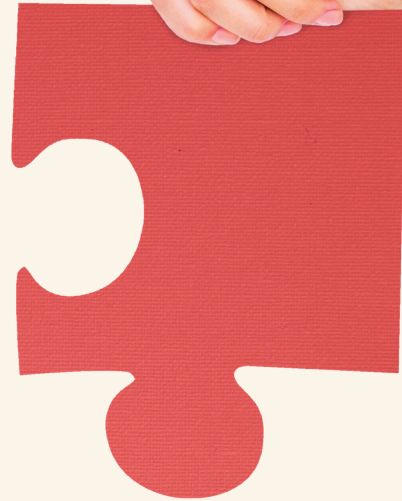
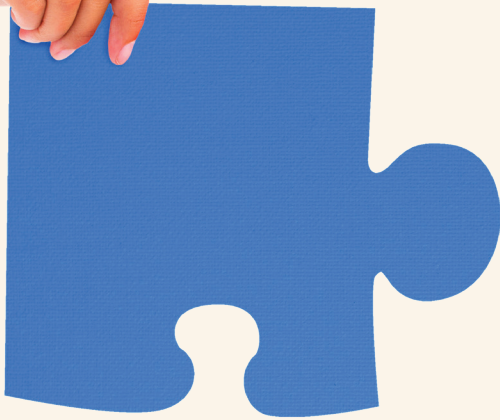


Research Study Publication

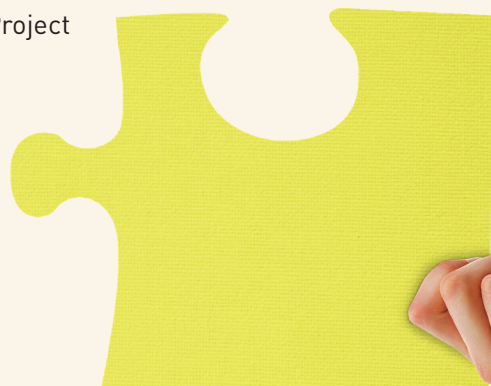
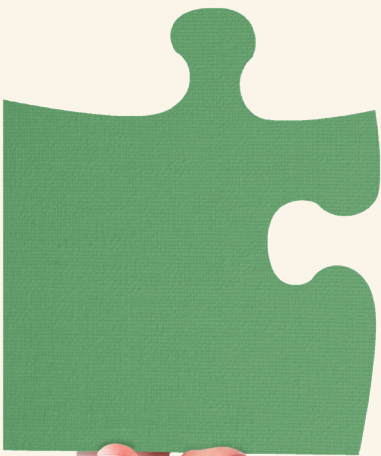


STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE OF THE
YOUTH AGAINST RADICALISATION
IN THE WESTERN BALKANS



PERCEPTION ABOUT RADICALIZATION BY YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE WESTERN BALKAN REGION

„Strengthening Resilience of the Youth
against Radicalization in the Western Balkans“ Project

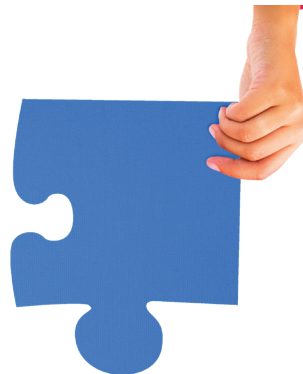
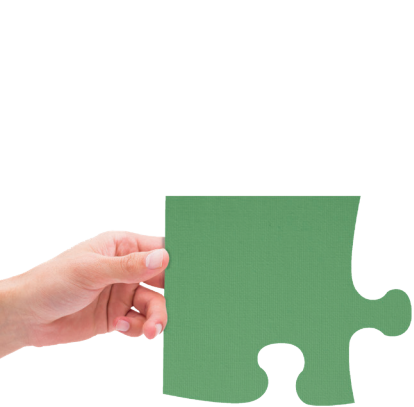


PARTNERS



DONORS





Authors

Albania

Erida Skendaj, Miriam Angoni, Veronika Kusyová
Albanian Helsinki Committee

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Jasmin Hasić, Melisa H. Mehmedović, Mahir Sijamija
Humanity in Action Bosnia and Herzegovina

Kosovo

Migjen Krasniqi
InnovActive Center for Social Improvement

North Macedonia

Samet Shabani, Sara Osmani, Angela Nikoloska,
*Horizon Civitas - Association for Civic Activism and
Encouraging Social Responsibility*

Edits and Introduction

Ján Cingel
GLOBSEC, Slovak Republic

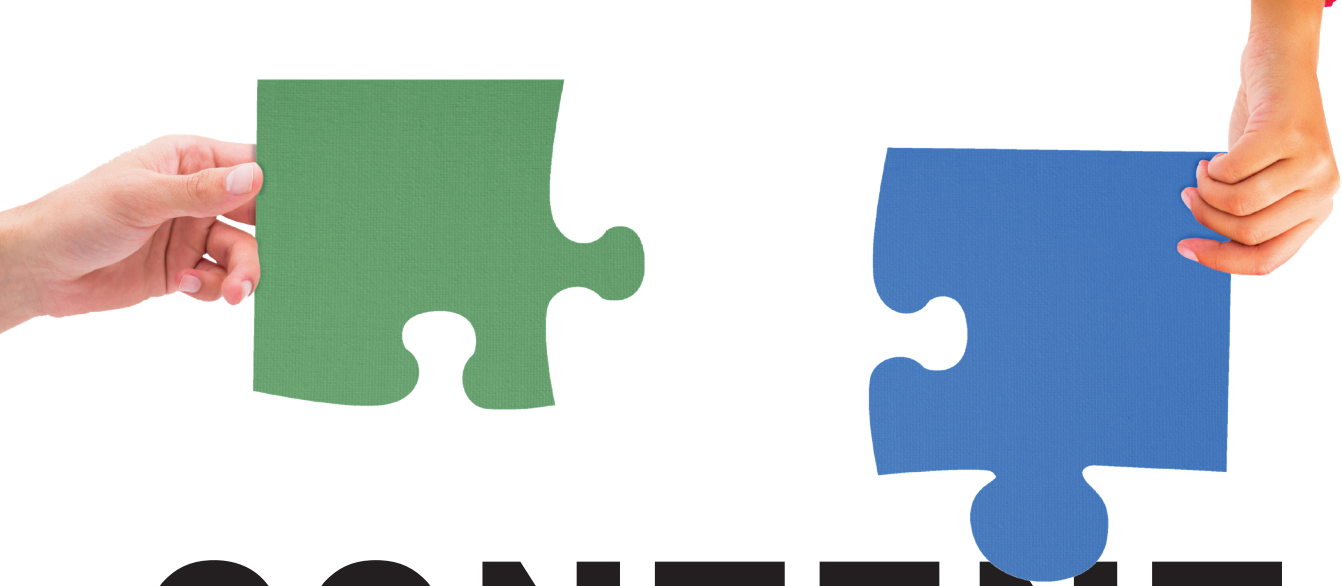
With the kind support of



Disclaimer

This publication is a result of the research conducted within the project entitled “Strengthening Resilience of the Youth against Radicalization in the Western Balkans” and views presented here are solely those of the authors of this publication and do not represent views of the donors of this project.

© Copyright: GLOBSEC, Bratislava, Slovak Republic, January 2020.



CONTENT

INTRODUCTION	7
RESEARCH OUTCOMES	11
COUNTRY REPORT: ALBANIA	11
COUNTRY REPORT: BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	29
COUNTRY REPORT: KOSOVO	51
COUNTRY REPORT: NORTH MACEDONIA	64





INTRODUCTION

This publication is an integral part and the output of the project entitled: “**Strengthening Resilience of the Youth against Radicalization in the Western Balkans**” implemented by the international consortium of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and think-tanks under the leadership of GLOBSEC, Slovakia based NGO and think-tank. The members of the consortium include organizations from the Western Balkan that played a key role in successful conduct of the field research, the result of which is this publication. These members of the consortium are: **Albanian Helsinki Committee**, Albania; **Humanity in Action**, Bosnia and Herzegovina; **InnovActive Center for Social Improvement**, Kosovo; **Association for Civic Activism and Encouraging Social Responsibility - Horizon Civitas**, North Macedonia.

The project was implemented from September 2018 – March 2020 and financially supported by the Official Slovak Development assistance – **SlovakAid** and co-funded by **the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Skopje**, North Macedonia, and the **International Visegrad Fund**.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Overall goal of the project: Strengthening capacities for resilience of the young generation in the Western Balkans countries against radicalization and violent extremism.

Specific goal of the project: Raising awareness of youth against radicalization through promoting shared values and social cohesion (interfaith, interethnic and intercultural dialogues).

The project had an ambition to contribute to addressing the youth radicalization that has been the problem in the Western Balkans for couple of years already. The project was implemented in four project countries – **Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo¹ and North Macedonia**, that are all affected with this phenomenon. The main idea of the project was to mobilize active young people, that are interested in improving lives of young people in their communities through addressing radicalization.

The project first detailly mapped the problem of youth radicalization in each of the project countries based on the field research through **focus groups** at high schools,

¹ - This publication approaches Kosovo “status neutral”.



youth clubs and universities; **interviews with key moral authorities** in communities (e.g. imams, priests, teachers, CSOs representatives dealing with youth, youth workers, experts from state administrations etc. ...). Altogether **229 young people** were involved in focus groups organized in all 4 project countries. **In each country 6 – 7 focus groups** (FG) were organized each in a different city. Selection of cities took into consideration ethnic and religious diversity of the given country including specific minorities living in certain regions. Selection of **focus groups' participants 6 – 10 individuals at each**, also reflected the ethnic, religious and social background of participants. At the same time, we tried to maintain the gender balance of FGs' composition. Additional **56 stakeholders** dealing with radicalization and youth work were also interviewed within the course of the research phase of the project. The result of this effort is this publication, mapping the **perceptions of young people from project countries, how they see the problem of radicalization and violent extremism as well as their role in preventing it**. Methodology of the research has been developed by the implementers and was used – the **same methodology/same set of questions – in all 4 project countries in order the results can be compared**.

Second phase of the project consisted of the work with identified active young leaders from vulnerable communities to build their capacities and raise their knowledge in order they are better equipped to address the radicalization in their communities, among their friends and peers. This phase included **study trip to Slovakia and trainings in form of a summer school in Albania**.

Third phase consisted of **creation of short motivation videos** (in each of the project country at least one) advocating for young people not to slide down the radicalization path. This was accompanied by information campaign in the online sphere and on social media.



TARGET GROUPS

Young people from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and North Macedonia (high school students, university students), key influencers in communities (natural authorities) – acting as multipliers.

POLICY IMPACT

Youth radicalization has been a problem in number of Western Balkan countries for few years already. During the research phase all forms of radicalization (in meaning “**extremization**”) present in the region were discussed with the young leaders from all project countries. They provided their views and surprisingly agreed – in all project countries – that **currently the most significant threat of radicalization in the region is the politically motivated radicalization**. Religious motivated radicalization and extremism scored only after. This publication summarizes the main outcomes of these deliberations with young people in regions of project countries as well as based on interviews with key stakeholders.

The project was aiming at mobilisation and activation of young people directly from vulnerable communities, that would serve as young – respected – leaders in their communities. To be capable of fulfilling that role, they were equipped with knowledge and experience through trainings and study trips they attended. The policy impact of the project consists also of creation of network of active young people, who could work as multipliers of the project’s ideas and goals in their respective communities thus supporting the official policies addressing radicalization and violent extremism in particular countries.



PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Kick – off meeting in Tirana, Albania. 9/2018: Kick-off meeting with representatives of partner organizations. Drafting the project implementation timeline and coordination activities. Amending and fine-tuning the research methodology. Briefing on research, its phases and how to conduct it.

Research phase: in all project countries. 10/2018 – 4/2019: Research into the vulnerabilities of youth towards the radicalization. Research based on: **A. focus groups** organized at high schools, youth clubs and universities. **B. Interviews with key stakeholders:** 1. high school professors, 2. religious authorities (imams or priests), 3. youth oriented civil-society organizations (CSOs), youth workers; 4. state institutions dealing with Youth, Education and Religious affairs. Output of the research phase: **this Publication.**

Study visit to Slovakia. 6/2019: during the **GLOBSEC 2019 International Forum in Bratislava**, Slovakia. Study trip to Slovakia for the most active selected young leaders. Programme including meetings with experts and stakeholders in Slovakia and participation at GLOBSEC 2019 Forum as well as training related to prevention of radicalization.

Summer School in Albania. 7/2019: series of trainings for young leaders from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and North Macedonia in form of a Summer School, that took place in Shengjin, Albania. The programme of the Summer School consisted of trainings, simulations, lectures and role-plays with the aim to raise awareness of participants about the problems of radicalization and violent extremism. Trainings on how to prevent radicalization.

Production of motivation videos and the online campaign against radicalization. 8/2019 – 12/2019. Production of 4 short motivation videos (one per each project country) against radicalization of youth. Public campaign against radicalization on social media and on youth networks including active young leaders.

Final expert event. 10/2019: in Tirana, Albania. Closing event of the project organized in Albania – discussion of experts dealing with the problem of radicalization and violent extremism from Visegrad 4 countries and from Western Balkan countries.

Advocacy events: 11/2019 in Skopje, North Macedonia and Prishtina, Kosovo and 12/2019 in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Publishing the outcomes of the project, visibility of the project towards experts, young leaders as well as general public, finalizing the public campaign.



RESEARCH OUTCOMES

COUNTRY REPORT: ALBANIA

In the recent years, radicalisation leading to violent extremism have become the focus of research studies, media reports and work of law enforcement agencies in Albania. Although religious harmony has been broadly recognized as a core societal value in Albania where members of Muslim, Catholic, Orthodox and other religious communities have co-existed in peace for many centuries, over the past few years and particularly with the further escalation of the conflict in Syria, various national or international media, reports and research studies confirmed the presence of around 150 Albanian citizens in the afore-mentioned conflict. With the rise of the ISIS and the An-Nusra Front, though, Albania's Islamic religious community has worked to challenge the calls to join extremist groups abroad. From 2012 to 2014, around 150 Albanian citizens are believed to have travelled to join insurgent groups in Syria, including the ISIS and al-Qaeda's then-affiliate in Syria, the An-Nusra Front. Out of all the Albania citizens that had joined the conflicts, 40 of them have already returned and 33 of them are believed to have been involved directly in the combat. Seventy-six individuals are still believed to be currently in Syria, while 22 of them may have died in the war. In some cases, there were also whole families joining the war in Syria, including women and children (nearly 45 women and children). In the response to these events, the Government adopted the National Strategy and Action Plan against Violent Extremism in 2015. Albania has developed the legal framework and restrictive mechanisms, has enhanced the capacities of state and non-state actors. The actions from then up to now have raised awareness on radicalisation, extremism and violent extremism among population. Recent studies have showed that religious extremism is still present in Albania despite the stakeholders' and practitioners' efforts. Although, violent extremism can be attributed to other religions, as well as far-right extremism. The 2018 study by the Institute of Democracy and Mediation found that "Albanian stakeholders have overlooked the potential for non-religious extremism."² This potential may lay grounds for anti-establishment, populist or other radical political alternatives. Recently, Albania has witnessed violent and non-violent demonstrations which brought unsatisfied people to the streets.

² - "Violent Extremism in Albania. A national assessment of drivers, forms and threats." G. Vurmo, E. Sulstarova, IDM, Tirana, 2018



YOUTH POLICIES IN ALBANIA

Albania, by the Decision of the Council of Ministers, adopted the National Youth Action Plan 2015-2020³, making it the only legal act regulating the implementation of youth activities at the local and national level. The NYAP focuses on the following areas:

- A. Youth promotion and participation in democratic processes / decision-making
- B. Youth employment promotion through effective labour market policy
- C. Health, sport and environment
- D. Youth education
- E. Social protection
- F. Culture and voluntarism

The fundamental mission of NYAP is to improve the youth quality of life and enhance their status by creating more opportunities for education, employment, health, culture and also to increase the youth participation in society and decision-making processes.

