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SOCIOECONOMIC VULNERABILITIES AS A FACTOR IN LONG-TERM RISK OF RADICALIZATION: PREVENTION POTENTIAL OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND OFFICIAL ASSISTANCE IN SELECTED CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired immunity deficiency syndrome
DRS	Districts of Republican Subordination, Republic of Tajikistan
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EU	European Union
GBAO	Upper Badakhshan Autonomous Region, Republic of Tajikistan
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MS	Migration Service
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
TSA	Targeted social assistance
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USD	United States dollar

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INTRODUCTION

This executive summary presents results of field research in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, carried out in September–November 2019, covering questions of identification of socioeconomic vulnerabilities, relative position of vulnerable groups and sources of assistance to deal with those vulnerabilities. The summary has been further expanded with additional information that was received from competent State bodies and during interviews with experts, conducted until January 2020, covering perceptions of various stakeholders of the possible linkage of socioeconomic vulnerabilities with individuals' grievances that could potentially trigger their susceptibility to extremist organizations' messaging.¹

The details of the conceptual and methodological frameworks are found in a dedicated section below. The conceptual framework defines the central notions of socioeconomic vulnerabilities, presents the "theory of change" underlying the assessment and States the hypothesis on the possible linkage between the vulnerabilities and emergence of a sense of grievance in vulnerable groups. This is followed by an overview of the methodology of fieldwork, covering key research questions, the justification for the choice of locations and categories of respondents and the progress of collection and analysis of field data.

This document has been developed by the international IOM consultant, Piotr Kazmierkiewicz on the basis of the country findings, collected and analysed by the team of national researchers in Kazakhstan (Aigul Sadvokasova, senior researcher and Bauyrzhan Baglay, field researcher), Tajikistan (Alisher Yarbabaev, senior researcher, Saodat Mutieva, field researcher and Malika Yarbabaeva, assistant to senior researcher) and Uzbekistan (Viktor Mikhaylov, senior researcher and Jahongir Pirmukhamedov, field researcher). The project has been co-ordinated by Svetlana Zhassymbekova, National Programme Officer at the Subregional Coordination Office for Central Asia of the International Organization for Migration. We would also like to acknowledge kind support provided by Bahrom Rahmatjonov of the IOM Mission in the Republic of Tajikistan and Sanjarbek Toshbaev in the course of fieldwork, carried out in Uzbekistan.

This research was commissioned as part of UNDP's regional "Strengthening Community Resilience and Regional Cooperation for Prevention of Violent Extremism in Central Asia" project (2018–2020), made possible by the generous contribution of the Government of Japan. The project aims to improve the resilience of communities in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan to violent extremism through supporting young people's socioeconomic inclusion in their communities through participation in local decision-making, trainings on soft and hard skills, and employment/entrepreneurship opportunities. The project's regional component that includes Uzbekistan focuses on facilitating knowledge exchange in the region through action-oriented research on PVE, regional dialogues among PVE stakeholders and exchanges among young people in the region.

The main part of the summary contains comparative findings, based on the fieldwork with local residents, community and religious leaders, officials and experts as well as on the analysis of data, provided by State bodies from the three countries. They are organized thematically, starting with the diagnostics of the extent of socioeconomic vulnerabilities, first general (on the level of households), and then additional challenges, faced by women and youth. These findings are then matched with national analyses of sources and types of assistance available to and used by respondents in the investigated regions – ranging from State employment and social aid services through support provided by family and friends to other non-State sources, such as local communities and religious institutions.

The last part of the findings focuses on the perceptions of interviewed community and religious leaders, experts and officials regarding the relative role that socioeconomic vulnerabilities can play in the emergence of grievances that might in the long run make the vulnerable individuals susceptible to messaging and recruitment efforts of extremist organizations. It also shows how local communities and spiritual leaders have worked with the vulnerable categories of residents to reduce their susceptibility to recruitment – offering essential support to State efforts by helping identify persons at greater risk, referring them to institutional assistance and in some locations directly delivering aid.

The summary also features a list of general objectives and measures, recommended on the basis of local practices as part of a comprehensive response to the identified risk of emergence of grounds for radicalization of the vulnerable individuals and groups. This is followed by the presentation of national recommendations to various stakeholders in the three countries under study.

¹ The research builds on a series of previous assessments into the linkage between socioeconomic vulnerabilities and risk of emerging radicalization, carried out by researchers, commissioned by IOM Central Asia in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in 2016–2017. See: IOM Central Asia, Migrant Vulnerabilities and Integration Needs in Central Asia: Root Causes, Social and Economic Impact of Return Migration, Astana 2016; IOM Central Asia, Migrant Vulnerabilities and Integration Needs in Central Asia: Assessing migrants' and community needs and managing risks, Astana 2017, available at: www.iom.kz/en/publications [accessed 15.09.2018]. The relation of this study to the previous assessments is covered in the "Conceptual framework" section below.

KEY CONCLUSIONS

Background and objectives of the assessment

- * A series of field assessments, carried out in 2016–2017 in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan, indicated that men under 30 years of age (especially those who were forced to return from labour migration) and divorced, separated or abandoned women could be facing significant socioeconomic vulnerabilities. This study follows up by seeking to identify the depth of these vulnerabilities among these categories of respondents in selected regions of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan as well as to reveal the extent to which these vulnerabilities have been reduced through use of various types of material and non-material support. In addition, interviews with local community and religious leaders as well as officials and experts have helped consider the role that unaddressed vulnerabilities could play in fuelling a sense of grievance that could in turn make some young people more susceptible to violent extremist groups' messaging and recruitment efforts.
- * The findings of this study are based on fieldwork that involved 157 individual interviews and 3 focus group discussions involving 14 people for a total of 171 respondents.² It should be noted that the study does not establish direct linkages between the occurrence of identified vulnerabilities and their likelihood to lead to individual radicalization. However, by coupling field interviews with various types of secondary data, the assessment offers findings on the relative strength of factors that could increase or deter the likelihood of radicalization of both the local communities at large and the most vulnerable categories of local residents.
- * Compared to previous IOM field assessments, the research focuses on community coping strategies instead of individual ones, and shifts the focus from factors that could lead to susceptibility to radicalization into the level of awareness of vulnerabilities affecting women and youth among current and potential agents of assistance delivery. The research does not aim to profile those whose socioeconomic vulnerabilities could become grounds for triggering radicalization through face-to-face interviews, but rather considers this issue indirectly, probing the perspectives of community and religious leaders as well as officials. Thus, the study establishes the level to which the agents of assistance are aware of the needs of most vulnerable groups, to what extent they acknowledge the role of such vulnerabilities in exposing those residents to potential radicalization, and how they assess the linkage between the measures reducing vulnerabilities and possibilities for preventing radicalization.
- * Although economic growth and job creation initiatives have eased some of socioeconomic challenges, large-scale labour migration in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan may have negative consequences for communities, and currency devaluation and price increases in Kazakhstan has been among factors that contribute to economic vulnerabilities. In all three countries, disparities remain in household incomes and in access to employment, with young men and women with many children (esp. divorced or abandoned) unable to take the advantage of economic opportunities. COVID-19 is expected to exacerbate these challenges.

Socioeconomic vulnerabilities of youth and women and the role of cultural norms

- * Official statistics in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan show that persons under 30 are more likely to be unemployed compared to other age categories and that a substantial share of them cannot find a job for over 6 months. Interviewed officials believe that youth unemployment in rural areas is stimulated by relatively low qualifications and lack of necessary job experience, coupled with rising wage aspirations of job applicants. While migration into urban centers or abroad partly addresses the problem of limited job opportunities locally, it often results in precarious employment in shadow economy. In some cases, it may expose young people to discrimination and hostility as well as bring about deterioration of their health.

² The respondents consisted of vulnerable local residents (including 48 women, 33 young people aged 18–29 years old, and 24 persons of working age [between 25–60]) as well as 17 community leaders, 19 religious leaders, and 30 experts.

- * Gender disparity has been observed in a variety of ways. Data from Tajikistan reveal that not only are women (especially young adults) significantly more likely to be unemployed, but also female unskilled workers, employed at open-air markets, tend to receive far lower wages than their male counterparts. In turn, during interviews with vulnerable youth in Kazakhstan, women reported significantly longer periods of joblessness than men, and unlike men, who would forego some job opportunities on account of their terms, female jobseekers had to stay out of the job market to raise children or run the household (e.g. due to limited availability of preschool facilities).
- * Women reported some additional socioeconomic vulnerabilities, often associated with the persistence of cultural norms or subordinate position within the family. Two groups of young women in rural regions were particularly affected. Some young women reported difficulties in entering the labour market as they were lacking necessary educational background or work experience. This was attributed by respondents not only to low literacy and education levels in the countryside but also to low priority assigned to professional activity and career development of women. In turn, middle-aged women who were divorced or separated from their husbands found it difficult to enter the labour market as they could not demonstrate either required qualifications or record of formal employment while they were restricted to homemaking.

Sources and application of financial assistance

- * Emergency costs (e.g. to cover costs of medical treatment), organization of major events, such as weddings, or acquisition of own housing have been named among priority expenditures, for which young people in the investigated regions need assistance. This has been primarily provided by own relatives and friends (in case of men) and by husband's family (in case of women). Provision of financial assistance from those informal sources is closely associated with the extent to which young people are integrated into the local communities. When alienation occurs, as with divorced or abandoned women, there is a risk of discontinuing financial support altogether, however.
- * The interviewed local residents have appreciated State initiatives which directly responded to emergencies or problems faced by certain vulnerable categories of citizens. In Kazakhstan, respondents welcomed the availability of a one-time debt repayment scheme as well as the liberalization of terms under which targeted social assistance is disbursed. Interviewed migrant workers from Uzbekistan reported making use of microloans and subsidies to health insurance for period of labour migration. However, the utility of targeted social assistance is limited due to its very low amount, which cannot keep up with the households' growing costs.
- * On the other hand, non-material forms of assistance were generally highly prized, especially those targeting returning migrant workers and women seeking to enter local labour markets in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Under a dedicated programme for employment and re-integration of migrant workers in Tajikistan, returnees may certify their skills by taking an appropriate exam or undergo retraining toward jobs that are in demand locally. On the other hand, in Uzbekistan trainings in crafts that are popular both in the local and international labour markets have been offered to young people while women so far unofficially employed in handicraft activities have received practical guidance as well as preferential loans for establishing businesses. The effectiveness of various measures is dependent, however, on awareness among a wider circle of local residents, and on the ability to secure sufficient numbers of jobs – both of which remain challenges.
- * Interviewed residents of regions of Kazakhstan and Tajikistan did not in general indicate NGOs as sources of direct support to meet their financial needs. A particular model was elaborated in Uzbekistan where local community associations would identify issues of concern and persons in greatest need as well as disburse direct assistance from the public Mahalla Fund. In all three countries, non-governmental organizations were acknowledged for their non-financial support: educating children coming from poorer families or providing courses for women to get a new profession in Kazakhstan; providing consultations and accompanying customers during visits to State institutions or conflict resolution and mediation in conflicted families in Tajikistan; or purchase of equipment for women's house work (such as sewing machines) in grant aid in Uzbekistan.

Perceived linkage to emergence of grievance and measures to reduce the risk

- * Socioeconomic vulnerabilities were indicated by interviewed local leaders, officials and experts as contributing factors to the emergence of resentment, but were not considered sufficient by themselves to predict the onset or progress of such a process that could make young people more susceptible to violent extremist organizations' messaging or recruitment. For instance, results of fieldwork in Uzbekistan, cross-checked against findings of a recent study of determinants of radicalization among migrant workers, showed that the presence of such vulnerabilities needed to be associated by a wider sense of injustice in order to trigger grievance.
- * Experts from Tajikistan concurred by pointing to an interplay of factors necessary to make migrant workers more susceptible: dissatisfaction with work conditions, inability to enforce workers' rights and the need to cope with hostility and discrimination from employers and law enforcement officials. In turn, respondents in Kazakhstan considered some psychological effects of unemployment – personal deprivation, insolvency and social isolation – that could induce young people to revise their outlook on life altogether, and become more open to violent extremist groups' interpretations of their plight.
- * Some particular risk factors were named by the interviewed local leaders, officials and experts with regard to young men and women as a result of a combination of their precarious economic situation and influence of cultural norms. Recruiters were reported to play up instances of unfair treatment in distribution of scarce resources, often attributed to corruption. Some respondents from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan believe that some young people might be more impressionable in both direct contact or when approached via social media on account of their personal values, inculcated in traditional homes, limited educational background and low ability to critically assess the messages.
- * In turn, in the assessment of respondents from Kazakhstan, young women can be more susceptible to recruiters' appeals to ideals of family unity and societal stability when they encounter problems in family life and are concerned about financial implications of loss of support in case of divorce. Nevertheless, the disengagement programme targeting spouses of former combatants, implemented in Tajikistan, revealed that many of the women had merely accompanied their husbands to combat zones in the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq while being unaware of the destination or purpose of travel.
- * Community resilience and mobilization to cope with external threats has been considered by some experts to play a major role in resisting attempts by violent extremist groups. According to some respondents, to be successful, communities need to demonstrate to their most vulnerable members their commitment to mutual support and internal solidarity, and instil in them the local traditions of tolerance in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious environment. In this context, the unique role of local religious and community leaders has been acknowledged. Relying on trust, earned through outreach to families and individual members of the community, these leaders (both male and female) have been reported to be able to detect symptoms of alienation or destructive intra-family conflict early on. Furthermore, they also play an important role in clarifying religious and ethical teachings against the narratives posed by violent extremist organizations and in strengthening young people's ability to critically assess the messages targeted at them.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This section opens with an overview of earlier IOM assessments in Central Asia, which laid the ground for hypotheses on the contributing role of socioeconomic factors in laying ground for radicalization of certain categories of youth and women. Then some unique features of this research are presented, notably the wider perspective on sources of vulnerability, covering both individual and community aspects, the concentration on certain regions within the three countries and in-depth treatment of the role that local support networks play in reducing vulnerabilities, reducing the vulnerable groups' alienation and facilitating their socioeconomic integration. Next, three basic concepts underlying this assessment are explored: vulnerability, radicalization and "theory of change".

Central notion of vulnerabilities

The central notion, applied in the sociological analysis undertaken as part of this assessment is that of vulnerability. According to the IOM Glossary on Migration a vulnerable group is defined as "any group or sector of society that is at higher risk of being subjected to discriminatory practices, violence, natural or environmental disasters, or economic hardship, than other groups within the State; any group or sector of society (such as women, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples or migrants that is at higher risk in periods of conflict or crisis)."³ The key element of this definition is the relative character of disadvantage, experienced by certain categories of population, measured in comparison to the position of the overall community or society.

USAID-commissioned IOM fieldwork assessment, carried out in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan in 2016-2017⁴ was used to identify socioeconomic vulnerabilities facing migrants and their households as well as reveal risk factors diminishing the success of reintegration efforts of the local communities and State institutions. That assessment concentrated on two sources of vulnerability of reentry-banned migrants upon return or in secondary migration: economic hardships and discriminatory practices, thus distinguishing between economic and rights-based types of vulnerability. These vulnerabilities were attributed to four categories of factors: individual, family and household, situational and structural.⁵

This categorization has been modified in some important respects and forms the basis of the typology, proposed for this assessment (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Typology of vulnerabilities

GENERAL (community)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structural • Long term
PARTICULAR (categories)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relative position • Status and aspiration
ADDITIONAL (circumstances)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deteriorating position and status • Growing dependence

³ R. Perruchoud, J. Redpath-Cross (eds.), IOM Glossary on Migration, IOM, Geneva 2011, p. 105, available at: www.publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml25_1.pdf.

