim to ISIS-engineered narratives of solidarity, a lack of financial means also cropped up as a typical motivating factor. Several other mothers could relay how relatives, friends, and colleagues were directly affected by extremism, with close family members departing for war zones or showing signs of extremist tendencies. Whereas in a couple of cases parents allegedly were able to prevent youths from diving deeper into extremism, most examples suggest that family and community members generally had not been cognisant of the warning signs ahead of individuals leaving for Syria and Iraq.

Despite the indication of a high baseline awareness and knowledge, when viewed as a collective, mothers appeared divided in their assessment of violent extremism as a concrete and enduring threat to their families and communities. A high number deemed their children and immediate environments to be altogether free of and immune to radical influences. The aforementioned exceptions notwithstanding, when probed about the issue within their respective communities, cracks in the prospective participants' context-specific understanding or indeed an outright unwillingness to speak about the topic began to emerge, as highlighted by statements like 'I didn't hear about this; we tried to educate our daughter without hate for others' or 'I have heard about this kind of issue in Kaçanik, but I never was interested in it'.[107] A certain detachment to the topic surfaced, with several mothers using

[105] 200205 XK MSN EnMO 2 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 37 – 38.
[106] 200207 XK MSP EnGN 1 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 74 – 76.
[107] 200205 XK MSP EnGN 2 | Pristina, Paragraph 73; 200207 XK MSP EnRK 1 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 67.

strikingly similar and negating language; not knowing, not being affected, not being concerned. The prevalence of such responses produced the impression of a personal distance to the topic of violent extremism. Further cementing this notion, a cluster of entry interview statements materialised around the idea that the mothers' social circles and families were immune to radicalisation: 'I don't know what to say, we are not really in contact with this subject, I know no one who is prone'; 'I have not heard about any cases in my family or extended family, but it wouldn't reach us because no one is engaged in those kinds of things'; and 'I am not afraid of radicalism and extremism because there are none of these things in our family. In our neighbourhood, when they are in the news—Kaçanik has had some of the most radicalism and extremism—personally I get afraid. But as a family, no'.[108] Genuine concern levels were difficult to gauge, with mothers purporting either to be highly concerned or fairly indifferent. A series of vague and often contradictory statements hinted that they were not just apprehensive; they also lacked sufficient tangible knowledge of extremism, with some expressing being unaware but concerned at the same time ('I don't know; I don't have any information. Whenever I hear about it, it makes me feel not so comfortable because of how some people are changing').[109]

An ambivalence towards the issue looked to stem from a mixture of factors, ranging from extremism's association with religion in public discourses to the perception that radicalisation was an external problem that happened elsewhere. In probing possible signs of extremism, knowledge gaps and a propensity to stereotype became clear. In attempting to identify some of the possible reasons for a reluctance to speak freely about toxic ideologies, a few clues in the answers provided by future participants can be gathered. For one, violent extremism's association with religion in public discussions acted as a possible deterrent, and as a source of frustration. 'I don't agree with the fact that they connect religion with extremism', a mother from Pristina found.[110] A prospective Teacher from Kaçanik suggested how this perceived link has dampened conversations. 'We do sometimes have this hesitation to talk', she explained, 'because they think that they are going against the religion'. Hinting at how a degree of intolerance dampened conversations, she recalled, 'I have the personal experience that when you go and talk about these things, they will ask you, "Are you religious? You don't know nothing about the religion"—things like that'. In line with the MotherSchools

[108] 200207 XK MSP EnGN 3 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 83; 200207 XK MSP EnGN 4 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 80; 200207 XK MSP EnUK 3 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 73.
[109] 200205 XK MSP EnMO 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 80.
[110] 200206 XK MSP EnMO 3 | Pristina, Paragraph 72.

philosophy, the Teacher added, 'It's very important to discuss that this has nothing to do with religion'.[111]