According to the document, Albania remains a very young country where 24% of the population belongs to the 15-29 years age group, comprising the largest active force group in the society and the largest group capable of working.

Child Rights Centre Albania (CRCA) monitored the implementation of the NYAP for 2015-2017⁴ and based on some of their results: Albania remained one of the poorest countries in Europe with nearly 14% of the population living in absolute poverty and 47% living in poverty (compared to 22% in the countries of the region). Poverty in Albania has affected mostly children, youth and elderly. Unemployment remains a primary concern for young people in the country. In 2015, International Labour Organization stated that over 30% of the young people were unable to integrate into the labour market. Though the situation has ameliorated since then, unemployment continues to be a big concern for youth, and it leads to poverty, social exclusion, immi-

³ - http://www.un.org.al/sites/default/files/plani%20kombetar%20i%20veprimi%20per%20rinine%202015-2020_ENG.pdf

⁴ - <https://www.crca.al/en/youth-albania-2017>



gration and criminality. Thirdly, Albania has been facing emigration and massive desire of young people to leave their country to seek a better life abroad. The report Young Voices from Save the Children says that "... young people were clearly aware of the incentive factors to emigrate. Some considered it an opportunity to qualify for better education, but most of them were fuelled by poverty, unemployment, social exclusion, lack of opportunities, corruption..."⁵. Lastly, Albania presents some worrying trends in youth criminality. According to the Ministry of Justice and INSTAT, from 2011/2012 almost half of the sentenced inmates were youth. The rest belongs to the age under 15 and over 30.

Referring to the main findings of the CRCA Monitoring report Albania till the end of 2017 had implemented only 21% of the envisaged part by 2017 of NYAP. Youth unemployment still reached 26% and represented one of the main reasons for youth emigration. More alarmingly, almost 50% of the convicts belonged to the age group 15-30 years and Albania still had no social or justice policy aimed at this group. Neither municipalities nor the government had established any structures or invested any funds in implementing the NYAP by the end of 2017.

Save the Children elaborated a very interesting report 'Young Voices 2017'⁶ which reports the youngsters' thoughts, feelings and opinions based on face to face interviews. Positively, 85% of the children viewed their future very and fairly positively; however, only 45% was optimistic about finding a job after finishing high school. 58% of the interviewed children had seen someone get punched or hit in the past year and children were generally of the opinion that violence was spread in Albania. Almost half of the children thought that they had few opportunities to be heard, 1/3 of them felt they had no opportunities at all, compared to 1/4 who estimated that they had many opportunities to be heard. Almost 1/3 of the children had been harassed or bullied during the then ongoing term. 86% of children considered children poverty, exclusion and disability as areas of particular concern where the government should intervene more.

It is interesting to put the data mentioned above in the context of radicalisa-

⁵ -<https://albania.savethechildren.net/sites/albania.savethechildren.net/files/library/Young%20Voice%202017%2C%20Albania%20f.pdf>

⁶ -<https://albania.savethechildren.net/sites/albania.savethechildren.net/files/library/Young%20Voice%202017%2C%20Albania%20f.pdf>



tion: the majority of youth desires to leave the country because they see their future in a place with more opportunities for them. However, when such a plan backfires, and some initiatives offer them education and prospect of personal growth, nobody should be surprised that young people use the opportunity. If radicals and extremists are willing to hear their problems, help them, provide them with resources, then the young people would be tempted. Radicalisation into violence would not mean something extraordinary because they have already experienced violence, harassment and bullying. When we compare the National Youth Action Plan and the critical CRCA Monitoring report we see the striking difference: the state adopts an action plan, it promises young people many opportunities. However, it appears to be failing to deliver, leaving young people disillusioned.



SUMMARY ON METHODOLOGY: RESEARCH IN ALBANIA

There were conducted 7 focus groups (further just FGs) in the following districts: Kamze, Kukes, Durres, Cerrik, Korce, Shkodra, Pogradec. The abovementioned cities had been selected with the co-operation with the National Coordinator for Violent Extremism. The places were distributed evenly across Albania, except for the South on the borders with Greece (Saranda and Ksamil as predominantly touristic destinations). The areas had been previously targeted as hot spot areas. Collection of data was conducted from November 2018 – March 2019.

The FGs were organised as follows:

- 18.12.2018: high school students from Kukes during their trip to Tirana, realised at the Albanian Helsinki Committee
- 20.12.2018: high school “Ibrahim Rugova”, Kamez
- 15.1.2019: high school “Mehemet Bajraktari”, Cerrik
- 15.1.2019: high school “Gjergj Pekmezi”
- 16.1.2019: high school “Themistokli Germenji”, Korce
- 11.2.2019: high school “Jordan Misja”, Shkoder
- 19.3.2019: high school “ Gjergj Kastrioti”, Durres

Young people between 16 and 18 years old took place in the focus groups. Altogether 65 persons participated in FGs, 20 boys and 45 girls, despite the efforts to have more gender balanced groups. However, the participation was strictly voluntary. Regarding religious affiliation, 37 persons claimed to be Muslims, 16 Catholics, 11 Orthodox and 1 atheist.

During the research period 21 stakeholders were interviewed: 7 from non-governmental sector, 3 researchers, 3 from international organisations, 3 religious leaders, 3 teachers and 2 persons representing the state institutions. The stakeholders’ activities and work were implemented in different parts of Albania.



SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS: ALBANIA

“Give young people something to do, give them aspirations, and we are done with radicalisation in Albania.” Activist, Albania

Radicalisation and extremism are still present in Albania; however, they rarely lead to violence. This is considered both positive and negative because it means a lack of physical violence, but it also creates space for underestimating the threat emanating from radicalisation. Radicalisation is sleeping and hidden under the surface. The issue appeared with the rise of ISIS and since the recruitment to fight in foreign wars stopped, many treated radicalisation and extremism as obsolete without realising that the threat has persisted and transformed into different, less visible forms.

Apart from religious radicalisation, the **political** one is perhaps more visible. Many stakeholders view the political radicalisation as the one which is endangering the whole society and should be addressed as well. In the local context, young people usually join the political parties in exchange for certain advantages such as employment. On the other hand, they are called to participate in demonstrations and speak in the name of the party. Many demonstrations in the country take a violent form.

Absence of de-radicalisation programmes and work with returnees and convicted persons. Apart from being followed by security forces, nobody works with these communities. They are on the margins of society and their isolation and marginalisation is being deepened.

UNDERSTANDING OF RADICALISATION AMONG YOUTH

The young people demonstrated a certain level of knowledge of radicalisation, extremism and violent extremism, as well as of terms multiculturalism and social cohesion. However, there was a difference in comprehension and easiness of describing the terms between geographical areas: those who were from the hot spot areas had participated in minimally one training on radicalisation, unlike their peers from less prone regions. Though, the majority of them said that the trainings were not organised in schools, though by non-governmental organisations at their premises

Half of the students defined the term ‘radicalisation’ and half referred to ‘a radical person’. Predominantly they associated radicalisation with negative aspects. Yet, a minority also drew a connection between radicalisation and positive impacts. In this



sense, radicalisation was defined as a process which brings changes, both positive and negative. As an example, the young people stated the then ongoing students' protests in Albania which were radical as they deviated from the ordinary status quo, but their actions were viewed as strictly non-violent, apolitical and advocating for more significant benefits of all students.

Generally, the young people defined radicalisation as a terrorist act; an extreme action in the name of God and religion; something drastic that goes beyond limits of what is considered normal and ordinary. Radicalisation was harmful and associated with religious and political views. Similarly, a radical person was described as somebody who is engaged in terrorism; carries out extreme political acts; is rude and even violent towards other people due to inequality in economic statuses. A radical is also a person firmly believing in the rightfulness of his/her own opinions and who acts on them.

One student from a Tirana suburb defined radicalisation as living in extreme economic hardship: *'There are many poor areas in Albania, mostly rural, people are forced to stay at home because of money, debts and blood feuds. This situation is radical.'* This view demonstrates that radicalisation is understood differently according to the context.

The young people considered economic conditions, mental health and mental stability, a low level of education, insufficient knowledge of the Bible and the Quran, isolation and fights for power as the main reasons why a person radicalises. Regarding religious radicalisation, they thought that it merely functioned as a pretext for other than ideological motives. The recruiters misused the religion for their reasons to lure people into fighting in Iraq and Syria. Young people could not agree on mental health and genetic predispositions. Some argued that *'maybe the radicals are born like that and it just becomes visible in specific conditions'* and that a radical person is mentally unstable. Others did not think so and used an example of twin studies which according to them showed that genetics does not define a person to be radical or not.



TRENDS OF RADICALISATION AMONG YOUTH

At the beginning, it is vital to state that the stakeholders did not differentiate between the radicalisation of youth and radicalisation of the general population due to several reasons. Firstly, the Albanian population is very young. Secondly, they regarded youth up to 35 years. Thirdly, the factors behind a person's radicalisation are the same for any age in the Albanian context. Lastly, the targeted group in the last wave of religious radicalisation were precisely young people up to 35 years old. The young people instead referred to radicalisation as something not happening to them, often to older people than themselves. For instance, when they used examples of students' protests (students were protesting) or when they referred to parents ordering young girls to wear hijab.

In general, the experts named radicalisation as rather sleeping, under the surface, being present in the country but without violence or leading to violent extremism. They identified two major and one minor trends of radicalisation among youth: political, religious as dominating and ethnical especially on the borders with Greece, North Macedonia and Kosovo. According to them, radicalisation is not a phenomenon happening exclusively in Albania. Few indicated that radicalisation was imported to Albania by foreigners and by Albanians living abroad. Moreover, radicalisation tends to be overrated leading to an overestimate of real threat and mistargeting.

Almost all stakeholders agreed on political radicalisation as the most visible and present in the Albanian society. Political radicalisation was demonstrated in clashes between different political parties which often called citizens to protest where young leaders usually spoke in the name of the party, not in their own. Quite often young people join political parties because of the prospect of jobs or other advantages. In exchange, they participate in demonstration, even in violent actions when asked by a political party. Others described political radicalisation as a process that often leads a poor and unemployed man of Albania into violence in a highly politicised area, and politicians make use of such people for their purposes. One researcher hesitantly diversified political radicalisation into rather tendency with potential to develop but not so deep in the present as in some geographically close countries.

Students, on the other hand, mentioned political radicalisation on the margins. To them, students' protests symbolised positive political radicalisation. Unlike researchers and civil society, the young people viewed political radicalisation as a process which will bring positive changes, in this case, better conditions for university students. Similarly, political radicalisation was present during the protests against



the introduced highway toll, and the young people considered it beneficial to the residents of the incriminated areas.

The second major identified stream was religious radicalisation. At this point, stakeholders did not agree on its presence in Albania. Religious leaders were more reluctant to speak about religious radicalisation in the country; they mostly denied it and merely confirmed that there might have been individual cases, not collective acts in the name of religious radicalisation. According to them, Albania was famous for religious tolerance, harmony and interreligious marriages for centuries. They praised religious tolerance as a core value of the Albanian society and designated it a role of prevention of radicalisation. Albania has been historically and geographically recognised for religious tolerance and multiculturalism, a value that has according to them persisted up to day. Similarly, young people unanimously dismissed religious radicalisation because Albania is famous for its historical religious tolerance and harmony. However, a minority of them said that actually religious harmony was overrated and did not exist in the country, merely it was lack of religious profanity and interest in religions that dominated the country. Young people usually 'inherited' the faith from their parents and although they could change it if they wanted, they appeared not to care much.

On the other hand, and without realising it, young people stated few rather extreme religious examples: girls in Kamza who were thought to had been prohibited from attending schools due to Islam; or young girls being forced to wear hijab. The majority of the students believed that this was happening because parents forced girls to cover themselves. However, a Muslim female participant in one focus group tried to debunk it, explaining that she had decided to cover herself as the Quran prescribed it and she wanted to look like her mother. Besides her, few students attributed the forced wearing of hijab misunderstanding of Islam which necessarily did not have to be the parents' fault. Muslim leaders and civil society representatives pointed out at a growing Islamophobia in Albania as a result of abundant discussions and articles on religious/ Islamic radicalisation which led some individuals to leave for Syria and Iraq. This opinion could be related to young people's statements as they viewed wearing hijab as a radical act imposed on girls (daughters) by their parents without their consent. It does not necessarily indicate Islamophobia; though, it may lead to it. This stroke in opposition to the declared religious harmony in Albania. Researchers and civil society workers, on the other hand, considered religious radicalisation as still present in the country, albeit more silent than a few years before and not being demonstrated in a violent form. The above mentioned does not mean that re-



ligious radicalisation has disappeared, merely it has been transformed due to several factors: ISIS and connected branches as the leading recruiters on religious grounds have changed their modus operandi and are trying to move forward after the losses they have suffered. Secondly, home radicals witnessed a change in laws and even a few sentences on the ground of supporting terrorism or recruiting. Moreover, they are aware that many returnees and suspicious persons may be under police surveillance, so they have also adjusted their work and style. It would be misleading to assume that radicalisation, including religious radicalisation, disappeared since the foreign fighters' departure to Syria and Iraq has stopped. Few experts expressed more pessimistic outlook: worries of future terrorist attacks in Albania because religious radicalisation has not been appropriately addressed by the state and returnees from Syria and Iraq have been isolated, ostracised and left without any support. De-radicalisation and rehabilitation programs are missing in the country. Furthermore, there are mostly non-governmental and religious organisations operating in the suburbs and in remote areas where the state is lacking. These organisations cannot substitute the role of state and their functioning often depends on grants which are envisaged for one year only, exceptionally for a longer period. Because of religious radicalisation targeted as a national priority and many offered grants, it has happened that many organisations have implemented projects on radicalisation, however, without prior and proper expertise in the field. Researchers also mentioned non-Islamic religious radicalisation which tends to be overlooked as it usually does not lead towards violence against other people.

The stakeholders criticised absent de-radicalisation programs, aimed at returnees from Syria and Iraq, as well as at persons convicted for or charged with crimes related to terrorism, recruiting or other support of terrorist organisations. Although these people do not represent an immediate security threat, they should not be marginalised and ostracised and left at the margins of the society. Deeping isolation of an individual or a small community could become a threat in the future.

Ethnic or nationalistic radicalisation is not visible or spread in Albania; it should better be called clashes or tensions rather than radicalisation. It touches mostly the border areas. However, young people from these areas, albeit being Albanians, reported that they had faced discrimination because of their geographical origin. They named it 'radical' as it was not normal. The students said that they felt discriminated against in the capital, but they also confessed that most probably they behaved similarly towards other people from villages. According to the stakeholders, this radicalisation does not transform into violence, perhaps occasionally at football matches or online.



Young people pointed out an abundance of bullying in the country. They argued that bullying was not ordinary and was extreme. They all had experience with it, either personal or referring to friends' experiences. One student even mentioned a forced school departure of his friend who had been severely bullied.

Lastly, students reported the 'Blue Whale' initiative which got popular in Albania, but nobody died from it. The game forced young people to inflict harm on themselves, record a video of it and post it online. Social media mostly spread the initiative online. However, it was reported to parents and authorities and did not get so popular as in other countries.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN DIFFERENT SOCIAL GROUPS

Albanian society shows a great level of cohesion, therefore, the differences among various groups of young people appear lower than in other cases. The main difference in understanding and addressing radicalisation is on the rural vs. urban stratification. The rural students felt discriminated by the urban population, but they also confessed that they behaved similarly towards persons from even more rural regions. This pattern resembles a spiral of violence: I discriminate others because I am also an object of discrimination. Similarly, more religiously devoted students, especially Muslims, felt that they were targeted as radicals based on their faith. This group of young people tended to be more sensitive towards radicalisation. On the other side, they drew a line between a radical and a pious person. Yet, it is difficult to find differences as many students claimed that they had inherited the faith from their parents and grandparents but were not very religious. Researchers pointed out dual attitude towards potential radicalisation: when the same behaviour is spotted within the Muslim believers, it is named 'radicalisation', however, when it is seen in the Christian communities, it is merely denominated 'pious'. Such distinctions lead to a growing Islamophobia and although right-wing tendencies have been absent from the Albanian society, except for occasional hooligans' clashes, that does not mean that the precious Albanian religious harmony will be preserved forever. Because of the economic and social stratification of the society, students compared themselves to the European standards, not to their peers in Albania. They did not consider material differences between each other relevant, rather accent, place of origin, physical strength and school grades were named as reasons for bullying. During the focus groups, all young people thought of radicalisation as a predominantly male issue –



even though they remembered women leaving for war as well, they thought they had been persuaded by their husbands' initiatives.