⁴ IOM Central Asia, Migrant Vulnerabilities and Integration Needs in Central Asia: Root Causes, Social and Economic Impact of Return Migration, Astana 2016; IOM Central Asia, Migrant Vulnerabilities and Integration Needs in Central Asia: Assessing migrants' and community needs and managing risks, Astana 2017, available at: www.iom.kz/en/publications.

⁵ IOM Central Asia, Migrant Vulnerabilities and Integration Needs in Central Asia: Assessing migrants' and community needs and managing risks, Astana 2017, p. 59.

Firstly, it considers the impact of long-term economic trends in economic welfare and deprivation, affecting the entire localities. These structural factors, operating on the community level, are subsumed into the category of *general vulnerabilities*. Secondly, the structural and family and household factors were integrated more closely into the notion of *particular vulnerabilities*, which affect certain categories of residents (most notably, women and youth) due to the combination of both their relatively lower economic resources and opportunities and unfulfilled aspirations regarding social status. Finally, the earlier assessments limited the situational vulnerabilities to sudden and dramatic occurrences, such as death or illness of a family member or becoming subject to legal sanctions, which acted as shock factors. In this research, gradual deterioration of economic welfare and social stability, resulting from the impact of a wider variety of shock factors (loss of employment by the breadwinner or long-term absence of a spouse) – such as, the disintegration of the family or growing conflicts between generations – are all included into the category of *additional vulnerabilities*.

Relative deprivation, disadvantaged position within the community, amplified by the unfavorable socioeconomic situation (e.g. contraction of job opportunities), were all taken into account in the study of vulnerabilities experienced by the residents of selected regions of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. IOM's previous assessment identified youth and women as *particularly vulnerable* groups in the local communities of migrants' return as those groups were affected by a variety of factors of vulnerability. Youth were found to be at multiple disadvantages with regard to their economic position: individually (lacking adequate education and skills and short on capital to buy a house or apartment, serving as a sign of self-establishment) as well as on account of their position in the community (due to cultural expectations to support their newly established families). This interplay of an objective socioeconomic position and cultural norms put additional pressure on youth. Certain categories of women were also found to be affected by this combination: divorced or widowed young women not only lacked economic resources but were also limited by cultural norms in terms of accepted conduct (as unsuccessful migration often brought stigmatization). The IOM assessment thus revealed not only these groups' baseline economic handicaps but also limited opportunities for coping with these handicaps because of the impact of cultural norms.⁶

6 Ibid., pp. 61–62.

Defining radicalization potential as distinct from violent extremism

Based on the results of previous IOM assessments of risk of radicalization, we find it necessary to distinguish between two phenomena. According to USAID definition, *violent extremism* is a set of actions, consisting of “advocating, engaging in, preparing or otherwise supporting ideologically motivated or justified violence to further social, economic or political objectives”.⁷ The focus of this study, as of the earlier assessments, implemented by IOM research teams in Central Asia, is, however, on a broader process of *radicalization*, preoccupied rather with attitudes.⁸ In line with the approach, adopted in previous studies, *radicalization* is understood as a set of beliefs, perceptions and attitudes as well as associated actions that could under certain circumstances lead to determination to join violent extremist groups or engage in violent extremist activities (including terrorist acts).

In the academic discourse, two approaches can be identified to the distinction between the two terms. Some researchers clearly distinguish between these two terms, becoming more nuanced regarding the notion of “radicalization” while reserving negative connotations to “extremism” alone. Alex P. Schmid, for instance, notes the following distinction: “*While both stand at some distance from mainstream political thinking, the first tends to be open-minded, while the second manifests a closed mind and a distinct willingness to use violence against civilians*”.⁹ Other perspectives, in turn, link the two notions as forming part of a process. The term “radicalization” is defined by some researchers as “*the process of developing extremist ideologies and beliefs*”¹⁰, and by others as “socialization to extremism which manifests itself in terrorism”.¹¹ Another definition of this term is that “*radicalization is the process by which individuals are introduced to an overtly ideological message and belief system that encourages movement from moderate, mainstream beliefs towards extreme views*.”¹²

It is worth stressing that the current study, in line with IOM's “do no harm” principle, deals with factors leading to and stimulating radicalization, but does not directly seek to understand under what circumstances radical beliefs, perceptions and attitudes are transformed into the firm determination to act. Therefore, during fieldwork with local residents, the team has not as a rule used the term “radicalization”, which is often loaded with negative connotations and frequently confused with the notion of “extremism”. This is partly due to the fact, that there is much uncertainty as to the difference between “radicalism” and “extremism”, as these terms are often used interchangeably, in particular in mass media.¹³ Instead, the researchers proceeded to elicit the definitions and descriptions of “radicalization” only during interviews with local community and religious leaders while officials and experts were asked for their assessment of the scale and sources of radicalization.¹⁴ As underlined by the OHCHR Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human

7 Cited in: World Migration Report 2018, Chapter 9, “Migration, Violent Extremism and Social Exclusion”, p. 2, www.publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/wmr_2018_en_chapter9.pdf [accessed 15.09.2018].

8 It should also be noted that prevention of violent extremism complements but is different from counter-terrorism (which focuses how the government addresses and fights activities from recruitment and up to terrorist acts and retaliation) and anti-terrorism (legal framework to deter and punish terrorism and State institutional capabilities to deal with terrorism). See UNDP (2016), Preventing Violent Extremism Through Promoting Inclusive Development, Tolerance and Respect for Diversity: A development response to addressing radicalization and violent extremism, available at: www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Conflict%20Prevention/Discussion%20Paper%20-%20Preventing%20Violent%20Extremism%20by%20Promoting%20Inclusive%20Development.pdf.

9 A.P. Schmid, “Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review”, ICCT Research Paper March 2013, The Hague 2013, p. iv.

10 R. Borum, “Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories”, *Journal of Strategic Security*, 4, no. 4 (2012), p. 30.

11 A. P. Schmid, “Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review”, p. 5.

12 J. Bartlett, C. Miller, “The Edge of Violence: Towards Telling the Difference Between Violent and Nonviolent Radicalization”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, no. 24 (2012), p.2.

13 A. P.Schmid, “Violent and Non-Violent Extremism: Two Sides of the Same Coin?”, ICCT Research Paper, May 2014, The Hague 2014, p. 12.

14 See the Annex for the questionnaires with community and religious leaders and officials and experts. Q5.1 in the survey of the community and religious leaders reads: “How would you define “radicalization”—what are its symptoms? What are, in your opinion, the main sources of radicalization in general?” In turn, Q6.1 in the survey of officials and experts reads: “What is your assessment of the current and possible future risk of radicalization of population in the target region?”

rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, this the lack of precise legal definitions and conceptual clarity on issues of extremism, radicalization and violent extremism have often contributed to violations of human rights.¹⁵

Early intervention of multiple stakeholders to identify and address vulnerabilities

The previous assessments have helped formulate a “theory of change” framework for rendering assistance to local communities in such a way as to reduce the long-term impact of the identified socioeconomic vulnerabilities on the potential for radicalization (Figure 2). In particular, they called for (a) early interventions on the part of both the local communities, non-governmental organizations and the State, (b) inclusion of the vulnerable persons into existing assistance schemes and (c) setting up new arrangements, building their resilience to further shocks.

Figure 2. Theory of change



¹⁵ www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25655&LangID=E.

The “theory of change” rests on four interlocking pillars, which foresee the involvement of both the institutional actors (in particular, the local and national government bodies) and the local community and religious leaders as well as women’s and youth organizations. The first pillar focuses on **identification** of vulnerabilities and most vulnerable members of the community as an essential part of prevention. This is followed by the component of **integration** aiming at both enabling the households to cope with future shocks better and at lowering the barriers to social advancement of the particularly vulnerable groups. The third pillar involves targeted **services** that by addressing specific social issues (in particular, alienation and passivity) as well as additional vulnerabilities, resulting from failed coping strategies put the vulnerable persons on a safe footing, increasing their chances for long-term self-reliance. The fourth pillar builds on the success of the previous activities, aiming to make the improvement sustainable by launching **policies** aimed at eradicating key drivers of the socioeconomic grounds for radicalization – structural unemployment, unfulfilled aspirations and long-term anxiety.

The theory of change framework has been modified compared to the model, elaborated for purpose of determining chances of migrants’ reintegration upon return.¹⁶ On the one hand, community involvement on behalf of local residents has a more permanent and inherent character than in the case of reintegration of returning migrant workers. It can be in fact understood to be a recurring and self-reinforcing mechanism, made up of a number of pillars, acting as essential elements of a whole chain. On the other hand, unlike with the migration cycle where targeted interventions are needed, aiming at specific persons’ immediate needs, the various stakeholders in the local communities should play a dual role – both as providers of concrete assistance and as focal points, ensuring long-term stability and cohesion of the community as a whole. This explains why two categories of stakeholders are considered central to these dual tasks. Both local community and religious leaders and local and national State authorities may serve as channels of assistance as well as anchors of social order and inclusion of all vulnerable groups in the local community.¹⁷

Hypothesis on the linkage between vulnerabilities and radicalization potential

Despite some recent efforts by researchers and organizations, significant gaps remain in understanding the grounds and mechanisms of radicalization that could ultimately fuel violent extremism in Central Asia. On the **factors** contributing to radicalization, relatively little attention has been paid to the role of socioeconomic factors, affecting whole households, and in particular the most vulnerable categories of local residents, such as women or youth.

IOM Central Asia has recognized the various challenges associated with obtaining valid data that could inform PVE programming and policy, responding to the calls from several Central Asian governments for research that would help address those gaps. Two rounds of comprehensive assessments into the linkage between socioeconomic vulnerabilities and risk of emerging radicalization were carried out by an IOM research team in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in 2016–2017.¹⁸ The assessment, made up of interviews with returning migrants, experts and community leaders, has not only defined key vulnerabilities faced by returnees and their families but also

“provided a framework for understanding the possible link between re-entry banned migrants’ vulnerabilities (deterioration of socioeconomic status, alienation from the State and community) and their long-term radicalization potential”¹⁹

The framework was made up of three levels of analysis: individual/household, community and State and non-State stakeholders.

¹⁶ The original „theory of change” can be found in IOM Central Asia 2017, p. 43.

¹⁷ The notion of community has an important element of shared identity as indicated in this definition: “a social group with a common territorial base; those in the group share interests and have a sense of belonging to the group” (R. Stebbins, *Sociology. The Study of Society*, Harper and Row: New York, 1987, p. 534).

¹⁸ IOM Central Asia, *Migrant Vulnerabilities and Integration Needs in Central Asia: Root Causes, Social and Economic Impact of Return Migration*, Astana 2016; IOM Central Asia, *Migrant Vulnerabilities and Integration Needs in Central Asia: Assessing migrants’ and community needs and managing risks*, Astana 2017, available at: www.iom.kz/en/publications [accessed 15.09.2018].

¹⁹ IOM Central Asia, *Migrant Vulnerabilities and Integration Needs in Central Asia: Assessing migrants’ and community needs and managing risks*, Astana 2017, p. 19.

Firstly, on the *individual/household level*, the 2017 assessment concluded that while the return of economic growth and uptake in migration flows between Central Asian countries of origin and main destination countries (Russian Federation and Kazakhstan) have helped bring down the overall level of economic vulnerability, the post-2013 economic downturn and application of re-entry bans have made certain groups of migrants and their households more vulnerable due to the growing indebtedness and prolonged joblessness. The interviews with returning migrants revealed that the combination of limited personal assets and skills, ruptured or weakened ties to the diaspora and home community as well as individual circumstances strongly differentiated those who made successful reintegration from those who did not. These *relative* re-entry paths become strong factors determining various individuals' and their households' chances for coping with further challenges, including willingness to seek assistance from established support networks. In particular, among the respondents the categories of young men and divorced/widowed women tended to face a particular set of challenges, reflecting their low socioeconomic status with frustrations with their own position as well as alienation from local community.

Secondly, on the *community* level, the extent to which vulnerable individuals exhibited trust toward local leaders and both State and non-State institutions and found them relevant to resolving their issues (both economic and sociocultural) was recognized as a key driver compelling the respondents to seek and receive targeted assistance. More generally, trust was found to be a major element of legitimacy that the local institutions and leaders enjoyed, enabling them to communicate and uphold social norms. Interviews with State officials and community and religious leaders confirmed this as a major factor of community stability and cohesion.

Finally, on the *stakeholder* level, State and non-State actors were found to play complementary roles in monitoring, identifying and addressing vulnerabilities of the researched members of communities. This complementarity not only helped resolve some barriers to reaching some of the vulnerable individuals and households but also highlight the fact that to be effective in the long run, PVE security measures must be accompanied by the inclusive approach in which a broad range of actors (diaspora and religious leaders, respected members of local communities) can be involved.

Thus, the assessments showed that the question of the linkage between vulnerabilities and radicalization potential needs to be tackled on all three levels of analysis by integrating three main variables:

- **Deterioration of socioeconomic position of individuals and households and their capacity for tackling these vulnerabilities on their own,**
- **Willingness to seek assistance from trusted and respected leaders and institutions and to maintain close ties to support networks,**
- **Recognition of vulnerabilities among various individuals and groups by various stakeholders and their perception of the linkage to long-term radicalization potential.**

The earlier assessments helped develop a thesis on the linkage between subjective sense of failure to achieve higher status and receptiveness to ideological messages that has been hypothesized in the radicalization component of the previous IOM assessment. The interplay of objective handicaps and subjective perception of the situation was revealed to be essential for fueling the process of radicalization:

“Socioeconomic deprivation of migrants was not sufficient for triggering radicalization. Instead, the combination of personal status, self-worth and sense of alienation from and mistrust toward the State institutions could play a role”.²⁰

At the same time, no direct linkage was established “between the occurrence of vulnerabilities among various subcategories of return migrants and the likelihood of their radicalization”.²¹ Thus, the studies did not allow for profiling of the categories most susceptible to radicalization. However, by factoring in various types of secondary data, providing context for the field interviews (in particular, the official statistics, evaluations made by State officials as well as public reports), the assessments yielded a set of conclusions on the relative strength of factors that could increase or deter the likelihood of radicalization of both the local communities at large and the most vulnerable categories of local residents.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 211.

²¹ Ibid, p. 23.

METHODOLOGY

Unique features of the current research

The previous assessments have helped build the general typology of individual socioeconomic vulnerabilities, indicating the most vulnerable groups, and concentrated on the population of return migrants along their migration experience. They indicated that the economic conditions of reintegration are vital for the returnees' decisions on settling down in the countries of origin while absence of employment or livelihood opportunities is a strong push factor, inducing secondary movement.

It became clear, however, that further investigation was needed to validate the thesis on the crucial role of early, targeted intervention reducing socioeconomic vulnerabilities and improving sociocultural integration of groups at risk in lowering their long-term radicalization potential. Three questions are particularly relevant to understanding the possible linkage between vulnerabilities and radicalization prospects, covering three levels of analysis: individual/household, community and State and non-State stakeholders. This assessment therefore explores in depth the role of communities (in particular, religious and informal leaders) as well as of State reintegration efforts in addressing those vulnerabilities. *The focus is shifted from individual to community coping strategies.*

Another distinction is *the geographic concentration on regions, which combine economic vulnerability, social instability and a higher number of reported cases of radicalization.* By focusing on the regions, affected by various factors of instability, the researchers are looking at the relative position of some socially and economically disadvantaged categories of residents and at the success or failure of their coping strategies, and their reliance on informal support networks (family, community, mosque). This focused perspective has resulted in the choice of a smaller number of communities, which have been treated as case studies, and their particular features have been taken into account.