On the other end of the spectrum, albeit similarly prejudiced in character, some linked signs of extremism directly and solely to appearances. One mother explained how she had educated her children on extremism and promptly added, 'When I see a woman with a hijab or a man with a long beard, I go on the other side of the road, on the other sidewalk, because I get frightened'.[112] This indeed looked to be representative of a broader community outlook, with another Kaçanik mother asserting, 'No one talks about it; I don't know anyone. Most of the people here think that the women here are covering themselves because they are getting paid'.[113] Similarly, a Pristina mother used her judgement of appearances to detect supposed signs of extremism. 'I can tell from their body, appearance, and how they dress—apart from that I wouldn't know, but I am happy to be in my neighbourhood where it is not a problem'.[114] Surface-level and one-dimensional notions of manifestations and early warning signs suggest that genuine awareness and knowledge around the mechanisms of extremism were low. Further, such polarising attitudes demand attention in the light of how parental and community viewpoints are passed down to future generations.

Violent extremism's taboo topic status not only produced information gaps; it also appeared to feed fear, uncertainty, and a culture of intolerance that could be gleaned from attitudes towards the repatriation of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) and their anticipated reintegration into communities of origin. The data analysis revealed a sizeable cluster of responses that positioned radicalisation as an unequivocally taboo topic, with only a select few suggesting otherwise. Interviewees who provided statements to the contrary tended likewise to express their aversion and offer conflicted responses. One mother who found it not to be a taboo topic added, 'however in my family we do not discuss it; we spoke about it and said that it is something awful and that is the end of it there is no place to add anything good to it—to the discussion'.[115] A high number of responses to questions on discourses around extremism generally lacked clarity, depth, and direction, indicating that mothers may not have reflected on the topic at length. Somewhat baffling postulations to this effect ranged from 'We never discuss this topic with the husband or the society; I felt bad when it happened but we have other problems to deal with so this is not a topic we will ever discuss' in Pristina to 'Well,

[111] 200206 XK MST EnUK 1 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 103.
[112] 200205 XK MSP EnUK 2 | Pristina, Paragraph 69.
[113] 200207 XK MSP EnMO 1 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 72.
[114] 200205 XK MSP EnGN 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 72.
[115] 200205 XK MSP EnLK 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 76.

in my family we do not really discuss this topic because we do not have this kind of issue, and even though we educate our children in a good way there are issues like this they may face' in Kaçanik.[116] An entry conversation that captured the overall sense of mystery and fear around the topic went as follows: asked if extremism was a concern, a mother from Kaçanik said, 'I do not have an answer to this'. When the interviewer followed up with a question, 'You heard about people going to Syria?', she conceded, 'Yes, but I would not want to talk about it', adding, 'people cannot talk about this, because they are afraid to express their opinions'.[117]

The entry data revealed that mothers by and large were uninterested in the prospect of the repatriation and reintegration of former fighters and their families. A general anxiety towards the topic also surfaced. Representative of commonly held views, one interview partner revealed, 'We do not care about the returnees, and we should not take them back. I don't want them next door; I don't trust that they will not create secret groups again'.[118] Another mother of three adolescent children voiced similar concerns: 'There was a boy from my village who left. People who know him said that he was not actually a bad boy. They drew him in. Today, nobody speaks of him anymore. We know that he is still alive in Syria, but he is dead to us'.[119] Based on the interviews and with respect to three communities that had witnessed a high number of individuals leave for Syria and Iraq, it became yet clearer that there was not only a fear and uncertainty surrounding FTFs, but also no detectible community-level dialogue around the topic.

RESILIENT AND TOLERANT COMMUNITIES | MOTHERSCHOOLS IMPACT

> *I think that what we have learned in MotherSchools will have a huge impact on our community. Because if we pass on the lessons from us to other mothers, they will teach their children and advise them on what is right and wrong. And it will impact on the education system and the social system in general. I think that MotherSchools was the best thing, and I would like to see it continue because I believe it would make a great contribution to security, raising awareness, and to the state in general.*[120]
>
> *– MotherSchools Graduate, Kaçanik, Exit Interview*

[116] 200206 XK MSP EnES 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 172; 200207 XK MSP EnRK 1 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 72.
[117] 200207 XK MSP EnRK 5 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 67.
[118] 200207 XK MSP EnES 1 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 153 – 155.
[119] 200207 XK MSP EnES 1 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 157 – 159.
[120] 201208 XK MSP ExRK2 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 140 – 141.