The stakeholders indicated that inhabitants of remote areas were vulnerable and perhaps more prone to radicalisation, however, the young people from those areas did not perceive it similarly.

LOCAL RESILIENCE TOWARDS YOUTH RADICALISATION

The Coordination Center for Countering Violent Extremism - Albania is the main state actor in the field of prevention of radicalisation, extremism and violent extremism. According to its website, the Center was established in December 2017 as a public entity, however, it became fully operational in summer 2018. It claims to be *"a hub for coordination and capacity development of local stakeholders and frontline practitioners involved in efforts to counter violent extremism in Albania and the region by sharing best practices and developing effective evidence-based responses to counter the threat of violent extremism."*⁷ The Center aims at connecting communities, civil society, practitioners and policy makers in the country. In the time of the interview, the Center was in the process of drafting and adopting various national action plans in close cooperation with every ministry in the country to ensure a coordinated approach. After the adoption of the action plans, implementation and monitoring phase are envisaged to follow. Simultaneously, the Center is working on creating a mechanism for response to radicalisation: coordination of policy makers, psychologists, police officers, social workers and local governments. The Center plans to establish a mechanism of frontline officers who would be present across the country and whose task would be to frequent cafes, play rooms and other public spaces and to monitor the community. The Center has been working on diminishing overlapping activities, training teachers and on the concept of schools as community centres.

On the other side stands civil society which actors feel overwhelmed in the process of addressing radicalisation, extremism and violent extremism. Many field practitioners said that the most they could do is prevention; however, they feel like the whole task of tackling radicalisation had been put on their shoulders. Based on their words, non-governmental organisations work predominantly with young people within different projects and granting schemes. This corresponds with the teachers' words who claimed that the relevant workshops and trainings were not held in and

⁷ - <https://cve.gov.al/about-us/>



by schools but outside precisely by NGOs. The NGO apparent fatigue does not indicate that they do not wish to work on prevention, on the contrary. It rather indicates a call for a more coordinated approach and shared responsibilities since due to their position 'non-government', they are not in the position to duplicate the state and intervene where state interventions and policies should have been already in place.

International organisations and foreign national embassies have also been working in the field of radicalisation in Albania, either as direct actors or in co-operation with local stakeholders, or in the position of donors. Sometimes they work as an intermediary between the state and civil society. Other times they transfer their experience and adapt them to the local context.

A good example of close co-operation of different local, national and international actors is a training for prison staff on recognition and addressing potential radicalisation cases in prisons. Another NGO highly appreciated a book club, which has been organised in co-operation with the Ministry of Education, and attracted many young people who again started reading books. The Albanian Helsinki Committee has participated at building a national network of numerous local civil society actors to prevent violent extremism and radicalisation thanks to a sub-granting mechanism. Few organisations and even a state institution praised the concept of school as community centres; however, this initiative is still at a very initial phase.

Except for the state actors, all interviewed considered absence of de-radicalisation programs as a neglected problem that should have already been addressed. To wait just before the convicted are about to be released is not an adequate response. Moreover, when they spoke about de-radicalisation, they referred also to the returnees who had not been sentenced and who live in Albania, albeit ostracised and discriminated. Not only them, but their families, children and youth included, as well.



PREVENTION OF RADICALIZATION AND P/CVE

Young people as a target group of the project should be included in prevention and listened to. Unfortunately, the majority, almost all of them did not see themselves as part of the solution. They passed the ball of prevention to authorities such as state, police, schools or teachers. State and the government should develop policies, especially social policies to include and support isolated individuals. They thought that more trainings on radicalisation, its meaning and implications should be carried out across the country. They argued that only once people understand the phenomenon, they can work on prevention. Different actors should continue with awareness-raising activities and stimulate more discussion. Some students tended to be more pessimistic as according to them nothing could be done in terms of prevention because “radicalisation happens due to a person’s deep conviction and beliefs which are impossible to change.” Other tried to joke that the best prevention is to ignore radicalisation, but one student explained that actually, that would be the attitude of most people as they do not desire to get involved with either radicals or authorities so they would most probably ignore the phenomenon.

The stakeholders hinted that poor economic conditions, absent prospects of further development, few opportunities for personal growth, not enough extra-curricular activities, not adequately developed infrastructure are factors that may largely contribute to a young person’s radicalisation. Young people are especially vulnerable because they seek for their identity and fast solutions. Nowadays, they are connected to their peers in Europe and the world, and they see a different standard of living than the one they are living in Albania where they witness the everyday fight for jobs (if any), corruption, nepotism, political radicalisation, not adequately equipped schools. They see that if they want to move forward, they have to move as close to the capital as possible because the majority of opportunities are located in Tirana.

In the local context, all stakeholders agreed that the first step consists of building trust in different communities which include being present for a more extended period, not only for the duration of trainings or workshops. The mentioned applies even more in work with young people but also with their parents. The civil society actors said that few times they had to work harder with the parents than with youngsters precisely because of a lack of trust from the parents’ side. State institutions and non-governmental organisation either need to be always present around Albania, even in the remote regions; or they should delegate to local communities and smaller organisations. Smaller organisations should have access to a variety of funding,



and the level of administration should be adjusted to their possibilities because usually these small organisations consist of few persons (2-3). It would also require a much more coordinated approach between the state actors and civil society actors. Many organisations have stated that precisely the coordinated approach with other NGOs and state institutions, such as the Ministry of Education, has proved as the best solution on how to tackle radicalisation and extremism. Young people tend to prefer the NGO staff to their teachers or state officials for simple reasons: usually, they are of similar age, do not wear suits, create a more relaxed atmosphere. All stakeholders emphasised the importance of going as local as possible. It may indicate that there are many initiatives in Tirana and other cities, but not in nearby villages. Because of local infrastructure smaller villages and towns are usually more badly connected with the bigger cities. It means to go where young people are, not where it is convenient for the stakeholders.

Besides, trust-building, any initiative aimed at preventing radicalisation, extremism and violent extremism should be framed into a broader topic of human rights. Many actors have stated that once they mention the terms as mentioned earlier, young people tend to be upset and unwilling to participate, however, when a workshop is dedicated to human rights in general, attendance and active participation grow up. In general, extra-curricular activities should be available and affordable. For illustration, in the absence of community centres and public libraries in smaller towns and villages, quite often the only place to go with young people is a café. However, one civil society activist confessed that at one occasion this was deemed impossible as female participants refused to enter because the only café in the village was for men only, not according to any law, but when working with young people, one has to bear in mind the local context and act accordingly.

“The fun activities don’t exist. You have to keep up with your daily routine and after that what? I was in one village because of a project, and we wanted to go to a café, just to have coffee, you know, but in front of it, the girls told me that they couldn’t come inside because there are only boys and men use to hang out there. So, this is isolation; they don’t have another place.”

Several non-governmental organisations, as well as state institutions, mentioned that the concept of schools as a community centre has been bearing fruit. Schools are usually viewed as trustworthy institutions. They are evenly dispersed around Albania, have necessary (or at least the essential) equipment. Although there are not many schools as community centres in Albania at the moment (the numbers stated in the interviews diversify from 2 to 5) and they are not located in the remote areas, it



has the potential for future projects. On the other hand, few NGO actors have indicated a complicated bureaucracy model and a lengthy procedure for the establishment of schools as community centres.

Art as a tool to fight radicalisation, extremism and violent extremism. Various organisations said that shaping human rights education into art got young people's attention. They mostly used painting exhibitions and literary contexts, but one also organises a book club in co-operation with the Ministry of Education. These activities have combined online and offline methods. Additionally, it helps when no community is designated a hot spot or a risk area which is off-putting as well.

Offering internships home and abroad and giving young people opportunities to develop their own mini-projects is another successful tool.

What all stakeholders agreed on was no need to complicate the prevention: simple leisure time activities so that young people have opportunities to develop, to go offline, to read, to educate themselves be it in schools as community centres or anywhere else. Young people should feel there is a perspective for them in the country. They need to be supported, listened to and encouraged. Not to leave them alone in the grasp of the Internet and popular social networks.



RECOMMENDATIONS: ALBANIA

The recommendations for stakeholders such as: public administration, civil society, local leaders, international organizations and donors active in Albania.

- Close and coordinated system: police, prosecutors, social service, psychologists, teachers, community – all these actors need to work in close cooperation. Although the Coordination Center for Countering Violent Extremism – Albania has been functioning, at the moment it does not include a coordinated approach of all above-mentioned actors.
- Periodical consultations between civil society and state actors. To facilitate financial contribution to the civil society and clear rules of grant distribution.
- To listen to the young people, to hear their voice and give them opportunities, even in a form of small microgrants, so that they could develop and implement their own projects.
- Better project deployment: nobody underestimated the importance of conferences, but according to the civil society actors these rarely help young people in the remote areas. Conferences, roundtables and similar initiatives are needed, yet they should not be dominant.
- Furthermore, there should be a better coordination on project deployment in several areas so that duplication is avoided and more local actors are involved.
- Simplify the grant giving scheme to adjust to the needs and capabilities of local organisations. Since they are small and lack capacities, it is difficult for them to comply with the rules of big and state donors. Lessen the administrative criteria in exchange for greater operability.
- More targeted awareness raising activities and trainings for teachers and young people. The teachers expressed their wish for more trainings since some teachers had not attended any training. They would welcome continuous trainings for teachers on new concepts, such as radicalisation, discrimination and bullying. They would welcome co-operation with social workers and psychologists. They said that even a flyer, a poster would be enough for the beginning as they may have spotted radicalisation but remain unsure and do not want to target any particular student.



- Schools as community centres as well. The concept has been proven successful and used not only by students after school but also by parents.
- Better system of social protection and more services provided by social workers. Social workers should be part of local communities, work with the people and intervene when necessary. They should have the local people's trust.
- Investment in demographic research and statistics and seek for reasons why young people leave the places of their origin (to Tirana or abroad) and work on solution. The government cannot propose any policy without having relevant information from the field.
- Go as local as possible and stay present there through continuous engagement with the community.



COUNTRY REPORT: BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

INTRODUCTION

Humanity in Action Bosnia and Herzegovina (further just HiA BiH) conducted research in perception of the problem of radicalization by young people in various communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The research was conducted via focus groups of young people age 16 – 24 and via structured interviews with stakeholders dealing with radicalization and violent extremism. The focus groups were conducted in following places around Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH):

FOCUS GROUPS

- 3.11.2018 at the youth office in Donji Vakuf. Altogether 10 young people engaged in the dialogue (5 boys and 5 girls);
- 4.11.2018 at the University of Bihac in Bihac, 8 young people, were involved (5 girls and 3 boys);
- 10.11.2018 at the youth office in Bugojno, Ten young people were involved (5 boys and 5 girls participated);
- 11.11.2018 in the Humanity in Action office in Sarajevo. Seven young people participated (4 boys and 3 girls);
- 11.11.2018 at the youth office in Lukavica (Istocno Sarajevo), participated 8 young people (4 girls and 4 boys);
- 19.11.2018 at the UWC high school in Mostar, 10 participants were involved in the focus group (7 girls and 3 boys);
- 24.11.2018 at the Cultural Centre in Bijeljina. The discussion gathered 9 young people (7 girls and 2 boys).



YOUTH POLICIES IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Competencies in designing and implementing youth policies in BiH are devolved to the entity level: Federation of BiH (FBiH) and Republika Srpska (RS). At the level of FBiH, matters regarding the youth are managed in accordance with the Youth Law of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was published in the Official Gazette of FBiH, nr. 36/10 on 16 June 2010.⁸ The Law “regulates issues related to youth life, position and activities in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina” and defines youth rights and obligations, youth work and youth activities, youth support and youth associations and councils, while its goals have been defined as follows:

1. “Drafting and implementation of youth policies at all government levels in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereinafter: the Federation) based on multiple sector approach and consideration of youth needs, requests and interests;
2. Establishing criteria in compliance with European principles in the activities of public institutions related to the implementation of youth policies;
3. Establishing and defining measures and recommendations in relation to youth work and youth activities;
4. Strengthening youth participation and inclusion and their informing at all decision-making levels in the Federation based on the established participation mechanisms;
5. Strengthening youth volunteering and their voluntary participation in activities related to youth issues;
6. Implementation of principles of non-discrimination, solidarity and ethics in all activities related to youth issues;
7. Building of human, technical and administrative capacities of youth associations”.⁹

In Republika Srpska, the Law on Youth Organization, adopted in 2004, defines “general interest and programs in the field of youth, establishment and association of youth organizations, activities, assets and financing, rights and obligations, profes-

⁸ - Bešić, J., & Pabrić, R. (2011). Vodič kroz Zakon o mladima Federacije Bosne i Hercegovine (p. 43). Sarajevo: Institut za razvoj mladih KULT.

⁹ - Youth Law of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Official Gazette of FBiH, nr. 36/10. Retrieved from <http://mladi.org/v2/dokumenti/zakoni-o-mladima/youth%20law%20fbih%2036-10.pdf>



sional work and training, youth manifestations, international youth cooperation, information and development of bodies for youth policy”, stating as its objectives the following:

“Encouraging systematic improvement and development of youth organization and youth policy with the active participation of the youth:

- animating the youth
- affirmation of youth activities
- representation of the interests and rights of the youth
- promotion of the participation of young people in the decision-making process”.¹⁰
- There are two umbrella organizations at the entity levels dedicated to the representation and promotion of the rights of the youth. These are the youth councils Vijeće mladih of FBiH¹¹ and Omladinski savjet of Republika Srpska. Both organizations implement various activities aimed at improving the status of the youth and engage in dialogue with the authorities in their respective entities, while also developing active international partnerships.

¹⁰ - Law on Youth Organization. Official Gazette of Republika Srpska, nr. 98/04 and 119/08. Retrieved from <http://www.omladinskisavjet.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Zakon-o-omladinskom-organizovanju-Republike-Srpske-20.10.2004.pdf>

¹¹ - The Institute for Youth Development KULT is another organization intent on making the voices of the youth heard. It is currently in the process of implementing its Youth Watch Youth Policy, whose goal is to bring about an active civil society, which will be involved in the decision-making process with regards to youth policies and laws, as well as in their execution. KULT is also a part of the Initiative for Monitoring and Evaluating Youth Policies (IMEYP). The initiative’s objective is to „build and strengthen the capacities of the Initiative, to enable cooperation, exchange of knowledge and experience between YA/YC, to become more powerful partners in dialogue with the authorities in creating, enforcing and monitoring youth policies. The Initiative will work on establishing sustainable mechanisms for cooperation between the government and the NGO sector, on establishing systems of monitoring, evaluation, analysis and advocating youth policies at all authority levels in BiH” Youth Watch Youth Policy. Institute for Youth Development KULT. Retrieved from <https://mladi.org/v2/en/projects/1/youth-watch-youth-policy/157-youth-watch-youth-policy>



SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS: BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

This report documents the findings of the four-month-long data collection and research carried out in 7 municipalities and cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Approximately sixty young people and ten stakeholders were engaged in conversations about the potential existence of radicalization in the country, its causes and effects, as well as the means to prevent and/or counter it. This is one of the pioneering research studies on the case of BiH that bridges the findings of the previous studies on radicalization in BiH, which almost exclusively focused on adults and extreme groups, and various studies on the Bosnian youth and youth policies, which almost completely disregarded the phenomenon of radicalization and its relation to the younger generations.