Finally, a shift has been made from analysing both socioeconomic and ideological factors that could trigger radicalization process (featured extensively in 2016 and 2017) to *the analysis of the level of awareness of vulnerabilities affecting women and youth among current and potential agents of assistance delivery* – both officials and local community and religious leaders. As stressed throughout the study, the research does not aim to profile those whose socioeconomic vulnerabilities could become grounds for triggering radicalization through face-to-face interviews, but rather considers this issue indirectly, probing the perspectives of community and religious leaders as well as officials. Thus, we expect to establish the level to which the agents of assistance are aware of the needs of most vulnerable groups, to what extent they acknowledge the role of such vulnerabilities in exposing those residents to potential radicalization, and how they assess the linkage between the measures reducing vulnerabilities and possibilities for preventing radicalization.

Research objectives and general approach

The lessons learned during the preliminary assessments, implemented in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have been taken into account when planning **an in-depth investigation of the contribution of socioeconomic factors to overall radicalization potential of youth and women and of the role of local communities and State and non-State stakeholders in recognizing the impact of those vulnerabilities on those categories of local residents.** Following up on the focus of previous studies, attention has been paid to socioeconomically vulnerable young people (both male and female) and women, facing challenges in integration into the local communities due to a variety of factors. Impact of migration strategies on reintegration opportunities and needs for assistance are of particular interest to the researchers. **The study is thus based on the fieldwork to be carried out in selected communities in three Central Asian countries, serving primarily as countries of origin of migrants (Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) or as a country of transit and destination (Kazakhstan).**

Unlike the previous assessments, the current research involves an **integrated factor analysis**, drawing on in-depth interviews with three categories of respondents, which seek to establish:

- **The factors influencing the depth of socioeconomic vulnerabilities and the likelihood of alienation from local communities among youth and women, identified locally as vulnerable (attention to be paid to success of life strategies, marital status, duration of migration, personal capacities and skills),**
- **The existence and effectiveness of formal and informal support mechanisms as well as their accessibility and relevance for the particularly vulnerable persons,**
- **The local community leaders' and national stakeholders' perception of the linkages between the unaddressed socioeconomic vulnerabilities and ineffective economic and sociocultural integration of the vulnerable persons and their susceptibility to appeals from or activities of extremist groups.**

The experience gained in previous assessments has exposed some of the risks involved in the analysis of the linkage of socioeconomic vulnerabilities with radicalization potential. While sociological fieldwork is uniquely suited to collect personal testimonies, those are hard to extrapolate to produce valid generalizations. The results may also be skewed due to various connotations of the question of radicalization that could potentially influence the respondents' answers. In turn, the main stakeholders' perspectives may be limited, especially on the issues faced by some categories of local residents (women, youth) when the latter do not contact them on a regular basis. The limitations of the various perspectives must be therefore overcome by adopting an integrated approach.

Furthermore, the consultations with the members of the research team have helped highlight the need to adopt country-specific approaches to this study. In particular, it must be acknowledged that while in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, the assessment has taken into account the findings of the earlier assessments, seeking to validate the preliminary findings by taking into account social, economic and policy changes and considering local specificities, the component, carried out in Uzbekistan, has sought to establish certain theses through first-time query and was adjusted to take into account the different factors and causalities which might be at play. This specificity was reflected throughout the research process – starting from the stage of developing methodological instruments (survey forms) all the way to analysing the fieldwork material by the national team.

The fieldwork was generally conducted in two stages. In the first “wave”, carried out mainly in October–November 2019, the field researchers concentrated on obtaining the picture of vulnerabilities and identifying coping strategies of local residents as well as establishing the role of community and religious leaders in selected locations. The second “wave”, undertaken primarily in November–December 2019, involved primarily the national researchers and the international consultant who carried out interviews with experts and officials, aiming to complement the case studies with national-level statistics, current information on legal and policy measures as well as a variety of perspectives on possible linkages between vulnerabilities and radicalization. The interviews with State officials also gave the researchers an opportunity to communicate to the authorities the importance of obtaining local data and to brief them on the objectives of the research.

Thanks to the support offered by IOM missions, national experts were able to collect official statistics from the State institutions, which had received formal data requests. To probe the question of the use of assistance and identification of beneficiaries' needs, additional three focus groups with recipients of IOM assistance, meeting the vulnerability criteria, were organized in December 2019–January 2020. In turn, it was possible to relate the material, collected in Uzbekistan with the results of interviews, conducted on a related set of questions in August 2019. These additional sources of information serve to put the field research in context.

To verify the impact of the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic-related measures, the research teams in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan conducted a rapid assessment of the changing labour market opportunities and challenges as well as of short- and mid-term prospects for securing decent employment. The interviews in June and July 2020 targeted both persons who were at the time unemployed, searching for employment or remained inactive.

Sample of respondents and choice of locations

The fieldwork involved the total of **157** individual interviews and **3** focus groups (**14** persons, including 11 local residents and 3 community and religious leaders (thus, the total of **171** respondents took part in the study). In total, **105** local residents (**94** through individual in-depth interviews) and **36** local community and religious leaders (33 through individual in-depth interviews) were interviewed in the three countries. Among the local residents, particular attention was paid to women (43 individually interviewed and 5 focus group discussants) and youth (27 individually interviewed persons in the 18–29 age bracket and 6 focus group discussants up to 35 years old). In addition, interviews were conducted with **30** experts and State officials and official information was provided by State institutions in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

In **Kazakhstan**, Aktobe, Mangistau and Turkestan regions have been selected in accordance with the following criteria: population size, poverty level, the presence of events with socioeconomic tensions, the incidence of terrorist attacks.

Aktobe and Mangistau regions are located in the Western part of Kazakhstan. Aktobe region is an industrial region with a larger share of the urban population. Mangistau region belongs to the oil-bearing regions with the presence of foreign companies as well as with a greater share of the rural population. Turkestan region, located in the south of the country, bordering Uzbekistan, is an agricultural area where the rural population is predominant.

In **Tajikistan**, interviews were carried out in two regions: Khatlon region (Kulyab and Bokhtar cities) and the Region of the Republican subordination of Rudaki district and town of Vakhdat. The Kulyab city is characterized by high rates of migration and divorce, deficit of job opportunities, and high level of patriarchy. In turn, the Bokhtar district is a once industrial region with significant population and mixed population (immigrants from other regions in the second and third generation). Moreover, three focus groups were organized in the town of Bokhtar (Khatlon region).

Three regions in of the Ferghana valley were selected for field research in Uzbekistan: Andijan, Ferghana and Namangan.²² The areas were chosen on the basis of three main criteria: dense population; the level of unemployment, forcing young people to leave the labour migration; prevalence of conservative traditional community values.

²² The Ferghana valley is a compact, relatively small area of 22 thousand square kilometers. The Ferghana valley is divided between Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Currently, the valley is home to about 15 million people.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Economic position of households

Economic growth in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan has helped raise wages and create jobs to a certain extent, while remittances are still major contributions to the budgets of migrant workers' families. At the same time, collected local testimonies confirm that large-scale labour migration (prolonged separation of spouses and disconnection from children) may have negative consequences for some families and communities. In turn, while jobs continue to be created, especially in gas and oil industries, slowing down of economic development, currency devaluation and price increases in Kazakhstan have been among factors, contributing to economic vulnerabilities of local residents. Recent interviews in selected regions of Kazakhstan and Tajikistan indicate that the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic further limited opportunities for youth employment by disproportionately affecting sectors of their current employment (small businesses, services and informal sector). Moreover, in investigated regions of all three countries wide disparities remain in household incomes and in access to employment, with young men and women with many children (esp. divorced or abandoned) unable to take the advantage of economic opportunities.

Factor of vulnerability No. 1: Low-paid jobs, not sufficient for meeting household needs. Interviews with local residents in Kazakhstan show that those employed in low-paid jobs have limited opportunities for obtaining permanent income that is sufficient for meeting the living needs of the households and for fulfilling successfully the role of a provider for their families. Most respondents had to cover costs of renting accommodation and only very few of them had farms, which could help them reduce costs of purchasing food. In these circumstances, they reported living from day to day without setting aside any savings. Interviewed local officials and leaders suggested that the shortages of housing stock and resulting high values of rent have in fact put pressure on young people to search for jobs that could offer sufficiently high wages.

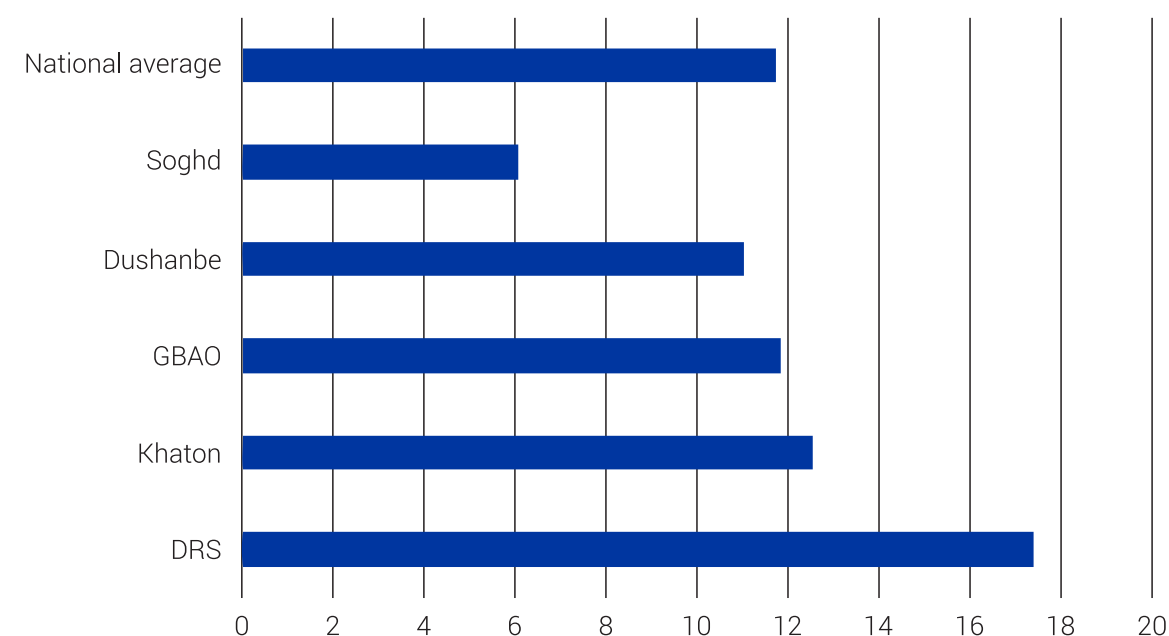
The respondents in the investigated regions of Kazakhstan noted that employment in the private sector often did not reduce vulnerabilities in the long run as it did not lead to personal development or savings accumulation etc. Usually such work was reported to be paid by piecework, on a daily or weekly basis, and the occupation might last for only several days. This precarious situation was referred to in particular in the southern agricultural regions. Official data of the Committee on Statistics of the Ministry of National Economy of Kazakhstan confirm that the agricultural sector has lowest average wages.²³ Surveyed women employed in public institutions (schools, kindergartens) also reported difficulties in making ends meet.

A recent household budget survey, carried out in 2018 in **Tajikistan**, showed that on average 11.8 per cent of families found themselves below poverty levels.²⁴ Rural residents were over 40 per cent more likely to be in poverty than city dwellers (13.1% vs. 9.1% respectively). The investigated regions are characterized by above-average poverty levels: 12.6 per cent of the residents of the Khatlon region and as many as 17.5 per cent of those living in the Districts of Republican Subordination (DRS) were in that group (Figure 3). An even higher concentration was observed in the category of households in extreme poverty with as many as 67.6 per cent of them found in the Khatlon region and the DRS.

²³ While average salaries amounted to 186,615 tenge (487.6 USD) they stood at only 115,317 tenge (301.3 USD) in the sector of agriculture, forestry and fisheries – being the lowest among all the sector of the national economy. See www.stat.gov.kz/api/getFile/?docId=ESTAT102273.

²⁴ G. Khasanzoda (ed.) (2019), Продовольственная безопасность и бедность [Food security and poverty], p. 86, Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan. www.stat.wv.tj/publications/June2019/food-security-rus.pdf.

Figure 3. The level of poverty in the regions of Tajikistan for 2018, in % of households (household budget survey)



Source: Tajstat-2019 (www.stat.wv.tj/publications/June2019/food-security-rus.pdf)

The economic situation of households is also affected by the growing scale of delays in payment of wages in Tajikistan. As of the end of September 2019, the total amount of arrears for the issuance of wages, taking into account previous years, amounted to 44,790,500 somoni (4,627,117 USD), including 17,381,300 somoni (1,795,589 USD) for the reporting period, which increased by 18,025,000 somoni (1,862,087 USD or 67.37%) compared to the same period last year.²⁵

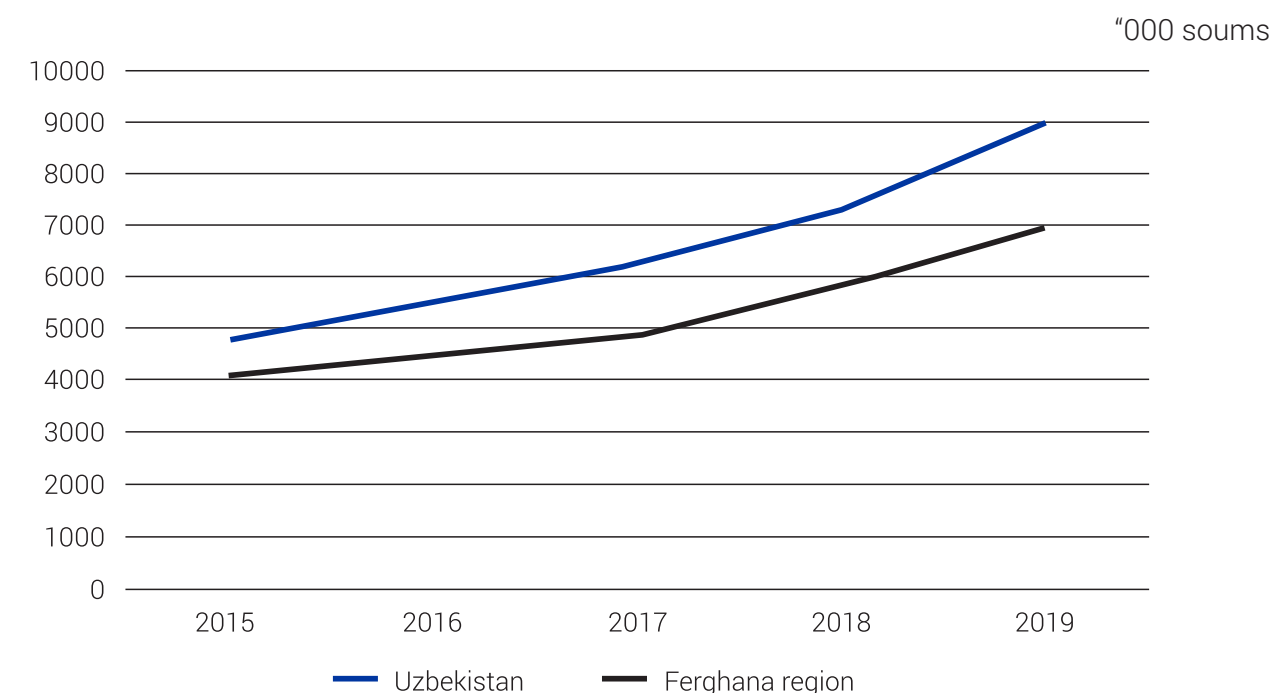
Low wages have been also named as a source of vulnerability by respondents in Tajikistan. Fieldwork in Tajikistan shows that the level of wages can be too low even for those employed in State organizations, forcing some to take secondary employment, including as *mardikors* (day labourers), where there is no permanent income and the wages are paid daily. Another strategy involves seasonal employment at family-owned farms in summer and autumn or work in teams of 5–6 women who provide services to more affluent segments of the population (cleaning the territory and premises, washing dishes and carpets) during weddings and other celebrations.