The mothers of Kosovo have arrived at their community-wide role in security. Now acutely aware of their responsibility at all levels of society, graduates are employing their heightened confidence and competence, chipping away at self-imposed and real barriers like fear and subjugation, and discovering their role model and changemaker potential. Armed with self-confidence, knowledge, and a set of new skills, graduates are expressing a desire to effect changes within their wider spheres of influence. 'And I can not only handle whatever comes my way', a Pristina graduate asserted, 'but also I am more than willing to contribute to my community in different topics like extremism, where I may have an impact'.[121] New knowledge and the formal MotherSchools education acted as a clear point of departure. 'Knowing about an issue itself is empowering', a Teacher explained, noting how 'the way that sessions are organised and provided information makes an impact, and makes them think about this as a potential danger'. Merely seeing it on the news makes it appear to be a distant phenomenon that is disconnected from the family and community. 'And the way MotherSchools presents it', she highlighted to provide contrast, 'it's like, "My kids can be in potential danger also, so I can be more attentive"'.[122] Yet the programme went further than acting as a wake-up call to mothers who previously had contended that their children and communities were generally immune to violent extremism. Namely, 'it was a very good opportunity to see that it doesn't happen to just your family but that you can help your neighbours and society too', as a Pristina graduate explained.[123]

Adamant on positioning themselves as safeguarding actors beyond the confines of the home, their boosts in confidence and knowledge are giving way to role model aspirations, equipping mothers with the notion that women can reclaim their agency, and that they have a place in society beyond the kitchen table. 'It was evident', in the words of the Kaçanik Notetaker, 'that the mothers were feeling that they have the right to express their concerns and opinions. This was very different compared to the beginning, because at the beginning it was more evident that they would seek responsibility from someone else. When it came to safety, they wanted safety from the police or from another institution, when it was about education, they wanted it from the school, so it was always from someone else. They felt they couldn't contribute. But in the last session, they decided they will draft a document of concerns to take to the mayor or the relevant institution in the municipality'.[124] Similar developments could be

[121] 201215 XK MSP ExRK1 | Pristina, Paragraph 143.
[122] 201209 XK MST ExRK1 | Pristina, Paragraph 79.
[123] 201209 XK MSP ExMO 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 86.
[124] 201208 XK MSN ExUK 2 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 107 – 108.

observed by a Notetaker in Pristina, where mothers are assuming a whole-of-community outlook and are no longer bowing to singular and community-prescribed roles of mothers: 'At the end of the workshops, they mentioned all the time how the change starts with us and how we should be role models and reflect ambition, kindness, safety, and security. This was really successful, and the objectives have been met. … It was so great to see women of my country be encouraged and start to think and work together to make a change in the community and country'.[125] Mothers corroborated how self-confidence and their new networks are functioning as a promising catalyst for changes in their community. In removing isolation and fear from the equation, the empowerment processes came to the fore, motivating them to convey with conviction the need for capitalising on this new momentum: 'It has given me confidence and is very needed in our community, especially Kaçanik. I know the group was small here; it should become much bigger. And we feel emancipated. … We need this to get more open and not be afraid'.[126] In similar terms, a graduate from Pristina concluded, 'The MotherSchools had an impact on the empowerment of women. Here is Kosovo, the empowerment of mothers is at its beginning and sometimes it is violated and put down by us women as well. However, we will never give up. MotherSchools is like a window that brings light in a castle that is beautiful and has flowers in it and a well, but just needs to give it light'.[127]

Moving from advancing to disseminating awareness, mothers report how their social environments are proving receptive and becoming sensitised to the Parenting for Peace philosophy. This ongoing knowledge transfer is benefiting yet more isolated individuals who in some cases had been denied the permission to attend by husbands or in-laws. Against this backdrop, graduates are viewing the end of the programme as the starting point of their community activism, with many either seeking to or already embarking on building larger and more informal networks of mothers. In what might be termed the 'MotherSchools multiplier effect', graduates are sharing their experience and disseminating knowledge to a broad cast of characters in their communities—ranging from their own children and family members to colleagues and neighbours. Most impressively, they are also reaching other mothers who were not given the opportunity to attend due to, for instance, restrictions placed on them by in-laws or husbands: 'My sisters in-law especially noticed the difference and they told me, "Lucky you that you are learning new things" … I told them everything that I learned in the school. As my sisters in-law didn't attend school and they