While some respondents associate 'radicalization' to 'radical social changes' or attempts to achieve them, a great number of the interlocutors are unable to define the term and showed a genuine lack of understanding thereof. Others use descriptors and examples to illustrate their understandings, but cannot offer any formal or theoretical reference points. The majority has labeled political radicalization as the most widespread, while only few of the interviewees was unable to define or point to the existence of any other specific type of radicalization. Although some believe that a multicultural society is not conducive to the rise of radicalization, some were not even familiar with the concept of multiculturalism.

Interestingly, there seems to be no difference between the understanding of the concept of radicalization in mono-ethnic and multi-ethnic communities. Their perceptions of the phenomenon at hand are strongly correlated with their own ethnicity or religious affiliation. Among the groups, there seemed to be a consensus that younger people are more susceptible to radicalization in comparison to older (adults), while gender is generally not generally considered a significant factor. Only some interlocutors have suggested that, once they fall under the influence of radical ideas, men tend to be more radical than women.

Most of the interviewed students have never spoken about the topic of radicalization with their friends, family or teachers. This directly points to the need to incorporate it into the public discourse in order to raise awareness about the existing issue. Other suggestions aimed at countering radicalization proposed by both young respondents and interviewed experts include increasing media literacy and strengthening the ability of the youth to dodge radicalization through formal and informal education, as



well as through the organization of media campaigns.

Almost all interlocutors have identified governmental sector (including the education system) as the weakest link in the chain, and the lack of institutional capacity to tackle the growing problems. Radicalization and extreme violence issues are not being treated systematically and with specific measures, but rather as one of many deviant social phenomena affecting the youth. As a result, the social workers, teachers and other government officials received no specific training, they rely on outdated pedagogy and referral mechanisms, and thus they cannot offer help or advice tailored to the specific needs of vulnerable individuals at risk.

UNDERSTANDING THE TERM 'RADICALIZATION' AMONG YOUTH IN BIH

The research team conducted seven focus groups in different cities across Bosnia and Herzegovina, between October 2018 and end of January 2019. The team selected cities based on the ethnic composition of its inhabitants. The first two focus groups took place in the greater metropolitan area of Sarajevo (Cities of Sarajevo and East Sarajevo), followed by three predominantly 'monolithic' ethnic communities of Bihac, Bijeljina, and Donji Vakuf, complemented by two multiethnic (divided) communities of Mostar and Bugojno.

Each focus group consisted of approximately eight participants of diverse backgrounds, matching all basic preset focus group conditions (gender, ethnic diversity, religion, age, level of education). Each session lasted between 90-120 minutes. While the majority of interlocutors were high school students, predominantly in their senior year, some were freshmen and sophomore students. The participants are enrolled in public high-schools or universities, and were not members of or involved with any political party or movement. Some are active within their respective local NGOs, which serve as the main resource for information. Most NGOs they worked with are cultural or sports oriented, and only few of those are civic minded and operating beyond their local communities.

The analysis of the results obtained in all focus group sessions shows a prevalent lack of understanding on what 'radicalization' is, and how it materializes within local communities in general or specifically among youth. There is a lack of education on the intricacies of the phenomenon, and lack of any additional content or sensitivity training. Additionally, there is very little or no first-hand experience with anyone who



has been involved in any initiatives that could be described as 'radical', or movements that aim to promote non-traditional values and extreme ideologies.

Previous research on the matter suggests that young people are particularly vulnerable to radicalization in an age of accessible social media. Similar worldviews are habitually exchanged and reinforced online,¹² while the dissemination of extremist narratives have gradually shifted into less visible online spaces.¹³ Our interlocutors also revealed that most information they receive on the topic come from TV or social media platforms they are active on. They are aware of the social media groups in their local surrounding that might promote some suspicious activities, generally considered as 'radical', but they have never been members of these groups, been sought out by someone or attempted to contact them. They are unclear about the 'recruitment strategies' and language used. Additionally, most claim they do not understand the appeal of these online contents, and feel they are sufficiently aware of the risks of potential involvements, and thus are ready to resist most manipulations.

The interlocutors have indicated no general fear of escalations and/or eruption of violence caused by radicalized groups they are aware of. Only a handful of individuals reported they know someone who they strongly believe is a member of a 'radicalized group' or 'movement', but never witnessed anything suspicious personally. However, they admit there are no safety nets available to them, and this is matched with level of corresponding frustration and distrust that the current social system can adequately protect all young people in BiH. Most focus group participants also perceive their teachers and local institutions as inadequate in providing necessary education, protection or advice in case they or their close friends become involved in some form of suspicious behavior. Local Centers for Social Work or other locally-embedded institutions are not considered as a resource, due to the lack of the staff interest, work overload, and the perceived lack of training tailored accommodate the needs of those who had been exposed to some form of radicalism.

The results of our research suggest there seems to be almost no difference between mono-ethnic and multiethnic communities. Namely, those living in predominantly ethnically monolithic communities, just like their young counterparts in the multi-ethnic ones, perceive this phenomenon almost in the same manner, and their own

¹² - Richardson, C., Cameron, P., & Berlouis, K. (2017). Radicalisation of Young Adults in the Balkan States: Counter-Measures, Healthcare Provision, and Community Involvement. *Journal For Deradicalization*, 11[2363-9849].

¹³ - Azinović, V. (2018). *Extremism Research Forum: Understanding Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans* [Ebook]. British Council.



ethnicity, just like that of their fellow citizens, does not play any significant role in the shaping of perceptions or attitudes about radicalization. Moreover, some of the interlocutors expressed strong beliefs that life in a multicultural society prevents the occurrence of radicalization, but were not able to support their claims with additional arguments, or provide concrete examples.

Some respondents from larger cities generally hold that people from both urban and rural areas are equally prone to radicalization, whereas the interlocutors living in smaller communities generally hold that their fellow citizens have fewer opportunities for personal and professional development, which makes them more vulnerable. There were many reflections and comparisons about availability of different educational opportunities and institutional networks that youth in urban communities can benefit from (like community centers, access to various institutions of culture; whereas rural communities can only offer primary schools and religious institutions as places of communal socialization). Moreover, some respondents highlighted the fact that very little money is allocated for youth within remote rural communities, and thus their isolation is perceived as permanent and impermeable for structural change.

Finally, the team noted that some young people operate on an assumption that radicalization is imported to BiH, and rarely or almost never locally generated. There is also a huge gap of perception reported by our interlocutors between what they think about this phenomenon in comparison to what their parents and older siblings believe. This was, in part, associated with their perceptions of war, living in former Yugoslavia (strong state and regulated system vs. presently weak state Bosnia and Herzegovina).

TRENDS OF RADICALIZATION AMONG YOUTH

Most of our expert interlocutors agree on the fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina is home to at least two prominent types of radicalization. One is political, and the other is ethno-nationalist. Both complement and feed one another. Nowadays, one can also observe a combination of political radicalization with the elements of religious radicalization. In the absence of adequate institutional and social responses to the challenges that Bosnian and other Western Balkans countries are facing (i.e. sky-high unemployment rates, low level of economic growth, growing brain drain, etc.), political manipulations often occupy those gaps and lead to isolation of people. Ac-



According to our sources, isolation, as such, does not necessarily lead to radicalization, but opens up opportunities for deviant political ideologies and their agents to shape the thoughts and actions of vulnerable individuals. Radicalization in BiH cannot be explored in isolation, as one type of radicalization permeates the other.

Interviewed teachers and religious workers believe that all types of radicalization in BiH are interconnected, since political structures are predominantly linked to the national affiliations of individuals embedded in their ethnic groups, and their respective ethno-nationality often relates to their own religious affiliation. The line that separates these 'radical' trends has long been invisible. The football fan groups, as prime examples of this, show clear elements of multilayered radicalization: ethno-nationalistic negatively charged attitudes mixed with extreme religious intolerance towards other groups.

Our interlocutors from criminal justice sector point to the fact that state institutions and LEAs at lower levels of government structure have no clear strategy on how to tackle these issues. There are several inconsistent patterns of behavior among young people they worked with, which could be labeled as radicalized, manifested mainly through their aberrant opinions, readiness to support or cause violence, exclusivity and excessive in-group support, the absence of tolerance to the other. In their view, young people are radicalized primarily around political ideas, religious and ethnic affiliation, which then affects the forms of manifesting their ideologies. One of the stakeholders, who regularly works with young people in custody or jail, pointed out that the youth tend to identify radicalization with religious terrorism, which, of course is a reductionist way of understanding the phenomenon at hand.

Respondents from NGO sector warn about the lack of social sensitivity and inability of the general public to actively condemn and fight radical tendencies present in the society. In their words, some forms of radicalization have even become commonplace, and thus 'less problematic' for those who would traditionally be expected to take counter-actions. Tolerance of such instable movements turns into their justification, and a consequently a tacit approval. Therefore, such verily dangerous phenomena are left unpunished, which negatively reflects on the youth and new generations who gradually accept these new norms as granted. Desensitized about the raising dangers and unequipped for critical evaluation of information they receive on daily basis, the young people are prone to become the next potential victims of any of 'radicalized' ideologies present in their immediate surrounding.

Experts working in security sector warn about the lack of PVE programs available to



the youth, and growing radicalization trends in relations among ethnic groups, which is evident in discourses on social networks, especially in online fora focusing on recent conflicts in the Balkans. These trends are increasingly present and more pronounced in Republika Srpska entity where public displays of hate speech and appearances of radical militarized groups occur more often, like public gatherings and uniformed parades of 'Chetnik' movement and their political supporters during the celebration of important dates from the past wars, aimed at mobilizing young people to take appropriate action in 'conserving' the ideals of serbianism and Republika Srpska.

The youth in the focus group sessions offered quite divergent views on radicalization. While the students from Mostar and Bugojno did not point to the existence of any specific type of radicalization, those from Sarajevo and East Sarajevo have emphasized the ideological base of the existing radicalization. Respondents from Sarajevo perceive political radicalization as the most widespread, which was also shared among the interviewees from Bijeljina. Interlocutors from Donji Vakuf have also provided examples of intolerant attitudes of their friends and family with regards to homosexuality and inter-religious marriages as symptoms of radicalization, which, again, can be traced back to embedded beliefs stemming from their religious belief and ethnicity. Further examples include fan groups of football teams, which are often considered as radical.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN DIFFERENT SOCIAL GROUPS

The research team conducted seven focus group sessions in total. Two were carried out in the metropolitan area cities of Sarajevo and East Sarajevo, which are predominantly monolithic ethnic communities of ethnic Bosniaks and ethnic Serbs live side by side within administratively divided cities located in different political entities. Moreover, the team organized focus groups in two multiethnic (divided) local communities of Mostar and Bugojno. Furthermore, the team organized three additional focus groups in three monoethnic cities with predominantly Bosniak or Serb ethnic communities, in Bihac, Donji Vakuf, and in Bijeljina.

Focus group interlocutors in Sarajevo & East Sarajevo, as young people who lives in two geographically amalgamated urban units, but administratively completely divided cities, generally show a higher degree of conceptual understanding of radicalism, as majority of them are university students and had been actively exposed to various



public initiatives aimed to counter all movements identified as radical or extremist. Almost all are fully aware of 'politicized' social relations in their local settings and disproportionate power relations in BiH, which altogether influence both inner- and intergroup their views and attitudes towards all social phenomena, including radicalism. They were also aware of some international organizations headquartered in Sarajevo that fund and organize various types of awareness raising campaigns and initiatives (like trainings on PVE and similar workshops). Their social attitudes and identities are somewhat shaped by the strong presence of external actors in their immediate surrounding, much more than in other researched communities.

Interviewed individuals in both groups agree that radicalization in BiH exists, and that the younger generations are more prone to get involved, regardless of their gender, mainly as a result of their lack of experience and safety net to rely on. Young people's vulnerability is additionally heightened by lack of general knowledge and unstable patterns of behavior. Their views match the previous studies, which also found young people as extremely vulnerable and easily influenced by negative global trends, as well as global political influence in Europe and the world.¹⁴

During the sessions, respondents in both focus groups showed high-level awareness of the factors underpinning the low quality of life in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which primarily refers to the scant education system and high unemployment rates. Their remarks clearly mirror the findings of previous studies that also highlighted the importance decaying post-conflict communities and culture¹⁵ and low socio-economic status of the local population as predisposing factors for radicalization.¹⁶ Furthermore, additional factors interlocutors identified include unfavorable conditions in the labor market for the general population and the youth, continuous support for ethno-nationalistic political parties, social inequality, along with the corruption, nepotism and favoritism of the selected groups within society.

For majority of interviewed young people in East Sarajevo, radicalization is associated with certain changes that are often negative and can escalate into (violent) extremism. The majority of them connects it with the ideological foundation and with processes of mass mobilization founded upon strong 'ideological attitudes',

¹⁴ - Adamović, M., Gvozdanović, A., & Kovačić, M. (2017). Process of Reconciliation in the Western Balkans and Turkey: A Qualitative Study. Banja Luka/Zagreb: Institute for Social Research in Zagreb (ISRZ).

¹⁵ - Azinović, V., & Jusić, M. (2015). The Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters' Bosnian Contingent. Atlantic Initiative, Sarajevo.

¹⁶ - Richardson, C., Cameron, P., & Berlouis, K. (2017). Radicalisation of Young Adults in the Balkan States: Counter-Measures, Healthcare Provision, and Community Involvement. Journal For Deradicalization, 11 [2363-9849].



and usually appealing to individuals who do not conform to social expectations of their social environment. Similarly, the group in Sarajevo grasped 'radicalization' as a phenomenon with an ideological basis, which mainly refers to the advocacy of political ideas that can reach certain extremes. In many instances, these can involve the employment of all possible means to reach the desired goals, like changing the existing social or political norms. Moreover, this group of respondents believed that vulnerability to radicalization depends on the environment, and is heavily shaped by media, social platforms, teachers, and sometimes peer pressure. Most of them felt the quantity of information does not necessarily influence propensity for 'radicalization', but rather, the lack of differing perspectives available to the young people. In addition to these factors, a large number of young interlocutors suggested that charismatic leaders play an important role in this respect. They believe that young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina are prone to follow any person who promises to contribute to the welfare of the entire group they belong to, and even if they fail to deliver their promises.

When it comes to prevention, young people in Sarajevo and East Sarajevo believe that peers, parents and extended family members are the primary 'line of defense' and can protect the youth from radicalization. Apart from the conversation about the current challenges with primary circles of socialization, the interviewed participants in the focus groups held in Sarajevo and East Sarajevo think that the institutions need to provide more educational programs. They also recognized various non-governmental organizations, youth exchanges, trainings and workshops, as well as socially responsible media, as important allies in combating radicalization.

Participants in the focus groups held in Mostar and Bugojno, all of whom are high-school students, were not entirely familiar with the term radicalization. Their initial associations were 'radical measures' and 'initiatives', although they were not clear about what those are and what their scope is, or whether radicalization can appear in other forms. When the concept of social cohesion was brought up in the conversations, it was met with dilemmas, and almost all interlocutors in both cities showed the inability to define it in relation to other concepts discussed. As such, radicalization as a term was understood conceptually as a 'universal concept', applied to almost all phenomena in the society, even music and sports. Participants in both focus groups were very reluctant in sharing their ideas about prevention mechanisms, stressing there is not much that can be done to prevent someone from 'going rogue' apart from strengthening the existing social care system, fostering of critical thinking in formal as well as in non-formal education systems.



Young people participating in a focus group organized in Mostar were very aware of their local divisive political environment, and they kept emphasizing that fact in their remarks about radicalization. Even though they are aware of the negative rhetoric and raising populism in the community, the majority believed radicalization did not gain foothold locally. Youth perceptions in Mostar were, at some instances, drawn to ethnic relations and divided 'social spaces' in the city. They are also fully aware of the daily 'overemphasizing' narratives of their salience, especially in relations to the preservation of political interests and other means of social manipulation local politicians have skillfully used in the past 20 years. Overall, youth in Mostar does not associate radical movements and initiatives with ordinary people, but only with those who have a particular interest in 'propagating certain political narratives'. Some interlocutors have identified political movements, such as establishing the 'Third Entity' in BiH, as 'radical and separatist'. Others have regressed to the themes of 'aggression vs. civil war' in BiH, negative political influences of Serbia or Croatia and some other states in BiH's political affairs as radicalization of political landscape. By characterizing radicalization as a form of 'business' they wanted to draw attention to their own awareness about the existing social flows in the BiH political system and their own city, as well as the dominant media discourse they constantly observe.