According to official statistics from **Uzbekistan**, real total income per capita amounted in 2019 to 6,910,200 soums in the Ferghana valley compared to 8,963,700 soums for the country as a whole (approx. 726 USD and 942 USD respectively).²⁶ State Statistics Committee annual data on real total per capita incomes indicate a steady decline in the relative levels of income in the Ferghana region against the national average (Figure 4). While in 2015, they accounted for around 87 per cent of the country average, the ratio dropped to 77 per cent by 2019.

²⁵ Data supplied by the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan in the course of an interview.

²⁶ According to official National Bank of Uzbekistan rate of 1 USD = 9507 soums (31.12.2019). www.nbu.uz/en/exchange-rates/diagramma/

Figure 4. Real total income per capita in the Ferghana valley relative to national average of Uzbekistan



Source: www.web.stat.uz/open_data/en/15.5%20Real%20total%20income%20per%20capita.pdf

The Ferghana region's structure of population income reveals a relatively high dependence on transfers (28.2% of the total compared to 25.3% nationally) while the contribution of employment and self-employment is slightly lower than the national average (67.9% compared to 69.1%).²⁷ However, the region registered the second-highest share of self-employment to population's income in the country: 50 per cent compared to 42 per cent for the country as a whole. On the other hand, contribution from incomes of hired employees was significantly lower than in the other regions – 24.8 per cent relative to 27.1 per cent nationally.²⁸

Surveyed youth from Uzbekistan reported that families with single breadwinners were in a particularly difficult position. The search for employment as a *mardikor* (unskilled worker hired for a day's work) may last for several days without payment and can result in merely temporary work at rates as low as to cover only subsistence costs.

Factor of vulnerability No. 2: Youth unemployment. Certain categories of residents are more likely to face prolonged exclusion from the labour market and to be dismissed from their jobs. While official unemployment statistics in **Kazakhstan** are limited to persons who registered as jobless, they indicate that in the group of young persons (under 29 years old), unemployment rate is significantly higher among those lacking technical education (4.8%) compared to that among graduates or persons with incomplete higher education (3.3%).²⁹ According to local testimonies, young men who have been educated may take up to 2 years while searching for a job in their specialization. During this period, they try to earn extra money, find temporary work. During interviews, concerns were expressed that failed attempts to get a job matching the technical field of education could result in the loss of competence and prolonged State of career instability.

According to official statistics, obtained from the Agency for statistics under the President of the Republic of **Tajikistan**, persons under 30 years of age account for over 60 per cent of the registered unemployed, and the average period of job search for this age group rose in 2018 to over 9 months (Table 1).

²⁷ Ibid., p. 389.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 390, 392.

²⁹ Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Committee on Statistics, Quarterly statistics on youth on the national labour market (2001–2018), www.stat.gov.kz.

Table 1. Number of officially unemployed youth and duration of unemployment in Tajikistan, 2012 -2018

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
The total number of unemployed youth, 15-29	31,992	31,742	33,160	33,567	30,882	31,744	29,334
up to 1 month	2,287	1,773	2,918	2,338	2,904	1,841	1,556
from 1 to 3 months	7,437	5,467	5,655	5,969	6,971	8,327	5,410
from 3 to 6 months	6,820	9,401	8,055	8,294	8,213	7,558	6,982
from 6 to 12 months	9,063	8,706	8,538	9,875	7,149	5,976	6,034
over a year	6,385	63,95	7,994	7,091	5,645	8,042	9,352
the average time of job search, months	7.6	7.8	8.1	8	7.1	7.3	9.1

Source: Agency for statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan.

The official unemployment rate in **Uzbekistan** in comparison with 2017 increased by 3.5 per cent (from 5.8%),³⁰ but the Ministry of Labour notes that this is not due to a sharp increase in the number of unemployed, but with the improvement of the methodology for accounting for the unemployed population, which allows the most complete account of persons in need of employment. Even these estimates may not fully capture the full scale of unemployment as not all citizens register themselves in the relevant institutions.

Individual barriers include inadequate educational background, insufficient work experience or inability to verify their professional skills and qualifications. Typical scenarios are those of workers in the informal sector, for instance at local markets, seasonal jobs in agriculture or in washing and cleaning services or in labour migration. According to a large-scale survey, carried out in 66 cities and regions of Uzbekistan,³¹ young people (under 25 years old) were far more likely to be unemployed (17%) than the general population (9.3% of the economically active). Women are another group that is more likely to be affected by unemployment (12.9%).

Interviews with youth in the Ferghana Valley revealed that young people often lack necessary capacities that would help them overcome their vulnerabilities. Young people reported difficulties in finding jobs, meeting their expectations of sufficient wages and long-term career development prospects, either locally or in the cities of the Ferghana valley. Other local studies show that young people lack skills that would be in demand, and such untrained young people who do not have work experience, are the most vulnerable to being fired and are more likely to suffer from long-term unemployment.³²

30 www.web.stat.uz/open_data/en/11.2_per_cent200D_Unemployment_rate_eng.pdf.

31 A survey, administered by the Republican Scientific Centre for Employment and Labour Safety of Population at the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations of the Republic of Uzbekistan, covered 17400 respondents and 3300 households. The results were made public in January 2019. See: www.gazeta.uz/ru/2019/01/29/employment/.

32 This conclusion is drawn from research data collected by the Center for the study of regional threats, Tashkent.

At the same time, interviews carried out in this fieldwork confirmed young people's aspirations to better education, who perceive it as a way of personal advancement and improvement of life opportunities. Fieldwork in Uzbekistan also revealed that this strategy could help reduce vulnerabilities to some extent. While the position of students remains precarious economically, this category of young people was found to be better equipped to cope with their economic vulnerability – for instance, none of the student respondents were engaged in irregular physical labour.

Factor of vulnerability No. 3: Impact of migration on households. The samples of respondents in two major countries of origin of migrant workers in the Central Asian region, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan included persons with experience of working abroad. Impact of labour migration on addressing the local socioeconomic vulnerabilities was featured in the fieldwork: both as an individual and group strategy to deal with the limited opportunities for decent employment and as a factor influencing the welfare of families and communities more broadly.

Interviews with vulnerable youth in **Tajikistan** contained many references to the vital role that external labour migration continues to play in addressing the problem of scarcity of well-paid jobs. According to the Migration service of the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of the Population of the Republic of Tajikistan in the first half of 2019, 300,284 citizens left the Republic for labour migration, which increased by 49,037, or 19.5 per cent, compared to this period last year (251,247 left). Available data for 2019 show that young people account for 73 per cent of the total volume of external migrant workers while women represent 14.5 per cent of the migrant group.³³ Interviewed experts noted that more independent labour migration is observed among women in the northern regions of Tajikistan, and among women in the southern regions of the country, migration with family members (brothers, sister, fathers, mothers, sons-in-law) prevails.

At the same time, local spiritual leaders believed that labour migration might also have some long-term adverse consequences for the welfare of the families and communities. They attributed a rise in the cases of divorces and family breakdowns to prolonged separation of spouses. They also pointed out such problems as the deteriorating health status of migrants themselves as well as psychological burden that the absence of a parent represents to children.

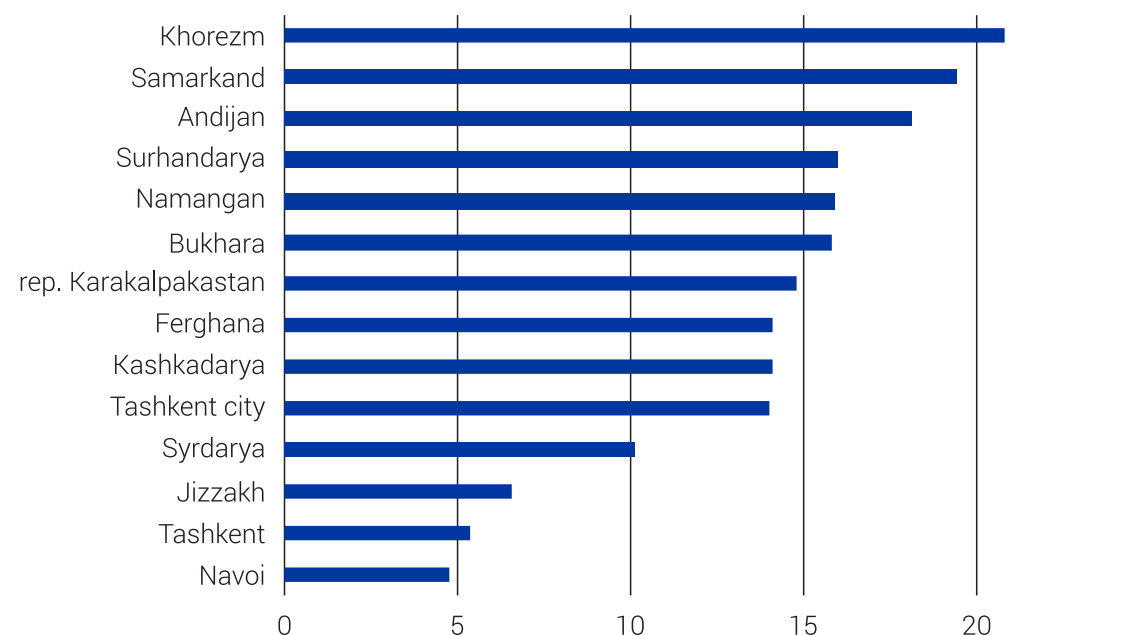
Data from **Uzbekistan**, on the other hand, indicate a recent decrease of the scale of external labour migration. According to a survey, carried out in 2018,³⁴ about a third of Uzbek returnees intend to find employment in the area of their permanent residence, while the others planned to leave for labour migration, but until the beginning of the new season, they would help members of the family or entrepreneurs without registration of labour relations. However, as interviewed local officials note, inability to locate adequate employment locally continues to push young people in the Ferghana Valley into emigration. In turn, many migrants from Tajikistan are unwilling to leave Russian Federation while their bans on re-entry are in force.

Overall labour migration is a significant positive factor, helping alleviate economic problems that the households are facing in the Ferghana Valley as well as in other regions of the country. Financial resources earned abroad represent for many households a major contribution to the family budget. The figures vary by region, but it is believed that this is between around 5 per cent (Navoi and Tashkent regions) and nearly 21 per cent (Khorezm region) of the total income of the population (Figure 4). Ferghana region registered the inflow at the level of around 14 per cent.³⁵

33 Data provided during an interview with the Migration Service of the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of the Population of the Republic of Tajikistan.

34 A survey, administered by the Republican Scientific Centre for Employment and Labour Safety of Population at the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations of the Republic of Uzbekistan, op.cit.

35 Analysts of the international audit and consulting network FinExpertiza noted that from the Russian Federation, each migrant from Uzbekistan sends home an average of 414 USD per month. Transfers from South Korea exceed 600 USD per month. See www.uz.sputniknews.ru/economy/20191224/13098405/Stalo-izvestno-kakuyu-summu-otpravlyayut-trudovye-migranty-iz-Rossii-na-rodinu.html.

Figure 5. Remittance levels to regions of Uzbekistan as share of total incomes, January – June 2019 (%)

Source: State Statistics Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan³⁶

On the other hand, interviewed local officials and spiritual leaders believed that in some cases labour migration might actually deepen economic vulnerabilities, especially when families become seriously indebted or are forced to sell all their assets in order to embark on migration. The research team in Uzbekistan received reports that inadequate preparation prior to departure, insufficient language proficiency and inability to cope with an unfamiliar environment have put some migrants in jeopardy, both in financial and personal terms.

The respondents in Uzbekistan referred to particular problems when some local residents needed to undertake risky migration strategies to cover high expenditures associated with travel and housing. They spoke of cases of some older men who failed to establish their position in the community and migration appeared to them a way out of the situation in which they did not see prospects or opportunities locally. They would sell everything they could (e.g. a cow or a car) from their own assets as well as those belonging to close relatives while some would take loans from private individuals, getting into debt. Another cited scenario involved young men who would risk working and residing irregularly, at times violating the law, in order to compensate their family members who had provided initial funding for air tickets, insurance, agency fees and costs charged by the host party.

Emerging vulnerability: COVID-19 pandemic fallout. As a follow-up to the main round of fieldwork, interviews were conducted by the national research teams in June and July 2020 with vulnerable youth in three regions of Kazakhstan (Aktobe, Turkestan and Karaganda) as well as in the Khatlon region and I. Somoni district of Dushanbe city in Tajikistan. They helped provide preliminary conclusions on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the opportunities for finding and holding on to jobs in the conditions of reduced economic activity.

Interviewed young people in **Kazakhstan** believed that the COVID-19 pandemic limited opportunities for employment, restricting them to those positions, which were considered vital to cope with the rising number of infections (doctors, nurses, drivers). At the same time, the mobility restrictions temporarily introduced in the country put a hold on the activities of businesses, employing a significant number of young people – cafes, restaurants, shopping malls and construction sites.

36 [www.stat.uz/uploads/doklad/2019/yanvar-iyun/ru/yanvar-iyun_2019\(rus\).pdf](http://www.stat.uz/uploads/doklad/2019/yanvar-iyun/ru/yanvar-iyun_2019(rus).pdf).

Many households reported one or two members losing jobs in that period, which put significant pressure on family budgets (either requiring cuts in all but essential expenses) and where all breadwinners lost their jobs, compelled the family to use loans. However, available statistics show a significant drop in the number of young persons who turned to State employment centers in the first half of 2020 when only 68,300 visitors under 29 years of age approached the centers compared to 224,100 in 2019.³⁷

The sample of respondents in **Tajikistan** included 24 unemployed young persons, all of whom declared having lost their previously held jobs during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. While officially lockdown was not introduced in Tajikistan, surveyed youth reported that a number of private companies were placing their staff on unpaid leave for a month and some of the interviewees were affected by that measure. The surveyed youth had been employed by small companies, which had to suspend their operations in the fields of commerce and services. Half of the respondents took active measures to search for employment.

Groups at greater risk of socioeconomic alienation

Women's socioeconomic position, especially in rural areas, is largely dependent on their family status and relations with their husbands and their families. Their welfare may sharply deteriorate after abandonment, separation or divorce when they may, in certain cases, lose their financial support and even be forced out of the house. These problems are particularly acute among the women with many children who are homemakers and lack formal work experience. In turn, many young women lack qualifications to compete successfully for the few available stable jobs and are forced into precarious seasonal employment where again they cannot acquire skills needed for career development.

Gender disparity can be observed in unemployment statistics in **Kazakhstan**. Among women, this figure is higher than among men – both generally and among young women (Table 2).

Table 2. Gender disparity in registered unemployment in Kazakhstan, 2018

Category	Men	Women
General population	4.1	5.5
Youth (15–28)	3.3	4.4
Young adults (25–28)	3.4	4.6

Source: www.stat.gov.kz/official/industry/25/statistic/8

Surveys with vulnerable youth in Kazakhstan indicated that women tended to stay unemployed significantly longer than men: while young men reported the period without work to average 2–3 years, women reported joblessness lasting between 3–5 years. At the same time, the commonly cited reasons for staying out of the labour market varied between men and women: while most men took a longer time to find a job because they were interested in positions matching their skills and qualifications, women often had to stay out of the labour market or work at lower salaries in order to take care of young children.