[125] 201215 XK MSN ExRK1 | Pristina, Paragraph 90.
[126] 201208 XK MSP ExRK4 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 94.
[127] 201215 XK MSP ExRK2 | Pristina, Paragraph 132.

had stricter families, so they weren't free to attend this programme either. So whenever we got together, I used to discuss with them everything I learned and especially related to kids, and so they were really happy that I could attend'.[128] In line with the 'multiplier effect' concept, and as WwB often witnesses after a first iteration of the programme, some who previously had been reluctant or unable to join are now eager to do so. As is often the case, graduates harness their new networks to develop strategies and arguments that convince patriarchal and abusive husbands that the programme will benefit rather than threaten their family culture. Controlling husbands tend to be more amenable to the idea upon learning that the workshops revolve around parenting. The added value of the MotherSchools lies in its ability to provide a safe entry point for mothers to address their personal trauma and abuse, and to find support—which are all established albeit hidden drivers of extremism. 'If women were asked to participate in discussions about domestic violence', a Kaçanik graduate explained, 'I am sure that their husbands wouldn't allow them to participate, despite it being in a school of women. And in Kosovar society, there is an obvious threat of women about their rights, their rights being supported'.[129] Indeed, graduates have already reported that hitherto sceptical mothers are now curious and ready to join, owing to the outreach work of participants, such as that of a graduate: 'I have a lot of friends and a few of them are educated. They asked about it and to get involved. I posted a lot about the MotherSchools during the sessions. They asked what it is, and I gave them the main points. I have friends who are a bit backward, and when they ask me to join for coffee and I would tell them that I am attending the MotherSchools, they would be sceptical, but some reached out to me and asked how they could be a part of it'.[130]

As is typically the case with educational programmes that seek to transfer practical skills and develop conceptual thinking, the completion of the MotherSchools programme marks the more definite point of departure for graduates. With lifelong learning in mind, many indeed are framing their programme completion as the beginning of a new chapter for themselves and their communities. Speaking to this effect, a Kaçanik mother astutely captured the sustainability-oriented nature of her education: 'I think the lessons will continue even though the sessions finished … what we have learned about our children, about becoming a stronger mother, and the advices we have gathered can be shared to future mothers who we will meet throughout our lives'.[131] Understanding that knowledge and responsibility are not

[128] 201208 XK MSP ExUK 1 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 115 – 119.
[129] 201208 XK MSP ExMO 3 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 95 – 96.
[130] 201208 XK MSP ExRK4 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 95.
[131] 201208 XK MSP ExRK2 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 93.

mutually exclusive, a strong conviction has surfaced to create what could be understood as larger informal networks of mothers. In Pristina, this likewise became a strong concluding theme and result, as all actors involved proposed: 'The MotherSchools topics taught me to discuss and spread the topics to the rest of society and my social circle, because three groups are a small portion compared to what MotherSchools can do for a state like Kosovo'; 'It is crucial for us to talk to our friends and neighbours, especially us women who were part of the programme … it's important to discuss and share our knowledge, and of course make women aware of the threats … A lot of women wouldn't know how to react in a certain situation. They wouldn't know like what to do to prevent'; and 'I want to transmit what I have learned not just to my children but also to other mothers who have younger children, or mothers who will have children in the future, so that they know how to behave with their children as well'.[132]