In Bugojno, on the other hand, young people described radicalization as a phenomenon that resides only in the prevailing politically molded divisions in the society, wherein each group has distinct interests, opinions and attitudes. They believe that every form of radicalization is harmful, and that it deepens the already existing differences among ethnic groups in BiH. Additionally, all agreed that even though the topic gained more prominence in the past couple of years, it has not been discussed systematically among teachers or parents. Based on the sources of information they receive, which range between internet and TV and conversations with their peers, young people included in this focus group believed that radical ideas are a 'slow spreading' virus that can be tackled adequately and timely, because it only appeals to specific groups of people that find it 'unusual and interesting', or because those individuals 'want to stand out of the rest of the society'. Examples of 'radical ideas' our interviewees cited during the focus group session included rebellion of the youth against divisions and segregation at schools in Jajce, strikes for quality social protection system and better working conditions by labor unions, and other ideas aimed at improving their community living. Interestingly, none of the young people explicitly mentioned the terrorist attack on the Bugojno police station (2010), although this incident is well known in the entire BiH.



There seem to be varying understandings and unaddressed questions in other predominantly 'mono-ethnic' local communities in which the research team conducted other focus groups. Youth participating at the session organized in Bihac appeared to be the most acclimated to the topic of 'radicalization', having recently witnessed unprecedented waves of migrants coming to and passing through their city. They instantly connected migrants' presence with various negatively charged social phenomena they were aware of, including 'radicalized religious movements' some migrants might belong to. There is also a high value placed in general on the role of external agents and weakness of local institutions to tackle the growing negative trends. Furthermore, they brought up a lack of privacy and greater community pressure to conform to certain behavioral patterns as important factors in shaping their perceptions. All of this is accompanied by 'locally-embedded pitfalls' for religious radicalization, because all religious communities, as the young interlocutors stated, are in a great deal dependent on politics.

The majority of young people interviewed in Bihac also noted that their parents and some teachers have continuously warned them of the potential dangers and risks, but not much was done to ensure their safety. Some individuals shared and discussed their personal trauma and grievances, while others kept mentioning the recent war in BiH and referenced 'mujahidin', 'chetniks' or 'fikretovci' as prime examples of what they personally consider as radicalization. There was no reflection about the cases of radicalization they could think of in the recent period. The majority of young people in Bihac also could not provide any reference to existing cases or networks they are familiar with. Most participants seem to know what the major causes of radicalization are nowadays, locally and in other communities in BiH, but they are not fully aware of the specific risks present in their local community or in the media they follow. However, some openly stated that some media outlets are set to create and foster animosity among the youth. Most of them implied there is a chain of factors that can put a young individual into a risk of becoming radicalized, but they could not identify them precisely. Their answers also revolved around radicalization as 'polarization' of political atmosphere in the country, which they generally find meaningless and cynical. Almost all participants communicated strong criticism toward local political parties, which they characterized as destructive and actively involved in perpetuating the existing divisive patterns.

The interlocutors from Bijeljina shared fairly different thoughts on the topic. Overall, they believe that new generation did not have the opportunity to break out of the cycles of political influences of the older generations. Even though the majority is



convinced that radicalization has not been strongly present in their surroundings, young people are more and more exposed to this topic on a daily basis. However, they felt that most of the conversations are taking places on the streets and during informal get-togethers, and less or no time is devoted to this topic in schools and in the public discourses. While most respondents in Bihac associated radicalization with new migration waves, the interviewees from Bijeljina linked this phenomenon to the negatively charged politics in Republika Srpska. Their specific understanding is rooted in locally constructed social categorizations of entity politics as a 'radical' form of political oppression of leaders from Banja Luka, which is strongly correlated with their personal judgments towards various prominent members of political parties.

Similarly, to their counterparts from Bihac, the respondents from Bijeljina emphasized the impact of external actors, especially political influences from Serbia, noting that the country's weak economy and social media are especially conducive with the rise and spread of radicalism. They almost universally attributed radicalism to aggressiveness and duplicity of manipulative agents who prey on the weak. Moreover, they believe that both age and gender can be considered as important factors in determining the potential agents. They specifically claim that, once subsumed by radical ideas, men are tend to be more intensively radicalized and are more likely to influence a larger number of people in comparison to women. While they do not perceive the area where a person lives or their ethnicity/religious affiliation as important factors, the interviewees from Bijeljina have also drawn the attention to the significance information sources and quality of news, as well as the level of general awareness among youth, as underlying factors potentially pushing individuals towards more radicalized ideas or movements. Some have strongly stressed the importance of eliminating propaganda and fake news (information), and strengthening media literacy programs, as useful counter-measures. When asked about other factors or actors that could impact or shape the prevention or combating radicalization, the interlocutors' in Bijeljina resolutely pointed to the governmental and non-governmental sectors, parents and extended families, as well as formal and informal education programs.

As opposed to the respondents in Bijeljina, the youth in Donji Vakuf associated the concept of radicalization with less negative connotations. Namely, this group of students identified radicalization with the launching of 'a strong idea or efforts aimed at the accomplishment of certain goals', which can result with changes that might improve the society altogether. However, they were outright unable to define the term and they showed a lack of general knowledge and understanding or related



phenomena. They also cited 'intolerant attitudes of their friends and family' about homosexuality and inter-religious marriages as examples of radicalism, stating that the crucial factor supporting the rise of radical ideas is the fear based on previously existing beliefs, coupled with the unfavorable conditions in the country. As it was the case with the interlocutors from Bijeljina and in Bihac, the respondents from Donji Vakuf explained that radicalism had not been part of their discussions with teachers or family. Some noted that this focus group was the first occasion in which they entertained this topic. Another problem they identified was the belief of certain individuals that radical ideas will help their communities, which is probably the key reason they supported them in the first place.

LOCAL RESILIENCE TOWARDS YOUTH RADICALISATION

The BiH's process of democratization was interrupted and delayed by the war and heavily shaped by numerous post-conflict legacies. The political decision-making system is highly fragmented, and leaves almost no room for quality-based deliberations.¹⁷ Almost all interlocutors agreed that radicalization of the political party system penetrated into all spheres of social and institutional life in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including the educational system. Symptoms they further recognized are weak horizontal collaboration between institutions, lack of shared vision to tackle commonly shared societal issues, and a lack of vision to deal with growing tensions that polarize the fragile social structures.

In views of most of the interviewed stakeholders, the most vulnerable types of young people potentially exposed to threats of radicalized ideas and movements are those who are lonely or need emotional support, who have no family support, living in a dire financial situation, live in remote places or in conditions that isolate them from the general public. Nearly all interviewed professionals also agree that the problem of radicalization is rarely discussed within the official institutional settings, among colleagues and within different educational platforms, especially among teachers and professionals who work with young adults. When discussed, it is often boiled down to reductionist statements on its existence and superficial identification of commonly known dangers and pitfalls for younger generations. None of the conversations point to the need for systematic action by competent and responsible institutions.

¹⁷ - Hasić J. & Sijamija M. (2018). Stable and state subsidized party membership in Bosnia and Herzegovina in Gherghina, S., Iancu, A., & Soare, S. (Eds.). *Party Members and Their Importance in Non-EU Countries: A Comparative Analysis*. p. 58-80.



Generally, interviewed professionals also believe that the existing school programs are outdated, lack multiplicity of perspectives, and are largely driven exclusively by the interests of their own ethnic group. As a result, unstable learning environment for vulnerable groups of students makes them susceptible to radicalization. Some believe that:

'Religious radicalization occurs in schools to a lesser extent. Private schools are more exposed to radicalized trends, since they are often isolated and not under public scrutiny in comparison to public schools. In secular schools, radicalism is gradually suppressed through the indoctrination of secular attitudes about life, the emergence of social values, while in religious schools there is a certain possibility of misunderstanding of key differences and social responsibility (...) It (radicalism) is occasionally channeled through the media, especially social networks. If not suppressed through religious education, it can produce individuals who can be a cause to the disturbance of relations in the society'¹⁸

Some of the interlocutors pointed out that young people from families where religion did not play a key role are most susceptible to become radicalized.

'Most parents of such young people did not have any connection with religion. They do not invest enough time or knowledge to provide their children with adequate education. People with formal religious education are far less susceptible to radicalization. Most of the radicalized persons have no formal education in BiH. (...) I also believe religion certainly should be a part of compulsory education, as this would be the basis for introducing young people to faith and their correct understanding of moral norms. People with formal religious education are far less susceptible to radicalization.'¹⁹

Another segment in this complex debate on local resilience relates to youth's inability to think critically about the social phenomena they encounter on daily basis. The inclusion of civic education was also recognized as vital in reducing the risks of vulnerable youth to accept extremist ideology.

¹⁸ - Interview with a Primary School Teacher and Islamic Theologian, March 2019.

¹⁹ - Interview with an Imam and Social Pedagogue, March 2019.



'What is definitely missing in BiH, from kindergarten to college, is civic education, a development of functional literacy in people. People who promote radical content would have more difficult task to sell their ideas if young generations they target have the ability to critically process some ambiguous information'²⁰

Some rudimentary forms of dialogue on radicalization and its impact on society are present at local universities, but only within specific topics and courses that focus on particular security issues or the conflict-prone regions, like the Middle East.

'Young people enrolled in social science programs are interested in these topics. Much of the young political party members I worked with share the same interest. Regardless of where they come from, the ethnic group they belong to or the level of their education, they all have similar opinions.'²¹

Teachers encourage conversations with students, and occasionally open space for their questions. However, the involved academics believe the structure of curricula and hours devoted teaching do not allow for much flexibility.

PREVENTION OF RADICALIZATION AND P/CVE IN BIH

Previous studies have identified youth education, accessible health care, reducing poverty and political representation as top areas of interest for all government institutions involved in designing anti-radicalization policies in BiH.²² However, government institutions at all levels in the government have limited capacities in designing implementing the set goals. There is no systematic data collection, and the existing policy measures do not fully reflect the concrete issues identified by NGOs, international organizations or informal groups. There are three key challenges interviewed experts identified in the field of prevention of radicalization among youth in BiH: profiling of youth with high risk for becoming radicalized, substandard institutional capacities to tackle the recognized challenges, and a lack of effective coordination and cooperation between the institutions. Interviewed experts point to several practical difficulties with profiling youngsters at risk of adopting of supporting radical behavior. Root causes of deviant behavioral patterns among youth in the past cases can be

²⁰ - Interview with a NGO Activist, Youth and Human rights, April 2019.

²¹ - Interview with a University Professor, Expert on Security, April 2019.

²² - Richardson, C., Cameron, P., & Berlouis, K. (2017). Radicalisation of Young Adults in the Balkan States: Counter-Measures, Healthcare Provision, and Community Involvement. *Journal For Deradicalization*, 11(2363-9849).



traced to both 'micro-social pathologies' and 'individualism'.

'Around 20% of them come so-called 'defective families.' They had some previous criminal records, or had some sort of problems with LEAs. On the other hand, there are also some people who came from completely well-functioning families and still decided to join foreign fighters formations abroad. This is why I do not think there are clear matrices that can help us determine their vulnerability and levels of risk. The closest descriptors of such deviant behaviors available to us are the referral mechanisms, and they have, more or less, proved rather unsuccessful in the past.'²³

According to one of the law enforcement experts, the existing institutional referral mechanisms are also inefficient, as they depend on mostly on institutional practices introduced fairly recently, within internationally funded projects. Local LEAs need more time and training to adapt, and more funds are needed to make the whole system sustainable. In spite of high-level interest to adopt the necessary changes, inadequate capacities at lower levels of institutional structure prevent full domestication of practices.²⁴

There are several institutions involved in combating radicalization, including social services, centers for mental health, schools and other related organizations (parents' councils and students' associations), detention and rehabilitation centers, religious organizations, city councils and local community councils, NGOs specialized in security matters, wider academic community and LEAs. The general institutional set-up is dispersed, disconnected, inert and fairly unequipped to deal with specific issues of deviant behaviors. Criminal prosecutor the team interviewed revealed:

'Vulnerability assessment entails identification of subjects at risk of being radicalized, evaluating their needs and how differ from those of the rest of the youth population. Another important aspect of the quality of our work includes the funding and additional resources available to us. If sufficient, our office, in cooperation with local police forces, conducts occasional evaluation of the situation, based on the number of criminal offences reported within a particular type of crimes committed. The prevention approaches we use are limited, and we mostly focus on post-factum investigation.'²⁵

²³ - Interview with a University Professor, Expert on Security, April, 2019.

²⁴ - Interview with a Criminal Justice Lawyer, February, 2019.

²⁵ - Interview with a Criminal Prosecutor, February 2019.



Interviewed social workers agree that the system design is flawed, primarily aimed to track and punish, and rarely to track and prevent. Local centers for social work dispose of insufficient funds to create and implement programs that can tackle specific risky behaviors, since the legal frames are very crude and do not allow for specific program solutions to particular risks observed. There were some attempts to include a wider range of institutions into the matter, but all have failed to gain momentum for the necessary institutional reforms. This is why all current programs are rudimentary and not tailored to specific needs of the young generations. Interlocutors claim that the competent education ministries themselves are not adequately involved in the development of plans and the prevention of radicalism. Additionally, staff in schools lack training aimed at early detection and prevention of the problem of radicalization.²⁶

Other, potentially dangerous, venues for youth radicalization are unsupervised local and online media outlets. Experts on media and information literacy call for more educational programs and more involvement by all relevant parties. One of the experts explicitly stated

‘Young people in BiH tend to distrust the mainstream media, and they generally use online news portals and social networks as their main sources of information. Most of these sites feature subjective and incomplete stories, have poor or no editorial supervision, the contents are unverified and might often promote ethnic-national divisions and sometimes hate speech. As a result, young people are at risk of becoming more exposed to populist and radical views, which further cement their misunderstanding of the political and social realities, as well as the ways they fit the general political architecture of the country.’²⁷

Interlocutors working in educational institutions and religious organizations strongly believe that radicalization among in BiH can only be analyzed and evaluated within the context of regional trends, and it should never be isolated or reduced to local initiatives that promote particular political goals. They all emphasized that BiH is not a special case, but it has been under a disproportionately high focus of foreign researchers, especially when it comes to the analysis of the so-called religious extremism cases. Some believe that excessive tendencies in following certain social and political trends in BiH may lead to ‘extravagant results’ intended to support pre-conceived hypotheses, and consequently, making the situation in BiH often more

²⁶ - Interview with a Social Worker, April 2019.

²⁷ - Interview with a Journalist, Online Media Expert, March 2019.



exaggerated and sensationalized in all available reports, without reasonably justified explanations.

'Students often notice and are informed through media about the appearance of radical groups in BiH, such as the deployment of uniformed Chetnik formations in Višegrad, as well as the emergence of extremist formations in war zones such as ISIL in Syria and other countries. Of course, children understand less about the political radicalization because they all isolate themselves from political trends Limited opportunities for interaction contribute to isolated observations of 'others' being active to pursue certain political or social goals, while 'we' usually remain isolated, mute or even potential victims of someone else's mobilization'²⁸

²⁸ - Interview with a High-school Teacher, March 2019.



RECOMMENDATIONS: BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The recommendations for stakeholders such as: public administration, civil society, local leaders, international organizations and donors active in BiH.