Women with many children who cannot find a permanent job have been found to be at greatest risk of poverty in the investigated communities in Kazakhstan. Interviews with several middle-aged women with children revealed stories of personal tragedies, such as the loss of their husband, divorce, in the wake of which the women had to provide for their families on their own, constantly being on the lookout for ways of providing the livelihood to the family.

37 Data of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Kazakhstan, July 2020.

Loss of support from the husband's family was named a particular source of economic disadvantage in cases of divorce. According to one of the interviewees in the Mangistau region 200 divorces were recorded over a 6-month period. The surveyed women referred to the widespread problem of non-payment of child support by their ex-husbands. According to the report of the Ministry of Justice of Kazakhstan presented in the Parliament on 23 December 2019, the amount of unpaid child support nationwide amounted to about 6 billion tenge (approx. 15.6 million USD).

These conclusions are in line with those obtained in *Tajikistan*. Gender disparity was observed in wages of day labourers, employed at open-air markets. According to a 2018 survey by the Research Institute of Labour, Migration, Employment of the population of the Republic of Tajikistan, while men earn from 50 to 80 somoni a day (5.1–8.3 USD), the wages of women are much less, ranging from 15–30 somoni (1.6–3.1 USD) a day.³⁸ Interview findings suggest that the need to combine professional activities with family responsibilities made women agree to work at lower rates or not accept overtime while men tended not to consider working under such terms.

Based on the results of interviews, the researchers in Tajikistan were able to identify certain categories of women who were particularly vulnerable economically. They noted that women who were outside of marriage (e.g. divorced or separated from their husbands) were limited in their chances of coping with economic problems when they lost the support from their spouse and from the husband's extended family while not enjoying sufficient access to other sources of assistance.³⁹ Secondly, bearing sole responsibility for raising children, they were found to be prevented from finding full-time jobs or seeking further education. Many female respondents pointed to seasonal employment in informal sector as their coping strategy. However, they expressed their concerns about insecure status of such employment, exposing them to risks of unfair dismissal, underpayment, non-payment of social benefits and failure to accumulate pension capital.

In view of the growing number of divorces in the country, a number of political and legislative measures have been taken, including improving judicial protection of the rights of women and children in cases of divorce. For instance, the courts of first instance in most cases immediately began to make decisions on granting the woman and minor children of the separate living space in the house of the spouse, without taking into account the circumstances provided by the husband's family. But the surveyed local residents reported that these measures were not always effective, since the woman living in the family of the spouse would often be subjected to psychological and sometimes physical pressure, leading the woman to leave the house of the former spouse. Another issue brought up by female respondents was the recovery of alimony from spouses who were in labour migration, due to the fact that migrants very often carry out work in the host country in the informal sector.

Another vulnerable category that was identified in the field research consists of young women who lack necessary educational background or work experience. In all three countries, experts and officials pointed to problems of prolonged unemployment among women. For instance, in Tajikistan women tend to stay out of the labour market for twice as long as men.⁴⁰ Tajik respondents pointed to several barriers to women's employment, especially in the rural areas: low literacy and education levels, failure to acquire needed skills, and unavailability of pre-school facilities, including those for children with disabilities. Young mothers were also named as facing particular difficulties in accessing job market and remaining employed. Their opportunities remain limited on account of the insufficient educational assets as well as of the cultural norms, which do not prioritize their career advancement.

38 "Causes and factors of informal employment in *mardikor* bazaars and problems of using women's labour", p. 13.

39 Data, supplied by the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Tajikistan reveal a diverse picture of the divorce dynamics. While some locations (such as Vose) did not experience any increase in divorces, several areas, including Levakan, Jomi and Vahdat districts saw the rates double over the period of 2013-2018. Interviewed local community and religious leaders considered divorced or abandoned wives to be particularly vulnerable economically.

40 Data of the Agency for statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, obtained by the research team during an interview.

The research in western Kazakhstan and in the Ferghana Valley of Uzbekistan revealed significant barriers to integration of youth into the local labour market. These include not only the relative shortage of jobs that match the aspirations of young men (in terms of wages, job prestige, and opportunities for career development) but also the difficulties in identifying those among the young men who need to be helped first on account of their unfulfilled aspirations. Young men are a particularly vulnerable group with a potential for developing long-term frustration and sense of personal failure as on the one hand, their aspirations have been increasing, pushing them toward search for employment in higher-paid positions, while often they lack necessary higher education and technical qualifications for taking them. Among these persons, the category of special concern includes returned migrants, especially those whose migration experience was negative (due to impact of legal/administrative measures, hostility from the local population or difficulties in the workplace) yet whose aspirations rose while abroad.

Social norms place significant expectations on young men (either married or about to marry) who seek to provide means for their newly established families. However, this group comes across strong barriers in access to labour market. Unemployment among persons 29 years old or younger in Uzbekistan stands at 15.1 per cent (compared to 9.3% for the general population).⁴¹ Official data for Tajikistan show that around half of the unemployed young people cannot find a job within 6 months and that the period of joblessness has expanded recently to 9 months.⁴² Field research indicates that young men from rural areas seek a way out by migrating to cities and other countries, searching for unskilled employment in the service sector. Interviews with local officials in both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan point to inadequate qualifications and lack of necessary work experience as factors contributing to persistence of youth unemployment.

Young people are particularly likely to seek migration as a strategy to cope with the shortage of job opportunities locally – persons under 30 years of age account for instance for 73 per cent of the total flow of migrant workers from Tajikistan.⁴³ However, as already indicated migration takes toll on migrants in several ways, and the impact can be augmented when it reaches young people lacking proper experience or skills to cope. For instance, interviews with respondents from Uzbekistan showed that some young men had become indebted and risked working and residing irregularly. This not only made their economic position precarious but also exacerbated their sense of alienation and failure. In worst cases, they could be subject to threats or even assaults from the host society. Interviewed spiritual leaders in Tajikistan also expressed concerns over the deterioration of the health condition of some migrants as a result of work strain as well as acquisition of infectious diseases. Thus, for some young men, migration experience might actually be traumatic, and hamper, rather than expand, long-term personal advancement prospects.

Financial assistance

Informal sources (families, friends and local communities) have been selected as priority forms of financial assistance by the respondents in all investigated regions. At the same time, many among the respondents have never used any institutional aid – either from the State or from NGOs. This is partly explained by the fact, that State or NGO aid rarely offers large enough support at a short notice to meet the main types of needs – big expenses for traditional events (such as weddings), medical treatment or investment into travel and establishment abroad in search of work. Informal support can be a serious burden on the local residents, as in case of unscrupulous lenders who put families in debt bondage.

Immediate and extended *families* have been cited as the most reliable source of assistance by interviewed local residents in regions of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In *Kazakhstan*, the primary sources of financial support varied depending on the gender and marital status of the respondents: own parents (for young women), spouses (married women), friends and close relatives (young men). Surveyed young men declared, however, that they would seek to overcome difficulties firstly on their own, and accept any financial support only as a temporary measure.

41 www.web.stat.uz/open_data/en/11.2_per_cent200D_Unemployment_rate_eng.pdf.

42 Data of the Agency for statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, obtained by the research team during an interview.

43 Data of the Migration Service of the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of the Republic of Tajikistan, obtained by the research team during an interview.

The majority of young male respondents in **Tajikistan** declared that they could rely on their close relatives, i.e. brothers, sisters, mother and father. In some cases, respondents (mostly young men) said that it was not always convenient for them to contact relatives, since relatives themselves are often in an economic difficult situation. Some of the surveyed young men noted that sometimes they turned to their friends with whom they worked in labour migration and who at that time had a working income. In contrast, the female respondents referred to the role of traditional social norms, according to which a woman would turn to her mother or sister for help, who would convey the problem to the male members of the family for final settlement.

Research from **Tajikistan** highlighted that women who reside with their husband's family, may lose the support of the husband's family in case they experience tensions. In these cases, women may eventually have to turn to their own parents and extended family members for support, and in extreme cases, move out of the residence of the husband's family. Another limitation faced by women in Tajikistan was the hierarchical structure, in which they would not turn for help directly to male family members (father and brothers) but rather would need to seek intermediation of their mothers and sisters who could then present the case to the male relatives so that they could make the final decision.

Nearly half of the surveyed respondents from Uzbekistan indicated relatives as the top source of assistance. The majority of young men who were interviewed said that they could rely on their close relatives for assistance except in cases when their family members themselves were in economic difficulties. In turn, women (especially when their husbands were in labour migration) were reported to be strongly dependent on the support of their husbands' family. Almost one out of five interviewees pointed to friends and acquaintances as the source of first resort. These informal sources (friends and loan sharks) have been turned to in emergencies (e.g. medical treatment or purchase of medicines).

According to the surveyed respondents from Uzbekistan, the top need for seeking external assistance relates to raising funds for the cost of wedding arrangements, and is closely associated with the person's status and relations with the local community. This social context could provide one explanation why funds would be sought for those purposes firstly from family and community members and then from acquaintances and friends. Another one is related to the high costs of weddings⁴⁴ or of medical treatment, which might make it extremely difficult for rural residents to obtain funding from institutions (e.g. banks) given their inability to provide sufficient collateral. Finally, the respondents in the Ferghana Valley highlighted strong social expectations of young married men to secure sufficient funds to afford at least own two rooms in their parents' house.

Recent State initiatives have begun to focus attention on groups facing socioeconomic exclusion, especially large families. An important development has been the allocation of targeted social assistance to vulnerable categories. However, few interviewed local respondents made use of some State funds even if they were eligible and many of them were not aware of some of the opportunities.

Respondents among local experts and officials in **Kazakhstan** have noted an increase in State support to some of the socioeconomically vulnerable categories, especially large families and young people. Many respondents made use of allowances granted to families with four or more minor children, but they believed that those measures did not bring any significant relief as they were able to use them only once and spent them on current needs.⁴⁵ In 2019, targeted social assistance was introduced for large families. Under the terms, to be eligible a family had to demonstrate that the income per family member should not exceed 70 per cent of the subsistence minimum (20,789 tenge or 54 USD). Effective of 2020, the amount of aid is calculated on the basis of the number of children. The amount of this benefit is set in a differentiated amount from 42,500 to 74,000 tenge (111–194 USD) per month. Making the level of assistance tied to the income level was assessed critically by the female respondents, who noted that as a result of the calculation, they did not receive approval of their applications. In addition, a guaranteed social package is being introduced for low-income families and children of preschool age will be provided with food sets and other basic necessities.⁴⁶

44 Weddings include often two dinners for ca. 200 attendees as well as the morning *pilav* meal, offered to as many as 500–700 persons. The costs that may be conservatively estimated to vary from 8,000–10,000 (smaller events) up to 35,000–50,000 USD are traditionally covered by the groom's and bride's families.

45 The size was 10,504 tenge (27.5 USD) in 2019.

46 Large families are also entitled to monthly allowance for the care of the fourth and subsequent child – 22,473 tenge or 59 USD (paid until the child reaches the age of one year) and one-time allowance for the birth of the fourth and subsequent child – 159,075 tenge or 416 USD (paid once at the birth of a child).

Some local residents took advantage of a State debt repayment programme, implemented as a one-time initiative in 2019 and found it to be helpful in easing the burden on household budget. However, interviewed local leaders found efforts at job creation of limited use as the proposed salaries were not competitive.

According to the latest data, in 2019 the Employment Agency of the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of the Republic of **Tajikistan** registered 32,807 residents of the Khatlon region and 22,082 persons from the surveyed DRS, of which the total of 10,166 were provided with professional education, and nearly 60 per cent of them were subsequently employed and about as many received unemployment benefits. Youth (under 30 years old) accounts for half of all the applicants the country and the numbers grew significantly in 2016 and stabilized in 2017 (Table 3).⁴⁷ While women account for over 47 per cent of the officially unemployed persons, only fewer than one in three of them make use of employment services to apply for jobs. In fact, although the total number of registered applicants, using State employment services, grew by a third between 2010 and 2017, the number of female applicants remains at the same level.⁴⁸

Table 3. Number of persons who applied for employment in employment services in Tajikistan, 2010–2017

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
All registered jobseekers, applying for employment	59,669	64,079	63,540	71,168	72,409	72,521	77,349	79,619
Of these: women	25,471	28,171	26,791	27,097	28,742	27,313	27,359	25,472
Of these: youth, 15–29 years old	27,743	31,992	31,742	33,160	33,567	30,882	41,001	40,007

Source: Agency for statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan

The number of local residents who receive regular social assistance (due to their economic status, disability, health status, except for old-age pension) in the selected regions of Tajikistan includes more than 148 thousand people with disabilities, including 27,000 children with disabilities are receiving a regular disability pension. According to World Bank experts' assessment, the targeted social assistance, amounting to 400 somoni (41.3 USD) per family per year, did not allow meeting basic needs.⁴⁹

Interviews with local respondents in Tajikistan detected limited awareness of the various forms of support, offered by State institutions. The majority of the respondents answering the question about the support provided by State structures, referred mainly to standard forms of support, such as pensions, survivor's benefits (paid to widowed spouses), or receipt of a land plot. A number of respondents mentioned the State employment service, which employs, retrains, and issues interest-free loans for the initial creation of a business. Women respondents in the district of A. Jomi of Kulob city also mentioned services for training new skills with the provision of scholarships. Thus, many of them were trained in the skills of manual carpet weaving with subsequent employment at the local enterprise.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, legislation of the Republic of Tajikistan defines as vulnerable a number of categories, including persons who have lost a breadwinner and do not have a source of income and single-parent families with minor children, as eligible for dedicated social services. An area of concern is the reintegration of returning migrant workers. According to the Migration service of the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of the Population of the Republic of Tajikistan in the first half of 2019, 300,284 citizens left the Republic for labour migration, which increased by 49,037, or 19.5 per cent, compared to this period last year (251,247 left).

47 Data on the number of persons who applied for employment in employment services for 2010–2017, available from the Agency for statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan.

48 Ibid.

49 www.blogs.worldbank.org/ru/europeandcentralasia/what-s-behind-slowing-pace-poverty-reduction-tajikistan.

50 This cooperation was carried out on the basis of an agreement on joint activities of The Agency for Labour and Employment of the Population of the Republic of Tajikistan and a local entrepreneur. Unfortunately, due to the lack of local raw materials, this company temporarily suspended its activities and women were for a time left without work.

In the same period, 188,183 citizens returned home from labour migration, which is 0.2 per cent less than in the same period last year (188,560 citizens). Of the returned labour migrants, 154,283 are men and 33,900 are women.⁵¹

By the Order of the Minister of Labour, Migration and Employment of the Population of the Republic of Tajikistan in 2015, a special programme was approved for reintegration and employment of returning migrants. Under this programme, returning migrant workers have their skills acquired abroad certified through the appropriate exam and may take small interest-free loans for the development of entrepreneurial activities. During 2018–2019, social services were provided to 13.1 thousand returning migrant workers as part of the Programme's activities. Nearly half of them received professional training, development and retraining in professions that meet the requirements of the domestic labour market, 1,500 received preferential loans for organization of business activities and 2,300 were involved in performing paid public works. However, only 300 were provided with permanent jobs from the pool of current vacancies.

Article 69 of the Labour code of the Republic of **Uzbekistan** identifies those citizens who have difficulty finding work and are unable to compete on an equal basis in the labour market. These women include single mothers, large families with children under the age of 14 and children with disabilities. In addition, the National Strategy of Action 2017–2021 contains a clear commitment to social protection: "Improving the social protection and health system" is one of the five priority areas, including the provision of mandatory social guarantees, strengthening social protection of vulnerable groups and health reform.