In stark contrast to their baseline point of departure, graduates are discovering the virtue of embracing and spreading a culture of tolerance and communication to counter the very polarisation that has been feeding cycles of extremism. While not altogether dispelling sudden changes in appearances as conceivably symptomatic of conservative outside influences, mothers are now reducing prejudiced and one-dimensional modes of thinking. All MotherSchools graduates in Kosovo are either practising or non-practising Muslims. Despite a split between those who favour liberal approaches and those who embrace more conservative traditions, the experience of an open exchange of ideas within a trusted group setting has worked to remove attitudes that tend to accentuate polarisation and marginalisation. An empowered dialogue has aided mothers to reassess inherent biases, especially with respect to overcoming the perilous tendency to define community members based solely on appearances. Rather than relying on knee-jerk reactions in the face of the seemingly unfamiliar, graduates are reflecting more deeply. A Pristina graduate considered her personal transformation in the following terms: 'Even if I had the slightest judgment about a covered woman and thought I won't hear good ideas from her, in the MotherSchools we have discussed so much, and they have made very good points. The MotherSchools made me get rid of that small prejudice, and to understand that they are very peaceful and open-minded individuals'.[133] In strikingly similar terms, members of the Kaçanik group appear also to have become more cautious of discriminating on the basis of appearances. 'Something that I will remember is one of the mothers', a graduate recalled, 'would constantly

[132] 201208 XK MSN ExUK 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 82; 201215 XK MSP ExES 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 200 – 201; 201209 XK MSP ExMO 2 | Pristina, Paragraph 140.
[133] 201215 XK MSP ExLK 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 145.

say “bearded men”, which was a judgement. And by the end of the programme, she removed this stereotype and replaced it with a less judgemental word’.[134]

The MotherSchools offer an ideology-free space to ultimately define the problem in broader terms. ‘I think it’s a really good point to keep religion out, because it really sets a distinction between religion really not being involved in the themes, whereas extremism is something in itself. So it just proves that the project is not trying to make a connection between the two, but trying to tackle just the bad element in itself’, as the Kaçanik Notetaker shrewdly observed.[135] Personal awareness that favours critical thinking is now also being passed on to future generations. Another graduate from Pristina, for instance, whose family is religious and whose husband works in a mosque, asked her children to paint a verbal picture of a religious person. Her son described, as she put it, ‘not a typical Muslim but a terrorist’. She concluded that the media landscape had a negative and polarising impact by creating stereotypical images that needed to be challenged.[136] The shift towards critical thinking to safeguard the youth was indeed picked up by a number of mothers as a central learning that needed to take root. ‘In places where currently there exist radical activities, we have discussed that religion does not force a person towards radicalisation’, a mother contended, noting how instead ‘the problem of today’s society is critical thinking’ and that this understanding needs to be passed on to children as they formulate their identities and personalities.[137]

The heightened resilience-building outlook also crops up in responses towards other contentious topics. In contrast to the entry interviews, for example, mothers no longer rejected or condemned the returnees from Syria and Iraq outright. One the one hand, mothers have become more open about being affected as well as willing to discuss cases on a personal level, as a Pristina Notetaker explained: ‘They mentioned cases that they know about, including family members. There was a mother who talked about how a family member of hers was recruited and he convinced his wife, and they went together to Syria. When they came back to Kosovo, their family did not want to talk to them, and they are outsiders now. Nobody wants anything to do with them. Everybody thinks negatively about them now’.[138] On the other hand, a reassessed stance towards their reintegration emerged alongside a willingness to speak, suggesting that at least some are now questioning rather than supporting the notion of ‘re-marginalising of the marginalised’ on a social level. Solutions-oriented postulations appear to

[134] 201208 XK MSP ExMO 3 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 92.
[135] 201208 XK MSN ExUK 2 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 134.
[136] 201215 XK MSP ExES 2 | Pristina, Paragraph 201 – 203.
[137] 201215 XK MSP ExLK 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 140.
[138] 201215 XK MSN ExRK1 | Pristina, Paragraph 77.

have come to the fore. In the words of a graduate, 'What I think regarding the returnees, I think that if the state is giving support to them, it will make it easier for them to restart their lives'.[139] Going yet further, a fellow mother disclosed how the MotherSchools 'taught me how to accept those who have tried something like this, and how to include them in society again … Everyone can be a victim, and we need to think of a way to prevent this and bring them back in society'. As she also concluded, 'The school taught me to think differently'.[140] Echoing this in comparable terms, a Kaçanik Teacher asserted that the sessions had made clear 'that we have to build this tolerant community where even if we are against something, at least they have their own rights, they have to live with their choices, and we have to be tolerant towards people—but not avoid our responsibility as community members: when we see something wrong, we need to discuss'.[141]