1. Previous research on radical viewpoints in BiH indicates there are openings for online recruitment of various social groups, since radical contents freely aired online without any censorship.²⁹ Media experts our team interviewed concur with these findings. Recommendation: Introducing media and information literacy programs to formal education settings. Firstly, providing adequate training to the teachers and academic staff, and then engage in educating students and parents about the aforementioned risks.
2. Interviewed experts call for inclusion of civic education in formal settings, as vital in reducing the risks of vulnerable youth groups to accept or support radical and extremist ideologies they are exposed to. This should be followed with a closer horizontal collaboration between educational institutions and CSOs that provide non-formal and informal trainings.
3. The research analysis indicates it is necessary to improve the capacities of government agencies to manage and monitor the process of 'deradicalization'. Various institutions involved in the process need to work coherently on identifying the technical and coordination challenges. They also need to set up legal frameworks and policy instruments that facilitate the process. Finally, more comparative research and leveraging international experiences is needed, in the context of providing alleviation and access to mainstream support tools for youth at high risk.
4. The analysis of data also points to the immanent need to create policies that would targeted youth-at-risk specific needs and provide matching assistance for those who were recruited or in danger of being exposed to radical organizations. These policies and measures should be combined with other available public and municipal services, such as social protection systems, formal education, part- or full-time employment, etc.
5. The research findings also suggest the need for more systematic approach to various 'socio-econ-cognitive' issues, such as social exclusion based on political, ethnic, sexual, or social affiliations. Governments need to provide

²⁹ - Bećirević, E. (2016). Salafism vs. Moderate Islam: A Rhetorical Fight for the Hearts and Minds of Bosnian Muslims. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative.



more funds for vocational training and personal capacity- and skill-building programs, as well as opportunities for attaining additional financial support (for instance to set up a business).

REFERENCES

- Adamović, M., Gvozdanić, A., & Kovačić, M. (2017). Process of Reconciliation in the Western Balkans and Turkey: A Qualitative Study. Banja Luka/ Zagreb: Institute for Social Research in Zagreb (ISRZ).
- Azinović, V. (2018). Extremism Research Forum: Understanding Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans [Ebook]. British Council. Retrieved from https://www.britishcouncil.me/sites/default/files/erf_report_western_balkans_2018.pdf
- Azinović, V., & Jusić, M. (2015). The Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters 'Bosnian Contingent. Atlantic Initiative, Sarajevo.
- Bećirević, E. (2016). Salafism vs. Moderate Islam: A Rhetorical Fight for the Hearts and Minds of Bosnian Muslims. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative.
- Hasić J. & Sijamija M. (2018). Stable and state subsidized party membership in Bosnia and Herzegovina in Gherghina, S., Iancu, A., & Soare, S. (Eds.). Party Members and Their Importance in Non-EU Countries: A Comparative Analysis. p. 58-80.
- Richardson, C., Cameron, P., & Berlouis, K. (2017). Radicalisation of Young Adults in the Balkan States: Counter-Measures, Healthcare Provision, and Community Involvement. Journal For Deradicalization, 11 (2363-9849).



COUNTRY REPORT: KOSOVO

INTRODUCTION

Kosovo, as the youngest country in Europe, with only 11 years as an independent and sovereign state, and 20 years since the war that left great consequences, is still facing many challenges and various problems. When the war ended in 1999, the process of recovery was dynamic, included many international missions, international organizations, different partner countries, KFOR, etc. As a country who just passed through war, the need for assistance was the most necessary, for example the urgent need for constructing thousands of burnt houses, the need for hospitals, construction of new schools, providing electricity, potable water, new roads... Very basic needs. We should add the fact that thousands of people were killed, hundreds of thousands displaced as refugees, thousands of missing people. In this situation it was difficult to prioritize the needs, because in each area there was an important need or emergency.

Under these circumstances, when a country passes such a fragile period, economically destroyed, spiritually ravaged and with emotional and psychological trauma, it is very possible that there can be risks that cannot be noticed immediately. Along with a lot of peacekeeping, diplomatic and humanitarian missions, in the name of constructiveness, there were also such 'missions', that tried to introduce new ideologies by using all the multidimensional transitions that the country was going through. There were such agendas that were very quiet at the beginning and the population understood only much later the real nature of these ideologies.

This prepared the fertile grounds for the recruitment of individuals who have gone to fight alongside ISIS, An-Nusra or other extremist organizations in Syria and Iraq in recent years. The majority of Kosovo population denounced those who went to Syria and Iraq. The recruitment went on nonetheless and in a very secretly way, even the families of those who left often failed to notice changes in behaviour of their close ones and their preparations to leave the country.

At this point, all this hate has strengthened another phenomenon - Islamophobia! 'Extremes feed each other' – Afrim Bulliqi, one of the interviewed within this research - the imam and theologian summed it up fittingly.

The mentioned radicalism illustrates "the flux" of various missions that came just after the war was ended in Kosovo, that not always had good intentions and positive



agendas. This is not the only form of radicalism in Kosovo however, neither the worst one. Inter-ethnic radicalization needs to be seriously considered and to be treated as soon as possible. More concretely, relations between Albanian and Serbian communities in Kosovo. Then, some work should be done to improve situation of Roma community and for their further integration in the Kosovar society, especially in areas when other habitants have a radical attitude towards them, not for political motives, but for the mentality that refuses them. There are also radical positions towards the LGBT community in Kosovo.

YOUTH POLICIES IN KOSOVO

The legal framework regarding the prevention of violent extremism in general, especially with the focus on youth has been developing in Kosovo for past several years, after the tendencies of violent extremism and recruitment of people for the conflicts in Syria and Iraq intensified.

The Constitution of Kosovo explicitly defines the constitutional rights of its citizens: “No one can be discriminated against on the basis of race, colour, gender, language, religion, political or national or social origin, with any community, property, economic, social, sexual orientation, birth, disability or any other personal status³⁰”. While respecting these rights, the institutions of Kosovo have drafted documents that prevent violent extremism, one of the most important, and the most detailed in relation to the fight against violent extremism is the **Strategy for the Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization that leads to Terrorism 2015-2020**. This strategy is a detailed structure and consist of steps that should be taken to prevent violent extremism and radicalization that leads to terrorism. The strategy was adopted in 2015 and had put forward concrete actions by 2020. Some of the objectives of the strategy are to address the important factors that influence the radicalization of young people. **“By achieving four strategic objectives: Early Identification - of Causes, Factors and Target Groups; Prevention - of extremism and violent radicalization; Intervention - in order to prevent the risk of violent radicalism; De-radicalization and reintegration - of radicalized persons as well as specific objectives / measures, The Government of the Republic of Kosovo aims through these to prevent and reduce the risk of radicalism and violent extremism.”**³¹

³⁰ - Kushtetuta e Republikës së Kosovës, fq. 1, Preambula e Kushtetutës së Republikës së Kosovës.

³¹ - Strategjia për Parandalimin e Ekstremizmit të Dhunshëm dhe Dadikalizimit që Shpie në Terrorizëm 2015-2020, fq5.



Also, Kosovo is one of the first countries that has created a law that forbids its citizens joining armed conflicts abroad, namely the **Law No. 05 / L-002 on the Prohibition of Joining in Armed Conflicts**. Since the adoption of this law, joining the foreign conflicts abroad became legally punishable and the number of young people reported to have joined wars / armed conflicts has declined, because their repatriation resulted in potential jail time. The most recent case is intervention within the conflict zones in Syria, where around 110 men, women and children (returnees) have been repatriated, and judicial proceedings have already been opened, and some of them have been indicted and sent to detention centers or put under house arrest.

In addition to the Strategy for the Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization that leads to terrorism 2015-2020 and the Law on the Prohibition of Joining Armed Conflict, Kosovo was implementing up until two years ago the **Kosovo Youth Strategy 2013- 2017** which had oriented young people towards a stable and sustainable development, and was contributing to distancing young people from activities that would lead to extremism and terrorism. Its objectives were focused on opening up the most opportunities for youth participation in decision making and in public life; greater access to informal education, greater opportunities for education and entrepreneurship; better access to the health system; human security; sports, culture and recreation. However, taking into consideration quite number of young people who joined conflicts on side of extremist organizations , it seems that the youth strategy's implementation into practice has not yielded satisfactory results.

SUMMARY ON THE METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH IN KOSOVO

There were 6 focus groups organized in Kosovo, altogether 47 young people age 16 – 19 participated in them and 16 stakeholders were interviewed within structured interviews. Distribution of FGs in different geographic areas of Kosovo were made in order to involve members of different ethnic communities of Kosovo. The aim was to gain understanding of perceptions of young people coming from different communities, with different background, religion, and ethnicity.



Focus groups were held in following municipalities:

South Mitrovica, 14.2.2019 in premises of Education Innovators Kosovo, participating 6 students, all ethnic Albanians.

Prishtina, 6.3.2019, participating 9 high school students from various high schools from Prishtina.

Gjilan, 8.3.2019, eight young people involved from 5 different schools in the city, among participants were also representatives of the Turkish minority in Kosovo.

Prizren, 9.3.2019, there were 11 participants from different schools, representing Albanian, Turkish and Roma communities in the city.

Gračanica, 9.4.2019 with 5 participants from the Serbian minority and 1 from Roma community.

North Mitrovica, 9.5.2019 with 7 young participants attending (4 girls and 3 boys) all of them from the Serbian minority.

Interviewed stakeholders included Deputies of the Kosovo Parliament; representatives of NGOs; imam, journalists that write exclusively about the Balkans; opinion leaders; sociologists; professors at the University; researchers of various projects on radicalism; employees of the Ministry of Culture of Kosovo - Department of Radicalism; representatives of organizations from Serbian municipalities and a professor of history.



MAIN FINDINGS: KOSOVO

UNDERSTANDING OF RADICALIZATION AMONG YOUTH IN KOSOVO

From the questions that have been made during the meeting with focus groups, it has been noticed that the majority of participants didn't have much information about what the term "radicalization" is. They were giving different responses, all they could agree upon however, was that it is "something negative". Young people from larger cities such as Pristina and Prizren had better understanding of what the radicalization and extremism are.

During each FG after participants responded to the initial question about the understanding of the radicalization, they were explained by the facilitator the meaning as understood by the organizers and were told the OSCE definition of radicalization. After the explanation, they immediately understood what they were supposed to be talking about. Part of them associated the term with wars in the Middle East and the recruits from Kosovo who went there to fight as this issue was widely covered by major media in the country.

TRENDS OF RADICALIZATION AS IDENTIFIED BY THE YOUTH IN KOSOVO

The focus groups and interviews with stakeholders concluded, that the current situation in Kosovo regarding radicalism is not alarming, but should not underestimate the possibility of deterioration. At the same time, lack of prospects of young people in the country is worrying, this may affect the eventual collective disillusionment of young people at certain moments, that can channel some of the youth into a radical stream as a result of an instinctive need to factorize and feel important - characteristic of the youth age. In fact, this has been already happening in Kosovo. Nowadays, there is a large number of young people that are leaving the country to go to work in Europe, especially in countries where labour visa facilities have been created. Lack of prospects in the country, stagnating policies, corruption, nepotism, isolation etc., have caused many things to stagnate in Kosovo and people, especially young ones, wish to try their luck in better places. At the same time, the fact that Kosovo has the youngest population in Europe³² should make it a country with much bigger potential to develop.

³² - <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/maps-and-graphics/oldest-and-youngest-countries-populations/>



RELIGION BASED RADICALIZATION

According to the interviewed young people during the focus group – religion based radicalization does not seem to be high risk in Kosovo. They explained that few years ago it was indeed highly topical issue, when dozens even hundreds of people left Kosovo to go to fight in the Middle East. In response to this trend, however, state institutions took restrictive and security measures, apply more control and most of the population including the clergy categorically opposed extremism and denounced those who went to join the armed conflicts elsewhere. Media dealt this topic often in an exaggerating manner, but the young participants maintained that that could actually has a positive effect as more people were discouraged from going to the Middle East hot-spots to fight. Also, the recent downfall of the so-called “Islamic state” (DAESH) and revealing its brutality could discourage even more young people from getting radicalized or joining extremist groups. Based on these presumptions, young people interviewed in Kosovo do not see the religious based radicalization as the imminent problem and the threat. They do see a problem however with so-called returnees coming back from the conflict regions back to Kosovo. This development led in Kosovo to higher level of Islamophobia - there were cases of discrimination against women wearing hijab; men with long beards and pants (symbols that distinguished pious religious practitioners). Hate speech against Islam is also a problem.

As one interviewee said, ‘Extremes feed each other’. So the extreme action of those who left to fight, led to extreme attitudes of those who disagreed with it. It is worth mentioning that there are many cases when those who went to war were not even practicing Muslims and they left for a different motives such as desire for money, desire for factorization, and they did not even know exactly are they going to do over there and in what situations they are putting themselves as well as close ones.

One of identified disturbing facts was the easy access to social networks of extremists, websites with extreme contents and other channels of extreme propaganda for young people from Kosovo. Online (religion based) radicalization was therefore highlighted as a potential threat. Young participants however showed some hope, that these extreme understandings of religion are not spread among those who really know their belief, as they are aware that their religion clearly forbids such extremists’ acts and behaviour regardless whether that is the Christianity or Islam.



POLITICALLY MOTIVATED RADICALIZATION

As far as the politically motivated radicalism is concerned, it is mostly related to the inter-ethnic relations within Kosovo. Especially based on relations between the majority – Kosovo Albanians and the most numerous minority – Kosovo Serbs. The roots of complicated interethnic relations lie in the bloody conflict at the end of 90s, that impacted lives of people, local economy, social relations, cultural and historical heritage – all aspects of co-habitation of the two main ethnic groups present in Kosovo.

The outcomes of focus groups were quite interesting as all participating young people were born after the military conflict in 1998-9 and therefore did not experience hardships and horrors of the war. However, their families were significantly affected by the conflict and that shaped to a significant extend their perceptions and relations with the other ethnic neighbours. Clearly this division of the society, communities “living next to each other” rather than “living together” also contributes to radicalization of both sides. Here the youth is the easiest to be manipulated by nationalists on both sides and misused for their political goals. Living de facto separated from each other allows for misperceptions, biases and viewing the others as enemies. Hateful rhetoric of politicians both in Prishtina as well as in Belgrade is then echoed by people in the streets and the spiral of hate keeps on and on.

The young people at FGs conducted in cities with predominantly Albanian majority brought to the fore views that all this interethnic tension is a result of “Serbia’s policies”, which have a full impact on the life and activity of the Serb community in Kosovo. The influence of Serbian state policies on Kosovo Serbs continues to keep the co-operation and relations between Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs, especially those living in northern part of Mitrovica, basically frozen. They also stated that they feel like Serbian state uses its minority in Kosovo as a “playing card”, taking directions when they have something on the agenda with the aim to influence happening inside or force something on Kosovo.

On the positive side, Albanian youth was quite open at FGs and declared their willingness to cooperate with their Serbian peers, but also reflected that there is a lack of reciprocity from the other side. Young people from the southern part of Mitrovica said that as for the daily needs, both sides move from the one side of the river Ibar to the other to pursue daily business. The citizens of the southern part of Mitrovica go to the north to buy various agricultural products, fresh vegetables and egg on daily basis as it is cheaper there. Serbs also come to the southern part to shopping centers, as they do not have them in the northern part.



On the other hand, young participants of FGs in cities populated with ethnic Serbs claimed, that they do not feel they are being treated as equal citizens of Kosovo, they feel discriminated. But at the same time, they don't feel as citizens of Serbia either. For example, every one of them has also citizenship of Serbia, as well as a Serbian passport. But their passport is not the same as passport of Serbs living in Serbia, their travel is limited including to the EU countries.

Also, Serbian schools in Kosovo work with the Serbian state curriculums and offer a different view on for example history. The war in Kosovo in their history books is treated differently from the history books taught by Kosovo Albanian students. This can of course have its negative impact, young people living on the same territory, growing and learning a "different version" of history can also lead to the increase in inter- ethnic tensions. Relations between the two communities continues to be fragile and requires a lot of work and reconciliation.

It was interesting to hear young ethnic Serbs from Gračanica talking at the FG, that there are those who have never been to Prishtina, which is just 10 km away. Youth complained that even when they went there, they did not feel free for example to speak their language (Serbian) at shopping malls or in the streets, afraid of potential negative reactions from the majority. To the follow up question, why this fear and whether something concrete has ever happened to them, they did not have any concrete answer. It seems to be just a fear, a mental barrier, that could be overcome only by more frequent contacts, visits, exchanges between the communities.