In line with these commitments, youth and women have been recognized as priority groups for assistance in Uzbekistan. Crucial directions of work involve raising professional qualifications of young people and promoting women's entrepreneurship. Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations has launched a large-scale project to train young people in crafts that are in demand not only in Uzbekistan, but also in destination countries for labour migration.⁵² Women's Entrepreneurship Centers offer preferential loans and advice to women setting up businesses and practical guidance to women unofficially employed in handicraft activities. In 2019, 1 trillion soums (roughly 98.5 million USD)⁵³ were allocated for the development of women's entrepreneurship, and 1 trillion 2 billion soums (roughly 98.7 million USD) were allocated for the development of services and services. In turn, particularly vulnerable categories of women (in particular, victims of domestic violence) are provided with shelter at regional Rehabilitation and Adaptation Centers.

Attention has also been recently paid to the needs of migrant workers, addressing some of the risks faced while abroad. In particular, interviewed returned migrants appreciated the emergency financial assistance, provided by Uzbek consular services. Another priority area is the support provided to economically vulnerable Uzbek migrant workers upon return to their regions of origin. Since August 2019, returnees have been eligible for microloans and subsidies to cover the amount of the insurance premium for life and health insurance for the period of labour migration. However, during interviews concerns were expressed that the value of the loan was too low to cover very high costs, associated with migration (including travel and intermediation).⁵⁴ Interviews with officials brought attention to a recent initiative of larger-scale assistance to returning migrant workers. In accordance with the November 2019 presidential decree, 3,462 apartments in multi-family buildings would be allocated to former migrant workers in need of better housing conditions in 2020 as part of State housing construction programmes. Out of the total, 1,140 were allocated to the regions of the Ferghana valley.

Non-State actors play a crucial role in identifying persons who are in need of financial assistance as well as in delivering aid. Various models have been applied in the three countries: from more institutionalized, in which local communities work formally with the national authorities (Uzbekistan), to more informal mechanisms, in which local leaders refer persons in need to relevant State authorities (Tajikistan). The role of religious leaders varies, too: from referral to delivery.

⁵¹ Data provided during an interview. See also: M. Makhmadbekzoda, «Мухочиратшиноси», Dushanbe 2020, p. 165.

⁵² The professions that are taught include: qualified specialists in construction, turners, millers, workers in the field of services-hairdressers, cosmetologists, nail artists, make-up specialists, employees in the tourism sector, waiters and chefs.

⁵³ According to official National Bank of Uzbekistan rate of 1 USD = 9507 soums (31.12.2019). www.nbu.uz/en/exchange-rates/diagramma/

⁵⁴ It was reported during interviews with returnees that that migrants' fees due to pay employment agencies, air tickets, insurance, visas, etc. could in total exceed 3,000-5,000 USD. These costs were reported to be even higher in the case of employment agencies sending migrants, for example, to the United States (up to 10,000 USD), and the EU (up to 8,000 USD). Another problem is fraudulent private recruitment agencies. Uzbekistan initiated a number of criminal charges against a number of private companies, which collected funds from job seekers and did not find any foreign jobs for them.

Distribution of social assistance in **Uzbekistan** involves a partnership between the State and local communities (mahalas). Representatives of the local community verify eligibility by carrying out standard needs assessment and upon approval administration of national funds to local residents. Under a 2017 presidential decree, about 10,000 local communities throughout the country are organized as institutions carrying out tasks previously in the domain of State institutions. Firstly, they serve to identify issues of concern. Another role played by mahalla is awareness-raising – leaders and activists of the mahalla are actively involved in improving the legal literacy of the population, especially young people and women. Finally, mahallas play a role in disbursing direct financial assistance, relying on the infrastructure of the "Mahalla" Fund.

Respondents in Uzbekistan reported asking for help also from the Imam-Khatibs. Imams have a small fund raised from the congregation and help the most needy.⁵⁵ On the other hand, the respondents did not report on the role of non-governmental youth organizations or departments that worked in the areas where the research was conducted. At the same time, local researchers identified a rise in the activity of NGOs, especially assisting women, in small towns. They help with the purchase of simple equipment for women's house work, such as sewing machines, that are given as grant aid.

The majority of respondents from **Tajikistan** did not have any information about non-State sources, despite the fact that a large number of social and economic projects are being implemented in the country by NGOs. Part of the reason for this situation is that many international organizations often implement their projects, implemented by NGOs on a pilot and short-term basis. Another issue remains the low awareness of the activities of NGOs and international donors in many regions of the countries under study.

At the same time, focus groups with beneficiaries of IOM assistance, carried out in December 2019 in Bokhtar city, revealed the technical (financial) assistance and the purchase of equipment helped the beneficiaries secure permanent employment and income, enabling them to pay off their loans and debts, and eventually creating jobs for family members and the community.⁵⁶ Both male and female beneficiaries noted that creating their own business was instrumental in not only improving their well-being, but also in raising their sense of personal importance as they could gain respect within the family and in society as a whole. Women beneficiaries strongly insisted that such assistance should be provided to other vulnerable categories of women, so that they too would improve their well-being and receive substantial assistance for their families.

On the other hand, community and mosque support was acknowledged in interviews. Respondents appreciated the role of local community leaders, especially women leaders. For example, they indicated activities such as providing consultations, accompanying the local residents during their visits to State authorities, work with families in conflict situations, as well as with children with behavioural challenges, vulnerable women and young people.

In **Kazakhstan**, the interviewed local residents noted that they primarily refer to mosques as their non-State actor of preference when they needed assistance, and often do not rely on other non-governmental organizations. The fact that the residents did not associate NGOs as sources of assistance could be attributed to the fact that the non-governmental organizations tend to provide non-financial forms of assistance, such as educating children coming from poorer families or providing courses for women to get a new profession. In turn, the surveyed local leaders noted that the local population was unlikely to seek assistance, unlike oralmans (ethnic repatriates) and migrants who were more prone to use aid. There were different opinions as to whether young people were willing to visit mosques to get aid from imams. While the majority of surveyed religious leaders concentrated on spiritual guidance, some of them also reported involvement in helping low-income families and individuals.

⁵⁵ Of note is the activity of the Vaqf Foundation (www.vaqf.uz/en), which "offers material and moral support to the needy layer of the population, including people with disabilities" by collecting voluntary donations and disbursing directly to beneficiaries.

⁵⁶ The monthly earnings indicated by the male beneficiaries ranged varied by the time of the year, ranging from 1,500 to 3,000 (150–300 USD) in the off-season (winter and spring) to 3,500 to 12,000 somoni (350–1, 200 USD) in the season (summer and autumn). Female beneficiaries indicated earnings of between 2,500 and 3,000 somoni (250–300 USD), which, however, do not depend on seasonality.

Local perceptions of potential implications of socioeconomic vulnerabilities for susceptibility to extremist groups' messaging and recruitment

While the interviewed officials, community and religious leaders and experts often cite ideological factors as triggers to radicalization, the socioeconomic position of the vulnerable groups is seen as an important contributing element. In fact, difficulties in overcoming socioeconomic handicaps are often used in recruitment messaging, which becomes particularly effective in the harsh conditions of labour migration. Another source of grievances is a sense of unfair distribution of entitlements and unjustified barriers in access to rights.

Interviews with officials, community and religious leaders and experts have suggested a variety of **factors** that could trigger the psychological reactions (such as grievance) among socioeconomically vulnerable persons and thus make those individuals susceptible to extremist groups' messaging and recruitment efforts. Many respondents believe that to account for this complex phenomenon, an interplay between socioeconomic and cultural/traditional and ideological factors should be considered. Some of the surveyed officials in **Tajikistan** believed that economic grounds might play an indirect role. While they did not see a causal relationship between the low living conditions, unemployment and limited opportunities to improve the households' economic position, some of them agreed with the Statement that the economic security of the local residents could reduce the risks of enhanced susceptibility to extremists' calls.

On the other hand, the interviewed experts on radicalization in Tajikistan stressed the role that socioeconomic vulnerabilities could play in the emergence of grievance and pointed to some likely scenarios of such development. Local experts believe that regardless of the region of the country, the groups most prone to a sense of grievance include people who do not have education, as well as people who had to leave the country for the purpose of labour migration (in particular young people). They suggested that a combination of factors might contribute to the process of recruitment by extremist groups: including migrants' psychological State, difficult working conditions, irregular working hours, and violations of their rights on the part of employers and law enforcement officials in receiving countries.

For instance, in the course of the interviews with experts and officials in **Uzbekistan**, it was concluded that the economic factor ranks third after the ideological factor and the sense of injustice in the process of radicalization. Experts and officials for instance stressed that the combination of demographic problems of poverty of the population with the lack of economic and social prospects for some young people and land scarcity can lead to social tension. In fact, it may be argued that both other grounds for radicalization could be linked to the grievances of socioeconomic character – as drivers toward seeking explanation of unsatisfactory personal situation in religion and as the basis for sense of injustice, especially on material grounds or in response to hostility in countries of destination, corruption and low trust to government institutions. Moreover, researchers from Uzbekistan refer to several types of socioeconomic problems that are invoked by recruiters working with migrant workers in order to trigger a sense of resentment.

According to interviewed leaders in regions of **Kazakhstan**, unemployment is a source of social isolation, insolvency and personal deprivation. In their view, all these circumstances could induce search of alternative sources of information and pursuit of new ways of looking at reality. They were concerned about the appeal that extremist ideas might carry among the vulnerable youth when spread by persons with visible material wealth as well as personal charisma (entrepreneurs, athletes or singers).

At the same time, both the interviewed experts, officials and local leaders in Kazakhstan were convinced that susceptibility of vulnerable segments of population to extremists' calls could be resisted through involvement of the local community (**zhamagat**). In particular, they referred to an important feature of self-organization of zhamagats that involves mutual support and internal solidarity. They also considered solid education in the local cultural and religious traditions as an important deterrent to spread of extremist ideas. For instance, the interviewed local experts assessed conditions in the regions of Mangistau and Turkestan not to be conducive to extremists' attempts at recruitment, pointing to the strength of local traditions, including tolerance in a multi-ethnic environment.

Women and youth are at some additional risks in view of either their environment, life experiences or cultural norms. The subordinate position of women in families has often created susceptibility to extremist movements. Religious leaders in Kazakhstan concluded that the influence of a husband could be decisive for the conduct of the wife. According to information provided by the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of

Tajikistan also determined that the majority of women who returned from the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq had gone there, following their husbands in fulfilment of the tradition that the husband's decision was to be complied with.

Another vulnerability consists in the psychological difficulties that either women or young people go through and the use that the recruiters into extremist groups could make in order to entice them. Experts and officials from Kazakhstan pointed to personal experiences, turmoil in family life, personal stress, and problems with children as circumstances invoked by recruiters to offer prospects of family stability. In case of young people, experts from Kazakhstan pointed to an interplay of factors: on the one hand, they believe that the primary factor remains socioeconomic: young people may not have a job, education or experience social disorder, while on the other hand, they noted that recruiters frequently appealed to young people's concern over ethical values and a search for societal stability.

Surveyed religious and community leaders and local officials in **Tajikistan** pointed to additional risk factors, which might make young men and women more susceptible to recruitment by extremist groups. They referred firstly to young men who are compelled by their families to leave for labour migration at the age of 15–16 while lacking professional training or command of the language in the destination country and are faced with difficult working conditions and low wages. Another group consisted in their view of young women from low-income families who were married at the age of 16 and could face significant financial difficulties in case of divorce as they lack necessary educational background and work experience to find employment in jobs offering sufficient remuneration to deal with the costs of raising children (in the absence of support from ex-husband or his family).

On the other hand, experts in **Uzbekistan** stressed the role that the adversities (both of economic and psychological kind) faced by young people in migration could play in the recruitment efforts of extremist groups.⁵⁷ In their view, a large part of persons targeted by recruiters consists of young men and women who are experiencing a sense of resentment at perceived injustice. According to the surveyed experts, the recruiters tended to play up instances of unfair treatment, in particular non-transparent decisions on distribution of resources or entitlements or outright corruption. However, the respondents considered that the likelihood to which grievances could be activated could be largely dependent on the personality of an individual. They believed that the same conditions (meaning difficult or bad) were not sufficient to push different persons toward violent extremism but that certain personal characteristics (including, but not limited to, rigid adherence to a set of values, limited access to alternative sources of information and failure to critically assess the messages) would have to be present to facilitate the reception of the ideas propagated by violent extremist groups and be influenced by recruiters, working face-to-face or over the Internet.

Prevention represents an important element of a range of activities, recently deployed in all three countries, involving not only State institutions but also community and religious leaders. The latter's role has been acknowledged on account of their ability to identify social problems that resonate in the community, detect and counter the messaging of violent extremist groups as well as resolving intracommunity conflicts.

The risk of recruitment into extremist groups has become subject of concern for **authorities** in all three countries. Strategic documents have been developed that identify the issue, albeit with a focus on linking to extremist ideology. While reintegration and rehabilitation programmes aimed at former combatants and their family members have not been the focus of this assessment, cases have been identified of programmes targeting specific circumstances and needs of women and children returning from combat zones. A relevant example is the return of women and children from camps in Iraq as well as their admission and integration into **Tajikistan**, undertaken through joint efforts of several State institutions. The investigation and interviews with female returnees carried out by the Ministry of Interior clarified the circumstances in which the women and children had left for the territories controlled by extremist or terrorist organizations. It was concluded that

⁵⁷ The field research, carried out as part of this assessment, was cross-referenced with the results of parallel field activities, conducted by the Center for Study of Regional Threats in 2018. In particular, interviews with 540 Uzbek migrants in the Russian Federation, 96 in Ukraine and 94 in South Korea were conducted, concentrating on the mechanisms of recruitment into extremist organizations. See also a related study by the Search for Common Ground, presenting the results of a study among Kyrgyz migrant workers, available in Russian at: www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/KGZ-country-report_CA-radicalization_Russ_24042018.pdf.

most of the women who were returned had gone to the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq joining their husbands and were not always aware of where they were going. In view of these circumstances, many of these women were released without taking any administrative or criminal measures after being interviewed after their return, and were also redirected to psychological and socioeconomic assistance structures. Some of them who were still brought to criminal responsibility were released under an amnesty, implemented in the fall of 2019.⁵⁸ The children were transferred to relatives and families, as well as to specialized institutions of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection. Governments of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are also leading similar efforts to actively repatriate, rehabilitate and reintegrate their nationals.

The role of **community and religious leaders** has been acknowledged in all three countries. In **Kazakhstan**, their role in reaching out to local population has been underlined. It was concluded that engaging imams in the social and cultural matters of the local community has a double effect: firstly, it serves to build their rapport with the populace, secondly, it helps religious leaders to identify risks associated with the potential or ongoing process of radicalization of some segments of the population. A unique role that local imams can play is in defusing some potentially negative phenomena, such as conflicts in families. Thus, they act as mediators, applying moral norms to resolve conflicts. Local religious leaders also play an important role in identifying symptoms of radicalization early on, and by notifying authorities of possible threats.

Religious leaders in **Tajikistan** have been acknowledged in interviews with experts as playing a big role in preventive activities. Imam khatibs of major mosques play an important role in raising community awareness on violent extremism during sermons and direct communication with youth, including engaging with young people and outgoing labour migrants. Given their ability to reach a large audience in the community, religious leaders are also able to highlight and discuss other social challenges facing the community. Furthermore, they also play an important role in clarifying religious teachings against the narratives posed by violent extremist organizations.