[139] 201215 XK MSP ExES 2 | Pristina, Paragraph 211.
[140] 201215 XK MSP ExRK2 | Pristina, Paragraph 129.
[141] 201208 XK MST ExES 1 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 73.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

My dream is for the MotherSchools to include the entire world one day… a mother from America, Kosovo, Australia, or anywhere, when she has an issue, she can share it with other mothers… where we as mothers can advise each other without having other barriers, because if we as mothers get together and create one common soul, the world will be a more beautiful place. Not a single child on the street will be left without support as is the case now with the leadership under men. It is an inner power that will persevere forever. I never want MotherSchools to stop, because the strength and love in the world starts from the mother.[142]

– MotherSchools Graduate, Pristina, Exit Interview

I think it is very important for the MotherSchools to have a future in Kosovo. And I think it would be great if they could also expand to other municipalities and places where you see that women are more excluded from community life.[143]

– MotherSchools Graduate, Kaçanik, Exit Interview

The MotherSchools Kosovo class of 2020 has joined the global Parenting for Peace network spanning sixteen country chapters. Like their fellow graduates around the world, participants are now addressing and overcoming real and imagined barriers standing in the way of their soft power security role. The first evident steps mothers took included working on their self-confidence and mustering the courage to embrace their potential, leading graduates of the programme to effect changes at the personal, familial, and community levels. When viewed against their baseline point of departure, graduates are taking steps to translate into practice their knowledge and awareness of how parents can play a pivotal role in safeguarding their children and advance community resilience, cohesion, and tolerance. With a view to the future, Women without Borders considered the monitoring data and testimonies from participants to gauge how future engagement could capitalise on the capacity and momentum that WwB has built through the programme in Kosovo.

The main and in some cases overlapping recommendations discussed below include the following:

1. Deepening the MotherSchools impact through additional iterations in original sites of implementation
2. Targeting more remote and rural communities
3. Expanding into at-risk Kosovar towns and villages bordering North Macedonia

[142] 201215 XK MSP ExRK2 | Pristina, Paragraph 134.
[143] 201208 XK MSN ExUK 2 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 125.

4. Involving husbands more decidedly in the 'Parenting for Peace' by introducing WwB's FatherSchools programme in Kosovo.

A successful mobilisation of participants in a remote community like Kaçanik is a considerable feat for a first-generation implementation round. New country chapter expansions typically are launched in capital or larger cities, thus allowing WwB to focus on establishing the programme by, inter alia, ensuring contextualisation, securing stakeholder buy-in at all levels, building networks of trusted relationships on the ground, and developing the necessary local capacity to expand to more at-risk or affected areas in the future. Jahjaga Foundation's (JF) professional approach and established access to communities beyond marginalised pockets in Pristina, however, made an immediate expansion feasible.

There are several reasons why deepening the impact in Kaçanik or Pristina as well as expanding to other at-risk communities is a logical consideration. Chief among these: the entry and exit data alerted WwB to how this had been the first time for many mothers to receive an education beyond primary school. Participants, Teachers, and Notetakers as well as our partners at JF expressed the need to build on this momentum by continuing to focus on physically and socially isolated women whose untapped role model and safeguarding potential means that familial and community cycles of psychological and physical violence are enduring over generations. The recent MotherSchools marked the beginning for a high number of mothers to address wartime trauma and gender-based violence, build networks of likeminded allies, and challenge repressive and counterproductive dynamics.