To the question of where you see your future, everyone responded that not in Kosovo, but rather in Serbia or in Europe. These are more or less the same motives as for the Kosovo Albanians, they lack prospects in the country too. But in case of young Serbs this may be also the fact that they do not feel integrated into the country where they live.

In the northern part of Mitrovica, the young people had difficulties to define radicalisation, extremism and/ or violent extremism. They thought that young people could radicalise because they lack something in their lives and perhaps something has been taken from them, or they have been hurt personally. For instance, the case of hooligans – violence happens when their team loses and they are also facing some difficulties, lack of opportunities in their lives. They could not identify a single case of radicalisation in their surroundings. They talked about the situation in Kosovo, but to them it was normal, not radical. To illustrate the case: they would prefer to stay in Kosovo if the situation stabilises and by stabilization, they meant to "make Prishtina



Serbian again". Putting the cars on fire was also part of their everyday lives. They never felt tendencies towards radicalization but they said that they would be ready to get engaged in some level of violence under certain circumstances, for example if Serbia would officially recognize Kosovo's independence. Interestingly, such tendencies were not viewed as radical. The youngsters did not see themselves as part of the problem – the situation in Kosovo, nor as part of the solution. They stated that the institutions should address any kind of radicalisation.

Their understanding of the situation was different from the Serbs in the South – they never lowered their voice in Prishtina, they felt that Kosovo was theirs and they were entitled to it. When there were clashes with the Albanians, they never started it, merely they responded to the violence initiated by the Albanians. If Kosovo should be divided between Serbia and Kosovo, the North would definitely belong to Serbia and the Serbs from the South would move up to the North which they have been already doing. It really struck us that they said they would be ready to participate in some kind of violence if Serbia officially recognized Kosovo within its current borders. They also thought that Kosovo was just an enclave and other states were playing with it: "If it was now up to us and Albanians, we would have war and we would solve the situation in 3 days. But if there was a war here, then USA, Germany, France, Russia, China would get involved and it would never be solved."

One thing has been said couple of time in this research regarding this aspect, improving relationships should start from the bottom and continue up. It is considered that there will be no improvement if the country leaders meet in office meetings, etc., and in the plain of ordinary citizens this does not affect anything. It should be started by them, to increase communication and exchange between them, joint projects, approximation strategies, to identify their needs: citizens, children, young people, women, etc., and following in the central policies of the two countries the will of the citizens.

Also, the Serbian state must stop its efforts to influence the will of Serbian citizens living in Kosovo, and not to extricate or guide their aspirations to integrate, not to fill with hate speech against Albanians, because so they are only impacting on their isolation which leads to the lack of integration and stagnation of their community development, but also the whole country, because a developed country must ensure full integration of its citizens, regardless of ethnicity, religion etc.

Young people from the Roma community in Kosovo also raised the issue of inter-ethnic radicalization. They mentioned discrimination, biases and unfair treatment in



schools towards Roma students as basis for potential radical behaviour. On the other hand, the ethnic majority is showing biases and even hatred towards the Roma community, that leads to violent behaviour against them. This deepens the feeling of exclusion on the side of the minority. FG in Prishtina brought to the fore the problem of Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje municipality, where number of Roma lives in segregated neighbourhoods in difficult even hazardous living conditions. On the other hand, FG in Prizren reported quite a different situation with the Roma minority over there. They said there is no discrimination against Roma population and the reason for that they gave that the city itself is the most ethnically and religiously diverse hence more tolerant. Also, Roma there do not live in segregated neighbourhoods and are integrated.

LGBT community. The majority society has generally a radical attitude towards them, with the exception of maybe the capital which is a bit more liberal. In one of focus groups participants said that they came out in support of the LGBT community then were threatened and bullied by their peers at school.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN DIFFERENT SOCIAL GROUPS IN KOSOVO

Most significant differences in perception of radicalization and extremism were between young people living in rural areas and those living in urban areas. Important criteria is the economic development of the region - In rural areas there is higher unemployment, lower wages and in general poorer conditions in terms of infrastructure or people's personal wealth. Social, cultural and sports life also plays an important role here, it influences the extent of free time activities' opportunities there are for young people. The vast majority of free time activities are concentrated in urban areas, and so young people from rural areas remain excluded from cultural, social and sports life. There is a need to find ways for greater involvement of young people living in rural areas otherwise they tend to turn to those, who give them false feeling of care - e.g. hooligan gang leader or an unofficial preacher. Remoteness and exclusion of some rural areas also leads to the lack of information, common knowledge about problems - including radicalization - that leads to more biases and misperceptions even radical positions to some of the issues/problems. Lack of education, poor cultural, social and sports life, as well as poor economic conditions, are considered the top three factors, identified by the youth at Kosovo FGs, that in their views lead to radical attitudes.



FGs in Kosovo show no difference between students of public or private schools in terms of knowledge about the issue of radicalization.

Active practicing of a religion seems to play a role. People actively engaged in religion did seem to recognize the problem, were better aware of it and at the same time were more resistant to misuse of holy texts for radicalization purposes. On the other hand, one young student at the Prishtina FG complained that she actively practices religion and prays 5-times a day, but she is constantly being bullied by her school-fellow for that, as they consider this her behaviour as something old fashioned or provincial.

LOCAL RESILIENCE TOWARDS YOUTH RADICALIZATION IN KOSOVO

Introducing preventive mechanisms such as proper legal framework that would enable prosecution of perpetrators of crimes related to the extremism and radicalization was an important step in Kosovo. Citizen of Kosovo could get punishment as high as up to 15 years in jail for serving in wars abroad.

In the year 2015 Kosovo has introduced “**Strategy on prevention of violent extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism 2015-20**”³³. This strategy foresees: early identification of the causes, factors and target groups; prevention of violent extremism and radicalization; Intervention with the aim of preventing risks from violent radicalization; de-radicalization and reintegration of radicalized persons.

There is also the strategy of the **Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports of Kosovo** for the years 2013-2017 that deals with the problem of extremism. The objectives of this strategy are³⁴: increase the youth participation in decision-making processes and greater involvement of young people in sectoral policy-making which directly affects the youth; improvement of youth participation in important policy-making processes at central and local level, which positively address problems faced by the youth in Kosovo. Support of municipal youth sector is of particular importance for a more advanced functioning of youth sector at the local level. Build capacities of youth organizations and development of youth services so that through strengthening the organization of better youth services will be developed too. Establishment of Youth Centres as well as improvement (strengthening) and spread of the range of

³³ - http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/STRATEGY_parandalim_-_ENG.pdf

³⁴ - https://www.mkrs-ks.org/repository/docs/KOSOVO_STRATEGY_FOR_YOUTH.pdf



services provided by the Youth Centres. Improving infrastructure for the youth.

Non-governmental organizations have been very active as well and done a lot, implementing dozens of projects aimed at addressing radicalization and violent extremism. Special focus on young people in Kosovo has to take into consideration their time and energy and channel these into doing something positive for self (personality development), community or society. They need to be provided with alternatives to where their energy will be channeled, time spent and what should be desirable trend to follow. Important factor in the whole process of countering radicalization are the media, not only traditional ones but also social media as young people spend huge amounts of time on social media. Therefore, fighting against hate-speech, disinformation, fake-news is extremely important. Providing a job prospect, and more informal education for young people, is also considered as preventive measure against radicalization. Last but not least, creating opportunities for various sports' leagues among schools, competitions in sphere of art and culture, would also contribute to self-fulfillment of young participants. Need for self-fulfillment is also one of very important factors behind radicalization of youth, therefore fulfilling ego and need for recognition with/through something positive could protect young people from ill intentions.



RECOMMENDATIONS: KOSOVO

The recommendations for stakeholders such as: public administration, civil society, local leaders, international organizations and donors active in Kosovo.

1. Enriching cultural, sports and social life in vulnerable communities. Offering young people opportunities for spending their time and energy in a constructive and meaningful way, offering them alternatives how to spend their free time and thus lowering danger of them being involved in an extremist group.
2. Improving the quality of education, including non-formal education and dual forms of vocational training. This would increase possibilities for future employment on one hand and also increase interest/willingness of young people to actually attend classes and study.
3. Improving employment opportunities – close coordination of local administration, state institutions and local entrepreneurs in order to provide opportunities for youth employment. State and local administration should provide policies and incentives, local entrepreneurs jobs.
4. Increased trust and cooperation between citizens and institutions – if there is a lack of trust in the state and its institutions, then there is also perception of threat, fear and insecurity.
5. Implementation of existing state strategies and laws – even the best laws are useless unless they are properly enforced in the practice.
6. Hate speech prohibition and monitoring of discussions on social networks.
7. Checking news tendencies in the media and punishing for the fake news – debunking disinformation, countering propaganda.
8. Increasing exchanges among young people from different communities, but also within the Western Balkan region.
9. Increase young people's participation in public life and decision-making.
10. Freedom of movement – Kosovo is the last country in the Western Balkans whose citizens still need visa to travel to EU/Schengen countries as well as to some countries of the region – e.g. Bosnia and Herzegovina.



COUNTRY REPORT: NORTH MACEDONIA

MAIN FINDINGS: NORTH MACEDONIA

Based on the interviews with different stakeholders, radicalisation is present in North Macedonia. Mostly, people pointed out political radicalisation as one which has been very noticeable and has meaningful impact on the society in general. It was an interesting finding that the political, nationalistic and religious based radicalisation doesn't differ too much in the eyes of the people, who think that these are always connected to each other and manifest together in the society. But also, the nationalistic radicalisation was seen as much present, but frequently influenced by the political issues. *Experts* stated that the politically based radicalisation is present due to the current political context in the Republic of North Macedonia and the desire of some political parties to achieve their political goals through radical rhetoric, means and methods, and *thus consciously or unconsciously influence radicalisation and its followers*. The political radicalisation has been very visible to the Macedonian society and had its culmination in the events of 27.04.2017 known as the 'bloody Thursday'.

The *school representatives* expressed their worries about the possible presence of the radicalisation in their schools. But, they don't see this as a main issue which needs to be focused on immediately. Maybe because they think that they haven't the essential skills to deal and to discuss/work with their students regarding this topic. Additionally, they see the one-language schools and mostly public schools as most influenced one because of missing contacts among students from different ethnicities. The *CSO's* have stated that although the problem of radicalisation has been present in the society, they haven't developed projects directly related to radicalisation, and that they have been focusing on tackling the employment issue and the social cohesion in the society, which in a manner helps with preventing radicalisation. The *religious leaders* tend to deny the existence of religious radicalisation. Part of them stated that the intra-ethnic conflict for political reasons is more prevalent than the inter-ethnic one. In that sense, they were explaining that in North Macedonia, we have a more social type of radicalisation than an individual and that there is nationalist radicalisation due to politics. The *municipal representatives* weren't familiar with cases of radicalisation of the youth, but they all agreed if they recognized such situations, mutual and organized response of the civic society is needed in order to prevent and combat radicalisation.



During the focus groups, big proportion of the participants weren't familiar with the meaning of the radicalisation, and some of them stated that it doesn't always have negative connotation. It was an interesting finding that in the eyes of the youth, the media is responsible for spreading stereotypes about radicalisation, and that they are aware of fake or manipulating news regarding this topic. When it comes to delegating the responsibility for combating radicalisation, the youngsters usually stated that the state should provide more information through school curricula, and the CSO's as a relevant informal education provider. But, the difference on knowledge related to this topic among public schools vs. private schools was evident. The students from the private schools had much more information about this topic and expressed their readiness to participate in different school level activities which can improve this situation. When it comes to the relation of the two most dominant religious communities, a student from the Theological Faculty said that 'two monologs don't make a dialogue' and implied that more intensive collaboration between them is needed. Additionally, those groups of youth expressed their opinion on the religious radicalisation for which they think that is influenced from other influencer (mostly political but sometime and religious), because according to them *the religion does not support the extreme opinions/actions*.

UNDERSTANDING OF RADICALIZATION AMONG THE YOUTH IN NORTH MACEDONIA

The young people, which participated in the focus groups in Gostivar, Prilep and Stip, as well as in the public high school in Skopje, generally did not know how to define radicalization. They understand the notion as a sort of change, usually associating it with extremism.

The participants of the focus group of the Youth Center in Gostivar conducted on 12 December 2018, throughout the whole conversation interpreted the youth's leaving their town as a radical step, hence they talked about economic conditions as factors for radicalization.

"People would do anything for money today," a female participant of the focus group said.

The participants in the focus group at the public high school in Prilep conducted on 26 December 2018 had different opinions about radicalization. Some of the participants regarded it as both positive and negative change. The Prilep participants



agreed that the perception for radicalization differs from town to town, i.e. that some occurrences can be treated as radical in one area, as opposed to very normal in another area.

The participants in the focus group in the public high school in Stip conducted on 24 December 2018 agreed that they associate radicalization with changes. According to their statements we could conclude that they have a low level of knowledge of the phenomenon of radicalization and that they had not discussed this phenomenon before.

The prevailing opinion of the focus group in the public high school in Skopje conducted on 11 February 2019 was that the first information they have about the phenomenon of radicalization is from the media. The phenomena in Syria is of current importance to them, and they associate them with the words: massacre, violence, something bad. However, even though they do not associate radicalism with Islam only, they indicate that the media presents it in that manner.

Radicalism is when someone shows self-importance, wants to make troubles or changes, but does it violently, a male participant said.

The participants said that they had not discussed this topic as they thought that it did not concern them. One of the participants highlighted that “*radicalization is a negative phenomenon, which starts with an idea to change, but usually ends up with negative results.*” He based his opinion on the information from the media.

In conclusion, we would like to highlight the various levels of readiness for discussion of the youth both from public and private schools. The participants from the private schools were more interested in the phenomenon of radicalization, and were proactive in defining radicalization, recognizing it in society, and demonstrated some knowledge of the concept of multiculturalism and social cohesion.

The participants in the focus group conducted in the private school in Struga on 27 November 2018 associated this word mostly with extreme. They especially highlighted the influence that media have on defining radicalization, and especially social media which they acknowledge as opinion makers. “*Everyone believes what they want to believe*” according to a female participant, i.e. people have an already built matrix of beliefs, which they just confirm with the information they hear.

The participants in the focus group conducted in a private high school in Skopje on 5 December 2018 defined the word in a similar manner. A girl in the focus group



in Skopje added that besides extreme, radicalization is usually “something uncomfortable outside the boundaries.” These participants had opposite opinions whether radicalization includes violence or not. Part of them thought that the very fact that it is extreme is inclined towards violence, while others thought that it does not always have to manifest violence. Yet, the shared opinion of this focus group, as well as the focus groups in Prilep and Stip was that radicalization of a certain idea does not only depend on the state, but, it also depends on the time when it occurs, and at a certain point in time it is categorized as radical, but later on it is accepted as normal.

Besides their readiness to discuss the phenomenon of radicalization, the participants from both religious schools/faculties were more informed about the meaning of radicalization. Both groups agreed that radicalization was an extreme and negative phenomenon. A participant in the focus group conducted in the religious high school on 27 December 2018 said that “radicalism is used by various extremist groups which set up Islamic schools and wrongly interpret Islamic principles, hence these problems occur, and some Islamic groups occur as radical, they manifest aggressive behavior and promote these radical movements in the name of their religion, hence the world associates that with Islam.”

The participants in the group concluded that this is done with the purpose to distance real Muslims from their religion, i.e. so that even Muslims start hating their own religion. On the other hand, one of the participants in the focus group from the Faculty of Religious Studies in Skopje, conducted on 27 January 2019, said that “radicalization is an exaggeration to the extent that it deviates from the main idea of the ideology or patriotism, it turns into a certain mutant version and it loses the essence of its bases, and finally turns into something opposite to the original idea.

TRENDS OF RADICALIZATION AMONG THE YOUTH

A general conclusion of the researchers of all focus groups, that were conducted, is that according to the opinions of the participants, nationalist radicalization together with political radicalization is most visible in North Macedonia. Young people frequently said that there was overlapping of multiple forms of radicalization.