The interviewed religious leaders and experts on radicalization stressed that an important element of State activities is prevention, focused on the groups that are considered to be at greatest risk. They referred, for instance, to a multi-level system of prevention has been elaborated by the State Committee on Religious Affairs, a coordinating State body in **Uzbekistan**. The Committee carries out preventive measures at several levels, involving various stakeholders: local communities (mahallas) play a crucial role in working with families. In turn, educational institutions are engaged in activities targeting youth with special programmes to prevent the spread of ideas of violent extremism and radicalization, engaging authoritative theologians as well. In 2019, the Committee adopted an action plan, featuring also some activities, targeting young people, including “development of religious and secular outlook of population, in particular youth” as well as “wide dissemination of national traditions and countering radical ideas” through mass media, websites and social networks.⁵⁹

In turn, activities in **Tajikistan** involved meetings that were organized by the Committee for Women and Family Affairs in cities and regions of the country. A number of round tables, seminars and consultations covered the prevention of violence in families in Tajikistan as well as the issues of promoting a healthy lifestyle and preventing drug abuse. Migration Service concentrated its efforts at reaching out to migrant workers in the Russian Federation by organizing meetings in mosques and places of their employment. The meetings focused on both the risks of work exploitation and human trafficking but also on the threats stemming from the involvement of young people in extremist organizations.

An interviewed expert in **Kazakhstan** pointed to activities of local centers for research on religious issues, which involve young people in debates and carry out individual meetings with youth as well as provide an opportunity for studying national culture, history and traditions. Interviewed experts stressed the role that such activities have for cultivating the values of tolerance, social harmony and mutual respect, taking into account the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional nature of Kazakhstan. In turn, local community leaders identified the close linkage between awareness-raising activities and measures, strengthening young people’s economic self-reliance (trainings on how to start a business and how to develop skills).

⁵⁸ In accordance with Articles 307 and 401 of the Criminal Code of Tajikistan, any FTFs (regardless of gender) who return to their homeland, repent and if their actions do not contain a crime, will be released from criminal liability.

⁵⁹ www.norma.uz/novoe_v_zakonodatelstve/komitet_po_delam_religiy_aktiviziruet_rabotu#.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

ADDRESSING ASSISTANCE NEEDS OF THE VULNERABLE GROUPS AND REDUCING THEIR RADICALIZATION POTENTIAL

General recommendations

The proposed objectives and corresponding measures have been developed by reference to best practices, identified in some of the investigated locations as well as in response to diagnosed issues, as reflected in the interviews with local residents, community and spiritual leaders as well as experts and officials. They are meant to highlight some essential elements of a comprehensive set of responses to socioeconomic vulnerabilities of youth and women, which are in turn believed to be necessary components of any mechanism for preventing onset of radicalization in these categories of residents.

Objective 1. Enhance systems of identification and monitoring of challenges facing youth and women at greater risk of prolonged socioeconomic exclusion

Measure 1.1. Put in place in national and regional statistical instruments definitions and indicators, sensitive to socioeconomic vulnerabilities specific to youth and women, designed in a participatory manner with women and young people.

Measure 1.2. Offer trainings for local officials, responsible for delivery of targeted assistance in regular monitoring of socioeconomic position of vulnerable categories, in particular collection and analysis of disaggregated data on the change in these groups’ incomes and welfare and on preparation of reports, indicating priorities for future assistance.

Measure 1.3. Collect best practices in identification of socioeconomic vulnerabilities by way of qualitative methods through running regional platforms for dialogue with local community and spiritual leaders. Develop tools on assessing risks of prolonged socioeconomic exclusion through extended interviews with potential beneficiaries of assistance for use by local employment office and social aid workers.

Objective 2. Tailor economic assistance to meet the pressing needs of the most vulnerable categories of residents and increase their economic literacy

Measure 2.1. Carry out regular local labour market assessments, considering on the one hand levels of demand, needed skills levels and sectors experiencing labour shortages and on the other hand the wage and work conditions expectations of women and young men, entering the labour market, especially returning migrants. On this basis, prepare up-to-date briefs on local opportunities for decent employment of returning migrants that could be disseminated at consulates and local employment offices. This activity should also help identify gaps and limitations of the existing datasets and provide the basis for development of improved monitoring and forecasting instruments.

Measure 2.2. Assess the targeting and impact of existing emergency loan arrangements through interviews with vulnerable categories of beneficiaries, in particular considering their relevance for large families with single breadwinners, especially those headed by women with their husbands in migration. Use the conclusions for development of targeted mechanisms of assistance in repayment of loans and long-term balancing the budget, encompassing material aid, grants as well as guidance on managing family budgets and use of financial instruments.

Measure 2.3. Partnering with women’s and youth NGOs, carry out a comprehensive review of the curricula and formats of short economic education courses, targeting women and youth, on their effectiveness in helping these categories overcome their long-term vulnerabilities. The results of the review should be the basis for revision of curricula and formats of the courses, co-designed with the target groups (women and young people) so they would better address the main problems with concluding contracts, drawing loans and managing personal and family budgets.

Measure 2.4. Working closely with local governments and donors, develop projects strengthening economic position of families while paying attention to specific needs of vulnerable groups. In particular, run dedicated trainings on running family businesses (securing financing, online marketing and strategic analysis). The trainings ought to consider the barriers facing families with female breadwinners and feature opportunities for enhancing women's entrepreneurship.

Measure 2.5. Adjust local employment promotion policies to make them more inclusive by considering the identified barriers to decent employment facing youth (with special attention paid to most vulnerable categories among young people). Specifically, improve the chances for employment by a comprehensive set of measures, starting with investment in raising quality of technical education provided at local secondary schools and schools of higher learning (for instance, by strengthening cooperation with international partners in STEM field). Next, offer a broad range of services to young jobseekers by training in soft skills, building self-confidence as well as helping achieve recognition of informal skills, obtained in labour migration.

Measure 2.6. Widen opportunities for young people's acquisition and certification of skills, obtained in labour migration or in informal employment locally. In partnership with commercial banks, offer loan guarantees and co-financing schemes that will open up more widely opportunities for establishing businesses, targeting categories of persons who could not enter the formal labour market.

Objective 3. Offer necessary support to the individuals who due to the change in their family status or other shock factors cannot rely on local support networks

Measure 3.1. With support of IOM, UNDP and UN agencies as well as the World Bank, develop guidelines for referral of potential beneficiaries of employment and social aid services at local government offices, taking account of vulnerable women's and youth's specific needs on entry. Develop preliminary needs assessment forms to be administered by personnel of local employment centers and work out a system of referral to multiple forms of targeted assistance (psychological, conflict resolution, financial, educational).⁶⁰

Measure 3.2. Train the staff of local officers in charge of social assistance, in carrying out interviews and running needs assessments, which would identify cases of sudden loss of support from family or other informal channels. In particular, offer trainings to the personnel of local employment centers, involving carrying out an interview, preparation and analysis of assessment forms and application of communication skills, considering gender and age criteria.

Measure 3.3. Include vulnerability criteria in the existing systems of monitoring and evaluation of social assistance and consider in the long run establishment of targeted programmes, addressing the identified special needs of most vulnerable youth and women.

Objective 4. Grant young men and women who experience resentment at their status opportunities for reclaiming dignity through integration into community

Measure 4.1. Build an "early warning system" through establishing safe spaces for women and youth to share their problems and revealing socioeconomic needs that would target the most vulnerable within those categories. This can involve creating or consolidating open platforms, either physical or virtual, for discussion of the problems faced by young people, as well as on the potential and capacity that young people have to contribute positively in their communities.

Measure 4.2. Actively and widely involve young people (both men and women) in the measures aiming at prevention of radicalization. Support projects, aimed at developing a set of necessary skills to support socially active young people: preparing and implementing communication strategies; use of social networks; writing articles about problems in the youth environment and ways to solve them in the mainstream media; and civic engagement and participating in community matters in an inclusive and active manner.

⁶⁰ UNDP's Integrated Case Management of Employment and Social Welfare Users in the Western Balkans – Guidelines and Good Practices (2017) presents a holistic methodology and protocols on integrated case management, which "regulates" the entire cycle for social and economic inclusion of individuals, that can be tailored to the needs of the countries in the region www.undp.org/content/dam/rbec/docs/internal/WBLM/2_ICM_Western_Balkans_Guidelines.pdf?logActivity=true.

Measure 4.3. Facilitate the development of a network of peer role models who could listen to the concerns of the vulnerable individuals, offer emotional support and coach on overcoming life challenges. The network could build on the existing infrastructure (youth and women's clubs) and organizations (youth and women's NGOs) and incorporate new channels: informal peer-to-peer consultations or online forums.

Measure 4.4. Set up national forums for exchange of practices among local mentors who provide leadership coaching to young people facing obstacles to socioeconomic advancement and thus help them cope with high societal expectations. Organize regular thematic seminars for discussion of the dynamics of issues affecting the vulnerable categories of youth and identification of best ways to reveal and address them.

Objective 5. Involve effectively local and religious community leaders in referral of persons in need and delivery of assistance

Measure 5.1. Develop standard mechanisms of referral, on the basis of which community and religious leaders would inform the claimants of opportunities for obtaining assistance to appropriate institutions. In turn, the leaders could provide the State institutions with preliminary needs assessment. Shelters need to be offered to those particularly vulnerable categories of residents who faced exploitation or abuse, either in labour migration or in the family.

Measure 5.2. Work out in collaboration with leaders of communities and traditional religious groups a range of financial arrangements that would be locally acceptable for disbursing public or donor funds among those identified as most in need.

Objective 6. Alert the vulnerable groups of tactics applied by recruiters and defuse long-term grievances

Measure 6.1. In collaboration with local community and religious leaders, as well as partnering with young leaders for peer-to-peer action, monitor the changing tactics used by recruiters toward particular vulnerable groups and develop dedicated communication strategies for them on this basis that could be applied in sermons, school curricula, personal consultations.

Measure 6.2. Widen the channels of delivery of the messages to capture the natural environment for a given social group and select persons who are respected in that community for delivering those messages. These might include co-workers in migration, women community leaders or successful young entrepreneurs and civic actors.

Measure 6.3. In the long run, revise the curricula focusing on countering radicalization so as to feature the concerns expressed by women and youth, their grievances and attitudes regarding their life opportunities. Consider inviting more often young people and women who once experienced such problems and were approached by recruiters so that these presenters could offer their testimonies of ways in which they overcame personal and family vulnerabilities.

Measure 6.4. Develop young people's awareness of and critical attitude towards ideas of violent extremism and radicalization. To do this, youth organizations, youth leaders themselves must be engaged in developing their own approaches to reach these specific objectives by (a) strengthening critical thinking in young boys and girls and identifying what mechanisms should be used for this purpose; and (b) improving Internet literacy, correctly distinguishing fake information in social networks, as well as promptly responding and commenting on sources of grievance.

Objective 7. Strengthen the capacity of local religious and community leaders for reaching out to youth and women potentially vulnerable to radicalization at early stages

Measure 7.1. Enhance methods of identification of women's issues by spiritual leaders. One method could involve establishing the posts of women assisting imams and other religious leaders who would be responsible for initiating and maintaining contacts with local women, identifying their specific grievances. Share best practices of involvement of women religious and community leaders (e.g. of Bibiotuns in northern Tajikistan or of mahallas in Uzbekistan) to develop tailored approaches, considering local conditions.

Measure 7.2. Improve the capacity for prevention of onset of grievance among women by enabling women's organizations (in particular, officially registered) to: (a) implement special education Programmes for young girls and women from vulnerable groups; (b) empower and enable the voices of women that act against ideas of violent extremism; (c) raise awareness based on the experiences of women who overcame difficult situations and who gave informed consent for sharing them; (d) offer guidance on how women can reach out to family members who are influenced by ideas of violent extremism.

Measure 7.3. Train other prevention operators (educators, physicians, social protection and labor ministry officials, housing, infrastructure, police officers, psychologists, etc.) to improve their awareness and capabilities to identify and properly refer vulnerable persons at risk of radicalization to be supported and address their specific situation.

Measure 7.4. Support the role of religious and community leaders, as well as women and youth civic actors, to address grievances and sources of social vulnerability experienced by communities. Promote an interactive approach where community and spiritual leaders can also listen to their community and help in finding solutions to challenges, mediate and create constructive dialogue. Offer wide access to both male and female local public opinion leaders (including spiritual leaders) to mass media so that they could promote ideas of tolerance among various ethnic and religious groups and strengthen communities' resilience to extremist ideas.

Measure 7.5. Enable the role of community and spiritual leaders to support family members of young people who exhibit sudden change of lifestyle, such as becoming socially distant and adherent to divisive and violent narratives, to respond to potential challenges related to radicalization. Raise their awareness of the psychological mechanisms of emergence of grievance and of the techniques applied by recruiters into extremist organizations so as to develop tailored approaches in communication with the vulnerable individuals.

ANNEX

Detailed sample composition

Table 4 presents an overview of the composition of the sample of respondents, indicating the numbers of vulnerable groups featured in the study alongside local community and religious leaders, experts and officials.

Table 4. Breakdown of the sample of respondents

Country	Vulnerable groups			Local leaders		Experts and officials
	Women and households headed by women	Youth (18–29 years old) incl. vulnerable young families	Working age (25–60 years old)	Community	Religious	Local governments Experts on radicalization
Kazakhstan	17 3 mothers of several children 4 divorced 4 widows 2 unemployed 3 oralmans 1 internal migrant	13 3 unemployed 3 blue-collar workers at marketplace 2 unskilled workers 2 oralmans 1 student from a poor family 1 internal migrant 1 self-employed		7 3 NGO leaders 2 informal leaders 1 NGO working with women 1 NGO working with youth	6 6 imams	9

Country	Vulnerable groups			Local leaders		Experts and officials
Tajikistan	11 individual interviews 3 single mothers of several children 3 return migrants 3 migrants' wives 2 unemployed/char-women 5 focus group participants	4 individual interviews 2 unemployed 2 students from poor families 6 focus group participants	10 3 return migrants 2 unemployed 2 cleaners/handyman 2 blue-collar workers at marketplace 1 self-employed	3 Individual interviews 1 NGO leader 2 informal leaders 1 focus group participant	6 3 imams 3 religious community leaders 2 focus group participants	8
Uzbekistan¹	15 3 mothers of several children	10 5 students from poor families 4 unemployed (3 men, 1 woman) 1 man with criminal record	14 5 unemployed 5 farm workers 1 blue-collar worker at marketplace 3 return migrants (2 men, 1 woman)	6 3 community leaders 3 informal leaders	5 5 imams	13
TOTAL	48 43 individual interviews 5 focus group participants	33 27 individual interviews 6 focus group participants	24 24 individual interviews	17 16 individual interviews 1 focus group participant	19 17 individual interviews 2 focus group participants	30 30 individual interviews

QUESTIONNAIRE TEMPLATES

Interviews with Vulnerable Respondents

The questionnaire provides a guide for the organization of a semi-structured interview with vulnerable respondents in selected regions of three Central Asian countries. The interviewer is advised to build trust with the respondent and maintain an attitude of respect to the interlocutor's privacy. At the beginning of the interview, the interviewer should introduce himself/herself as well as briefly present the objective of the assessment – identification of needs of potential and current beneficiaries of assistance with a view to better targeting and delivery of aid. The respondent ought to be assured that the personal data as well as specific answers given during the interview will be kept confidential and that any quotes in the final report will be anonymized.

The list of questions included below covers general issues, applicable to all categories of respondents. In addition, follow-up questions, probing specific vulnerabilities of some respondents (e.g. women or minorities) may be asked. Given the sensitive nature of some vulnerabilities, a follow-up meeting may need to be organized with the respondent who needs to give his/her express consent. Additional sets of questions covering specific vulnerabilities of some categories of respondents will be developed by the sociological team.