Against this background, mothers saw great demand for deepening the impact through further implementations while additionally expanding to other communities. One of the Pristina graduates requested new MotherSchools roll-outs to build on the momentum, 'because in our society—in the Balkans, in Kosovo—women don't have a place to express feelings, and the programme allows them to speak freely'.[144] A fellow graduate noted that new iterations could help to reach mothers who had not yet had the chance to attend. The most frequent recommendation was to expand to other villages and municipalities to include more women from rural areas. 'A lot of women are not going to school still, and this programme can make a big difference there, so I think it's important for this project to expand to rural areas', a graduate from Pristina explained.[145] This was corroborated by a fellow graduate from Kaçanik, who shared, 'For us as housewives, it is harder to be part of a project, so the MotherSchools

[144] 201209 XK MSP ExES 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 122.
[145] 201215 XK MSP ExES 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 152 – 153.

helped us a lot, and I think a lot of women from rural areas weren't able to participate, so it would be better for them if they'd get the chance'.[146] Graduates also recommended ensuring the inclusion of both older and younger mothers: 'I suggest it to start even with mothers who are pregnant, so they learn how to approach the children'; 'Older mums don't know how to read or write and I'd like to motivate them to do something in their lives, to make them go out and do something, because of their husbands, because of other circumstances'.[147] The cluster of statements around the need for future engagements to amplify and expand the MotherSchools presence could be viewed as a clear mandate on the part of the MotherSchools Kosovo graduates. Given the concentrated threat of violent extremism in communities bordering North Macedonia, a geographic focus on these areas would be consistent with the aims of P/CVE programming to prevent the spill-over of toxic ideologies by fortifying at-risk families and communities.

With respect to fathers, mothers generally expressed uncertainty as to whether their husbands would be open to join FatherSchools. A graduate from Kaçanik summarised the general attitude in the following terms: 'I think it would be great to have FatherSchools, but I don't think my husband would join because his mentality is a bit older—but I think that my son would love to join'.[148] There is nevertheless reason to be optimistic that such an endeavour would succeed in Kosovo. For one, revisiting this report's 'insights to impact' sections on family dynamics certainly sheds light on the potential benefits of this education for fathers, as they can be a chief barrier to the personal development of their wives and children alike. Their push-factor potential has also long been observed, with domestic violence a common occurrence in families and a driver for children as witnesses to the abuse. As such, children can become more isolated or indeed later mirror the behaviour of their fathers. Yet WwB's successful FatherSchools roll-outs in similarly marginalised communities across Austria, Belgium, and Germany—where mothers were likewise initially unsure about whether their husbands would join—indicates that this pursuit would be altogether feasible and worthwhile.

[146] 201208 XK MSP ExJK 1 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 124.
[147] 201209 XK MSP ExES 2 | Pristina, Paragraph 106; 201215 XK MSP ExJK 1 | Pristina, Paragraph 194.
[148] 201208 XK MSP ExLK 2 | Kaçanik, Paragraph 126.

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ABOUT MOTHERSCHOOLS

Mothers have long presented a missing link in preventing the spread of violent extremism. Their unparalleled physical and emotional proximity make them witnesses of every stage in their child's development. While mothers have the potential to intervene in the initial stages of the radicalisation process, often they lack the essential knowledge and self-confidence to recognise and address the warning signs in their sons and daughters. Women without Borders (WwB) began introducing the notion of Mothers Preventing Violent Extremism (MPVE) in the context of its SAVE (Sisters Against Violent Extremism) network of projects and initiatives from 2008. Responding to its research study findings from surveys and interviews with 1023 mothers across five countries, WwB developed and designed the pioneering 'MotherSchools: Parenting for Peace' Model. When put into practice, this bottom-up prevention approach positions concerned and affected mothers as the first line of defence in at-risk communities. The curriculum strengthens the participant's individual capacity, capability, and emotional literacy, and heightens her awareness of radical influences. WwB has been advancing local and regional security through contextualised iterations of the programme, and to date has engaged over two thousand mothers in sixteen countries across Western and Eastern Europe; Central, South, and Southeast Asia; the Middle East; and Sub-capacity by providing civil society stakeholders in at-risk regions with the essential structures, tools, and skills to address and counteract extremist ideologies. Owing to its proven track record, WwB's MotherSchools Model has emerged as a recognised good practice and contributed to rethinking and reshaping countering and preventing violent extremism (P/CVE) policy worldwide.