Personal data (to be filled in by the interviewer or asked if necessary):

Full name (to be kept internal and anonymous)

Sex

Age

Place of birth

Current place of living and since when living there

Marital status (and for how long)

Level of education

Occupation (short description of the position)

Ethnicity (if relevant, because member of a minority)

PART I. ASSESSMENT OF OWN AND FAMILY VULNERABILITIES

1. Family status

- 1.1. How many people currently live in your household? Could you please list them according to their relationship to you?
- 1.2. How many children do you have? How old are they? What do they do?
- 1.3. How many adult people in your household require permanent care? How many of them are disabled?
- 1.4. How many people in your household work and what do they do for a living?
- 1.5. Is your spouse occupied? What does he/she do for a living?

2. Economic status of the household

- 2.1. Who is the breadwinner in the family/household?
- 2.2. How do you evaluate your current economic situation/welfare? Are your means sufficient to cover basic needs (food, lodging)? Are you and your family able to set aside some savings?
- 2.3. Did your economic situation/welfare improve or worsen over last year? What circumstances brought about the change?

- 2.4. Did you ask for a bank loan? If not, why not?
- 2.5. Do you currently need to pay back any debt? Did you ask anyone for help in paying back?

3. Employment record (only asked if the respondent is the breadwinner)

- 3.1. Were you unemployed for over a year? When was that?
- 3.2. Did you go abroad in search of work? How long did you work abroad and where? When did you come back from migration most recently? Would you be interested in going abroad again? Why?
- 3.3. Are you full-time employed now? Since when?
- 3.4. Are your wages paid on time and in full amount? How long were you not paid any wages?
- 3.5. Is your regular income from work sufficient? Or do you need to work extra hours or in other jobs?
- 3.6. Did your health deteriorate due to your work? What conditions have you developed?

PART II. SOURCES OF SUPPORT

4. Support from family and acquaintances

- 4.1. Have your or your spouse's family members helped you and your family? What sort of help did they offer?
- 4.2. Would you be able to get help from your or your spouse's family in case of economic need? Would you be willing to request such help?
- 4.3. When you faced some difficulties in life, what person (other than your family) did you turn to for help? Why did you make this choice?
- 4.4. Were you satisfied with their help? Would you turn to them again for help? If not, who would you turn to?

5. Support provided by the State

- 5.1. Are you currently receiving support from any State/public institutions/offices? If yes, what is the type of assistance you received and how long have you received it?
- 5.2. *(For those who are not currently recipients of the assistance)* Did you receive support from any State/public institutions/offices in the past? If yes, what type of assistance did you receive and over what period of time?
- 5.3. How did you learn about this form of assistance?
- 5.4. What made you turn to for assistance from that source?
- 5.5. What difficulties did you encounter when using the assistance?
- 5.6. Did your or your family's economic situation improve since you received the assistance?
- 5.7. What did the support help you achieve? Did it help you deal with a specific problem you had at the time?
- 5.8. How did your life change overall since you received that assistance?

6. Support provided from non-State sources

- 6.1. Where else do people who are facing economic problems can turn to for help?
- 6.2. Who have you turned to (other than your family or public institutions) for help in your difficult economic situation? What made you turn to for assistance from that source?
- 6.3. Have you managed to receive any assistance from that source? If yes, what sort of assistance did you receive and how long did you receive it?
- 6.4. Would you turn to that source once again for assistance? If yes, why? If not, why not?
- 6.5. Did your or your family's economic situation improve since you received the assistance?
- 6.6. How did your life change overall since you received that assistance?

PART III. RELATIONS WITH COMMUNITY AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

7. Community involvement

- 7.1. Who do you respect most in your local community? Do you turn to them for advice or other support? Who do you trust to work together in addressing issues that you cannot address on your own?
- 7.2. What sort of help from other members of your community (neighbors, elders, friends, religious leaders) have you found most important and appreciated it the most?
- 7.3. Who in the community would you trust to share your problems or difficulties in life?
- 7.4. What is the biggest problem facing your community? What would you do to solve this problem?
- 7.5. How long do you think it will take to solve this problem? Who in your community could you work with to resolve it?
- 7.6. Are people leaving the community? Who in particular? What needs to be done that could prevent them from leaving?

8. Outlook for the future

- 8.1. How do you see your and your family's situation in the near future? Same as now, improved, worse.
- 8.2. What are you concerned about most in the near future in your personal life? What are your biggest concerns with regard to the life of your community?
- 8.3. Are you confident you will be able to manage these problems on your own? Where else could you receive help (other than from the sources you used so far)?
- 8.4. Are you generally optimistic about the future of your community? What could make the community stronger?

Interviews with Community and Religious Leaders

The questionnaire provides a guide for the organization of a semi-structured interview with community and religious leaders in selected regions of Central Asian countries. The interviews with the leaders will be run in parallel to those with the vulnerable respondents. They will complement the personal and household perspectives on the vulnerabilities and the macroeconomic assessments of the experts by offering a picture of the local development challenges and implications for the radicalization potential.

The interviewer is advised to build trust with the respondent and maintain an attitude of respect to the interlocutor's position, expertise and privacy. At the beginning of the interview, the interviewer should introduce himself/herself as well as briefly present the objective of the assessment – identification of needs of local communities with a view to defusing radicalization potential. The respondent ought to be assured that the personal data as well as specific answers given during the interview will be kept confidential and that any quotes in the final report will be anonymized.

This list of questions probes to diagnose two major sets of issues – assessment of current vulnerabilities and identification of grounds for radicalization – and to reveal the local-level measures to address these issues. The questionnaire combines questions to two categories of respondents:

- **Community leaders:** formal heads of local councils, informal heads of local communities, authoritative members of local communities;
- **Religious leaders:** heads of religious communities, authoritative laypersons, heads of religious charity organizations.

1. Economic status of local population and vulnerable groups (Community/Religious Leaders)

- 1.1. How has the economic situation of the families changed recently? Has the number of the families who find it difficult to meet their basic needs (food, other necessities) increased?
- 1.2. What are the primary causes of the difficult economic situation of these families?
- 1.3. Have there been more and more households who incurred debts? Which families have been most likely to become indebted?
- 1.4. Who in the community is finding most difficult to cope with their economic problems? Why is this so?

2. Diagnosing local social problems (Community/Religious Leaders)

- 2.1. What negative consequences has the difficult economic situation had on the local community? Can you give some examples of the resulting social problems?
- 2.2. Have some families been strained? Under what circumstances do families break apart?
- 2.3. What consequences has migration had on the families?
- 2.4. What issues do women turn to you with most often?
- 2.5. What are the main problems that are facing youth?
- 2.6. How do the young people react to their problems?

3. Support provided to vulnerable groups (Community/Religious Leaders)

- 3.1. Who do the individuals and families in need turn to for help first? Why do you think this is so?
- 3.2. What sort of help do the people request first? How effective is such assistance?
- 3.3. Do some persons or families find it difficult to ask for help? What are the reasons for reluctance to request assistance?
- 3.4. Who in the community is less likely to receive assistance?
- 3.5. How do you learn of local families' and individuals' problems? Who tends to approach you with request?
- 3.6. What sort of assistance do you get asked for most often?
- 3.7. Do women approach you with specific problems? What support are you able to offer them?
- 3.8. Do young people approach you with specific problems? What support are you able to offer them?

4. Spiritual guidance (Community/Religious Leaders)

- 4.1. Have you observed a growing demand for spiritual guidance among the youth or women in the local community recently? How would you account for this development?
- 4.2. What main sources of information and spiritual guidance have young people been relying on? Have you observed some changes recently and how would you explain the change?
- 4.3. (*Community leaders*) What issues have young people asked the religious authorities (formal/informal) to resolve most often? (*Religious leaders*) What issues have young people asked you to resolve most often?
- 4.4. (*Community leaders*) What issues have women asked the religious authorities (formal/informal) to resolve most often? (*Religious leaders*) What issues have women asked you to resolve most often?

5. Definition and sources of radicalization (Community/Religious Leaders)

- 5.1. How would you define "radicalization"—what are its symptoms? What are, in your opinion, the main sources of radicalization in general?
- 5.3. Has radicalization been, in your assessment, on the rise or in decline in your local community? How would you explain this tendency?
- 5.4. Which members of your community have been most at risk of radicalization? Why?
- 5.4. Under what circumstances can the youth be more susceptible to radicalization? Can you give any examples from your observation?
- 5.5. Under what circumstances can women be more susceptible to radicalization? Can you give any examples from your observation?

6. Community-level radicalization (Community/Religious Leaders)

- 6.1. Have you observed an increase in tensions between various communities in your region (e.g. have you noticed any calls for intolerance)?
- 6.2. Do you consider this a significant threat to the stability of the local community?
- 6.3. Have you observed any negative impact of the tensions on families?
- 6.4. (*Religious leaders*) Have you noticed recently some tension within your religious community? What, in your opinion, has been its source?
- 6.5. Have you observed any other problems in the local community associated with radicalization?

7. Community response to radicalization (Community/Religious Leaders)

- 7.1. How has the local community reacted to instances of radicalization or intolerance?
- 7.2. Have you been notified by members of the local community of instances of radicalization or intolerance? How did you learn of such cases?
- 7.3. What activities to prevent or reduce the scale of radicalization have been undertaken locally? Who has led them?
- 7.4. How effective have they been? Where do you see their limitations?
- 7.5. Have any activities been undertaken to specifically protect young people from becoming radicalized? Where do you see the biggest challenge in working with young people?
- 7.6. Have any activities been undertaken to specifically protect women from becoming radicalized? Where do you see the biggest challenge in working with young people?
- 7.7. What is your personal experience in working to prevent or counter radicalization?

8. Outlook for the future and recommendations (Community/Religious Leaders)

- 8.1. Do you believe the economic situation in the local community is going to improve? Do you believe the economic situation of those members of the community who are experiencing more problems than others is going to change significantly?
- 8.2. Which members of your community are going to be in need of particular assistance? How could they be helped more effectively?
- 8.3. Do you believe that the tensions in the local community are going to increase or reduce in the next couple of years?
- 8.4. What are your general concerns about the welfare of your community in the next couple of years? How could those be best addressed?
- 8.5. What sort of support would you like to receive and who could offer it to you so that you could deal better with the challenges you are facing in the local community?

Interviews with State Officials and Experts**1. Household income and indebtedness**

- 1.1. Statistics
 - 1.1.1. Available data on average household income by regions of the country, either per household member or in total (2016/2017 or latest year available)
 - 1.1.2. Available data on average household income for the more vulnerable households (single mothers, widows, etc.) (latest year available)
 - 1.1.3. Available data (State or external) on levels of poverty or share of population living below poverty line in the three target regions (latest year available)
 - 1.1.4. Available data (State or external) on levels of poverty in the more vulnerable groups (single mothers, widows, etc.) (latest year available)
 - 1.1.5. Available data on the level of household debt per region and on the share of non-performing loans
- 1.2. Questions to officials and experts
 - 1.2.1. What in your assessment has been the impact of recent economic hardships on the incomes of the population in the target region?
 - 1.2.2. Which population groups in the target region have been impacted most strongly?

1.2.3. Based on your own estimate, has the share of households in debt increased in the target region over the past five years?

2. Unemployment

- 2.1. Can you give the data on registered unemployment of women and men in the past 5 years in the region?
- 2.2. Can you give the data on registered unemployment of youth in the past 5 years in the region?
- 2.3. Are there data on the average duration of unemployment of women (compared to men) and of youth (compared to other age groups) for the last 3 years?
- 2.4. In your opinion, which social groups are relatively more vulnerable to prolonged unemployment in the region?
- 2.5. What fundamental barriers keep them out of the labour market?

3. Employment services and job creation

- 3.1. How many local residents turned in for assistance to employment centers in the region over the last 3 years?
- 3.2. How many of those who turned in for assistance were women and youth?
- 3.3. How many of those who turned in for assistance were helped with what kind of assistance?
- 3.4. How many of the women and young people were helped with what kind of assistance?
- 3.5. What programmes/initiatives have been put into effect for reducing unemployment/increasing participation in the labour market in the target region in the last 5 years?
- 3.6. Have there been any programmes/initiatives targeting specifically women/young people (under 35) in the last five years?
- 3.7. How would you rate the effectiveness of the initiatives undertaken so far? What further initiatives do you consider necessary?
- 3.8. What economic difficulties have small businesses (family businesses) or households faced in the region?
- 3.9. Has there been dedicated assistance to small businesses or households in the above-mentioned regions to address these difficulties? Which measures proved to be most effective?
- 3.10. Have services or initiatives been launched to address the specific needs of returning migrants?

4. Social assistance to vulnerable groups

- 4.1. Statistics
 - 4.1.1. Number of local residents who receive regular social assistance (on account of their economic status, disability, health, other than old age pension) in the target regions (2016/2017)
 - 4.1.2. Number of women who receive regular social assistance (on account of their economic status, disability, health, other than old age pension) in the target regions (2016/2017)
 - 4.1.3. Volume of social assistance to local residents in the target regions (2013-2016/2017)
- 4.2. Questions to officials and experts
 - 4.2.1. What are the general State programmes of social assistance that operate in the target region?
 - 4.2.2. What State programmes or initiatives have been launched that are specifically targeting the more vulnerable categories? What are the criteria of eligibility?
 - 4.2.3. What other initiatives (international, religious, community-based) have there been in the region that provide social assistance to persons and families in need?
 - 4.2.4. Who do the persons or families turn to for assistance when facing economic difficulties?
 - 4.2.5. Which population groups are least likely to seek assistance, and why?

5. Impact of vulnerabilities

- 5.1. How have the recent economic developments impacted the opportunities for employment of these groups?
- 5.2. How do remittances impact the welfare of families in the target region?
- 5.3. What is in your evaluation the overall impact of emigration to other regions of the country and abroad on the situation of families in the target region?
- 5.4. How do you assess the state of families' stability in the target regions? What challenges to families' stability do you see as the most significant in the target regions?
- 5.5. Which families are the most vulnerable to breaking up? What role do the economic factors play in your opinion?
- 5.6. Do you observe some negative effects of the difficulties faced by young people?

6. Assessment of the scale and sources of radicalization

- 6.1. What is your assessment of the current and possible future risk of radicalization of population in the target region?
- 6.2. Which population groups are, in your view, most susceptible to radicalization?
- 6.3. What role, in your opinion, play the economic factors, such as poverty, unemployment or limited opportunities for improving one's economic situation in the long run?
- 6.4. What is your general assessment of the role that ideology has played in facilitating or reducing potential for radicalization in the target regions?
- 6.5. Which population groups are, in your view, most susceptible to radicalization on ideological grounds in the target regions?

7. Preventing emergence and spread of radicalization

- 7.1. What changes have been recently introduced to the legislation to counter the spread of extreme views in mosques or in communities (in particular, inciting to violence)?
- 7.2. What preventive measures have been introduced to decrease the likelihood of young people and women to become radicalized?
- 7.3. What specific measures have been undertaken to raise awareness of the most vulnerable groups on radical messages?
- 7.4. What are the needs for improving the level of religious education of young people and women in the target regions?
- 7.5. What role have the religious leaders (on the national and local level) played in countering the spread of radicalization?
- 7.6. What joint initiatives have been undertaken between the public authorities and religious authorities and leaders to prevent and counter radicalization?
- 7.7. What are the prospects of closer involvement of local community and religious leaders in preventing radicalization in the region?

FOR NOTES:

A series of horizontal dotted lines for taking notes.