In most of the focus groups, which we conducted, one or multiple participants said that there was **political radicalization** in Macedonian society.



Even though the participants in the focus group in Stip,³⁵ had little knowledge of the phenomenon of radicalization, moving towards the middle of the conversation, especially after having defined radicalization, they agreed that there was political radicalization in their town. Throughout the conversation they told us that young people are very intensely involved with political parties and that is due to their political radicalization.

The participants in the focus group in the public school in Skopje³⁶ had similar opinions. The majority of participants recognize certain political parties as more radical. It is interesting to notice that one of the participants recognizes some of his own ideas and of his fan group as radical.

In addition to this, the participants in the focus groups acknowledge the presence of **nationalist radicalization**, as well.

In the focus group in Gostivar,³⁷ one of the participants perceived nationalist radicalism between Macedonians and Albanians, which intensifies if incidents occur. The rest of the participants consider that national radicalism is present in Macedonian society, but they are not interested in further talking about it.

The majority of the participants in the focus group in the private high school in Skopje³⁸ think that older generations are more inclined towards nationalist radicalism than the younger generation. A participant says that radicalism is embedded in people who love their history very much and who think that their history is the absolute truth. Another female participant adds, "I think that even though young people are proud of their own history, I think that we do want to let it go, because if we decide to preoccupy ourselves with it, it will affect our future. Older people do not look at it that way." A male participant thinks that there is political radicalism, but national radicalism is more present among young people, highlighting that he is not speaking about his school, but his community.

In certain focus groups they talked about the **overlapping of multiple types of radicalization**.

The participants in the focus group in a private school in Struga³⁹, think that politi-

³⁵ - Public high school in Stip, conducted on 24 December 2018

³⁶ - Public school in Skopje, conducted on 11 February 2019

³⁷ - Youth Center of Gostivar, conducted on 12 December 2018

³⁸ - Private high school in Skopje, conducted on 5 December 2018

³⁹ - Private high school in Struga, conducted on 27 November 2018



cal radicalization mixed with stereotypes related to nationalist radicalization is very present on the Balkans and in our country. They agreed that religious radicalization is the most present worldwide, but that it is not the case with our country. In addition to this, they discussed the relation between Macedonians and Albanians, and in general, the relations between different communities.

One of the participants in the focus group in Prilep⁴⁰ said that she felt radicalization in the society, *“yes, I do, believers against atheists, with a lot of defensive attitudes towards religion, which they actually cannot explain. In class we discussed why one believes or respects others’ opinion, but we, still, cannot impose our attitude, we can just explain it.”* Throughout the conversation of this focus group, the participants discussed the political influence of social conditions in their town and development of radical attitudes and intolerance.

The focus groups in the religious schools discussed all sorts of radicalization. One participant in the focus group at the Faculty of Religious Studies in Skopje,⁴¹ recognizes that radicalization can occur on many levels, i.e. *“it can be political or social, and it can be religious as a sort of a fanaticism.”* Generally, the opinion of the participants in this focus group was that politics abuses religion in order to create differences among people. One of the participants said *“we, as Christians, do not have problems coexisting with Muslims, but politics is the “one” who turns us into enemies. We, as Christians, talk about love for the enemy, but this specific situation in Macedonia divides us according to ethnicity, and we’re at each other’s’ throat, but religion preaches about love, and we should love our enemy as a friend,”* and adds *“How shall we talk about love, while we hate?!”*

In addition to this, a female participant in the focus group in the religious school in Skopje,⁴² highlighted that Islam forbids radicalism and extremism. “Radicalism and extremism are explicitly forbidden in the Koran, she quotes the Koran (Sura for Women) *“Devotees of my book, do not exaggerate with Your religion...”* She adds that the text itself reads: Damn are extremists, which is repeated three times. Another participant explained that true believers always try to balance and do not practice their religion in extreme forms.

In both focus groups significant amount of time was spent on nationalist radicalism. A male participant in the focus group in the religious high school, acknowledges the

⁴⁰ - Public high school in Prilep, conducted on 28 December 2018

⁴¹ - Faculty of Religious Studies in Skopje, conducted on 21 January 2019

⁴² - Religious high school in Skopje, conducted on 27 December 2018



presence of nationalist radicalization in our country between Macedonians and Albanians. A participant in the focus group at the Faculty of Religious Studies stated that there had always been national radicalism on the Balkans as it was being embedded at a very young age. Some of the participants in this focus group started talking about radicalism of the fan groups of the Albanian youth. There were opposite opinions in this group. One participant said that one should not generalize, because there are individuals in each community. The majority of participants agreed that there is radicalization among young people, however it is not based on religion as it is perceived (Muslims and Christians).

“All we need is radicalization of our love for others, nothing else” stated one of the participants in the group.

Political radicalism was, also, discussed in both groups.

The presence of political radicalism in Macedonian society was emphasized by a participant in the religious high school. A male participant in the other focus group believes that people are not well informed about politics which encourages political radicalization. *“People go to rallies in huge numbers, they take their young children with them, but they do not know if they are right wing or left wing. They only contribute to inter-party tension, hence interethnic tension because in our country ethnicity is focus. They do not know what political ideology is, they do not know their religion. They are blind.”*

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN DIFFERENT SOCIAL GROUPS

Regarding the characteristics that affect radicalization, we received similar responses from the participants in the focus groups which were conducted.

The focus group in Gostivar⁴³ discussed economic factors as a generator of radicalization, hence our conclusion of this focus group is that that is the factor which can make a difference in young people’s vulnerability with regards to radicalization. Some participants added that the political party is the dominant entity in society which “affects young people to come into conflicts.

In the focus group in Prilep⁴⁴ one participant emphasized that radicalization is more prevalent among older than younger people.

⁴³ - Youth Center in Gostivar, conducted on 12 December 2018

⁴⁴ - Public high school in Prilep, conducted on 28.12.2019



A discussion on radicalization through forms of bullying was developed in this group, with a participant's conclusion that children from rural areas are more susceptible to bullying. We would like to emphasize that in such cases, the bully is not seen as radical, because in that environment his behavior is dominant.

The participants in the focus group in Stip⁴⁵ did not make any difference between different social groups in terms of radicalization.

In the focus group at the public high school in Skopje⁴⁶, a participant stated that he recognized radical ideas in his own ideas and in his fan group. Our conclusion is that radicalism often finds suitable ground in fan groups because they are usually formed on another basis, and most often the basis is the belonging to a particular ethnic group. According to this, in our country in the past year there were many incidents involving violence, and they are associated with fan groups.

The participants in the focus group at the private school in Struga⁴⁷ agreed that narrow-minded people are the most vulnerable to the phenomenon of radicalization. They also agreed that *"the situation is not the same everywhere, and it depends very much on the environment and the structure of the community."* They believe that at town and regional level, where they live, there are larger divisions between ethnic communities, and this is due to the fact that they do not have sufficient interaction between them, explaining that they should have mixed schools in order to enable that interaction.

When it comes to personal characteristics, a participant assumes that *"extroverts are more resistant to radicalization, since it is easier to communicate their opinions with others."* In addition, a participant says that *"they adapt more easily to different situations."*

Participants believe that politicians abuse their power, and people often accept such attitudes because they come from a superior position.

Focus group at a private school in Skopje⁴⁸

The majority of the participants in this focus group had the opinion that usually people with radical ideas are of limited perspective. Participants discussed social factors and personal (individual characteristics) which affect radicalization of certain groups.

⁴⁵ - Public high school in Stip, conducted on 24 December 2018

⁴⁶ - Public high school in Skopje, conducted on 11 February 2019

⁴⁷ - Private high school in Struga, conducted on 27 November 2018

⁴⁸ - 2019 Private high school in Skopje, conducted on 5 December 2018



A participant says that in our country there are very radical ideas and people from different communities still have negative emotions for each other. Part of the group agrees that young people are more open to communication and have no problem with different ethnic communities. A participant says that she has also met young people with radical ideas.

Another participant says that many people in their nature have the need to create conflicts, because conflicts make life more interesting. He says *“it’s people’s nature not to remain calm. Joining such (radical) groups has to do with it, because they feel complete since they belong to the group. Otherwise they only have a job, go home and go to sleep, but with the group they have a place where they can express themselves. That’s why people have conflicts even in radical groups, because people have extreme attitudes and behaviors.”*

The same participant emphasizes education as a factor that affects radicalization. He thinks people who are not well-informed or well-educated are “stuck” in the nation’s history and cannot see where the future lies.

Another participant says that the most sensitive are young people who feel bad at a given moment and are easily attracted by extreme groups, for example, religious ones, who offer help to find the secret of a happy life.

A participant thinks that *“young people who grew up in dysfunctional families or families missing one parent as a role model are more vulnerable as they try to find that missing part of themselves which may be offered by radical groups.”*

Another participant pointed out that sometimes young people are easily inclined to radicalism when they belong to only one group and do not socialize with different people outside that environment. A participant in this group pointed out that bullying was a factor that could contribute to someone being more vulnerable to radicalization. In addition to this, another participant said that people who were victims had the potential to become radical in future. He based his opinion on the theory that because such people were sad, dissatisfied and depressed, they can develop radicalism, or they would begin to accept radical ideas from radical groups which would provide protection.

A participant here emphasizes the importance of mental health as a factor for radicalization. She mentions that through social media they are exposed to different information that can significantly affect them in a positive, but also in a negative way. These participants did not mention any special differences in relation to young peo-



ple from rural or urban areas.

The participants in the focus group at the religious high school in Skopje⁴⁹ did not have specific attitudes about the different characteristics of the groups. Our impression of the conversation with them is that they generally focus on the individual's attitude and that people's proper knowledge about social facts is a key factor in avoiding radical attitudes.

The focus group at the religious faculty in Skopje,⁵⁰ similar to the previous group, did not mention any special characteristics, but, still most of the participants said that ignorant people are usually the ones who support radical ideas. One participant added that *"People are delusional and they do not see that they are fighting for someone else's interests."*

One of the participants used the example of a bridled horse as a metaphor for radicalization through which he wanted to express the narrow-mindedness of radical people.

"You know what a bridle is? To bridle a horse, you need to put a bridle on it, so that it cannot look neither left nor right, just straight. That's radicalization, there are no other options for it, except to look straight, and that's the worst. "

TRENDS OF RADICALIZATION AMONG YOUTH IN NORTH MACEDONIA

Asked if our country faces radicalization all participants in the survey, **representatives of schools / faculties (9)**, responded yes. 50% of the participants responded that it faces radicalization a lot, 33% responded responded: fairly, and the others think that the country faces a low level of radicalization. They usually describe it as a negative phenomenon which involves extreme thinking and behavior by a group and / or individual. They identify the current societal situation (social and economic) as the reason for its occurrence. However, great importance is given to the influence of politics on society. The majority of people think that adults hand down certain attitudes and values to young people certain that further on affect their radicalization.

⁴⁹ - Religious high school in Skopje, conducted on 27 December 2018

⁵⁰ - Faculty of Religious Studies in Skopje, conducted on 21 January 2019



“Obviously these are turbulent times and when you have unrest, you have a good base for potential development of that radicalization. Now, as we speak, right now, since we have a special party polarized internal political situation, when we have frequent expressions of disagreement, both from younger and older people, of course, these elements manage to get through and come to the surface ... I wouldn’t go into details why, is it necessary, whose idea was it, but I am saying this based on the reactions that you can see, which means that there is bases, it’s enough, but if we talk about, I guess, nourishing constant radicalism, at least according to my information, so far, I haven’t heard of anything like that.

I see specific examples in the schools, nationalism is the base, especially between the two major ethnic communities (Macedonians and Albanians). I think that this is affected by some external influences that are combined with a low community awareness,” University Professor (21 January 2019)

“Completely, the whole societal situation, the family as the main factor, but also the economic situation is not good. You can already feel religious radicalism through religious communities ...,” High school teacher (28 December 2018)

“Lack of education in these areas ...,” High school teacher (24 December 2018)

“Usually, those who are not part of the institutions, and organize activities which are not in line with the institutions are labeled as radical, if a particular movement is in line with institutional values or is stimulated by the institutions themselves, it is not considered radical.,” High school teacher (11 February 2019)

According to the majority of the interviewed representatives of schools / faculties, they see nationalist radicalism as more dominant among young people, followed by political, and ultimately religious radicalism. In certain situations, it is considered that religious radicalism is often stimulated by political motives or by some external influences.



“The lack of tolerance and accepting others as they are, I think is the number one factor and it affects the societal situation. Political and religious radicalization derive from nationalist radicalization, they are closely related and intertwined.” High school teacher (28 December 2018)

“So the problem is that we can never divide and separate them. ... it was not always a question of religious symbols, but it was obviously politically motivated, and religious symbols were the base for such a reaction. You cannot separate the political from the nationalist.” University professor, Skopje (21 January 2019)

“Because most of the students’ parents are involved in some kind of political party or an organization, since everyone is affiliated with a political party so that they can benefit from it, and their children, too, so they keep saying: I’m on this side, you are on that side and sometimes even they come to conflict.” High school teacher (27 November 2018)

“I think that nationalist radicalism is more present, nationalist radicalism ... for example, nationalist radicalism is already identical with religious radicalism, I feel it ...” High school teacher (12 May 2018)

“Religious radicalism occurs from time to time, but not with such intensity, I think it is most often fed by other forms of radicalism (political or nationalist)” High school teacher (11 February 2019)

“... when it comes to high schools, one needs to be more cautious, because they are still teenagers and they are in their development phase, and when they go to university, I think that they should have space to get involved, to act against, to be able to recognize, because they are mature persons, they have the energy, and the knowledge ...” University professor, Skopje (21 January 2019)

“... any kind of consequences of nationalist radicalization, because we have a multi-ethnic group, Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish, Torbesh (Muslim Macedonians), Bosnian, Serbian, and other groups” High school teacher (27 November 2018)



Representatives of the municipal administration who participate in the survey (5) believe that the state faces a certain degree of radicalization expressed through violence, conflicts, divergent behavior, extreme or different opinions, and is perceived largely as a negative phenomenon. Firstly, they identify political radicalism as most dominant, secondly, national, and, thirdly, religious radicalism. However, one of the participants believes that, if compared with adults, the presence is lower among young people.

“Members are divided, and all you hear about is the division between Macedonian - patriots and Macedonian - traitors with regards to which political party they belong to ...The problem is that young people are very intoxicated with politics.” A representative from the municipality (24 December 2018)

“They show different behavior from the traditionally accepted one,” A representative from the municipality (25 January 2019)

“As a negative phenomenon that can create conflict,” A female representative from the municipality (30 March 2019)

“I see a group of people who act kind of weird in the city where I live ... I think abuse of religion is more present in my region and in Macedonia, in general, because I have seen people going door to door, distributing flyers and other materials to inform / convince the population to join this particular group.” A female representative from the municipality (27 November 2018)

“There is an increase in aggressive behavior among young people, they quickly create conflicts and they don't know how to peacefully resolve them ... Young people have not been raised properly, they were not taught how to make conversation, to respect diversity, accept winning and losing as normal part of everyday life, learn how to distinguish intentional from unintentional, they were not taught how to take on responsibility, there is no parental supervision over their free time, they have easy access to a wide spectrum of information, there is lack of a fast and efficient system for responding to antisocial youth behaviour” A female representative from the municipality (December 28, 2018)



All representatives from the NGO sector (5), participants in the research, also, believe that the state faces a certain form of radicalization (1: a little, 4: pretty much) expressed in the form of extreme and / or different way of thinking / behavior and is often identified as a negative phenomenon, but in several situations as negative and positive phenomenon. In addition, everyone agreed that at state level, the most visible is the influence of political radicalism over young people, which further on transforms intonational radicalism based on ethnicity. Young people are also influenced by their fan groups, which are divided on ethnic basis (there were actual unrests among fan groups during the time the interviews were conducted). According to this group of participants, on top of this ethnic radicalization there is the influence of religious radicalization.

“This question is being raised again, but it’s been present for a long time. We have noticed radicalization of fan groups, we have bullying in schools, which grows into radicalism, nationalist radicalism is present in the country. ...Political parties always talk about the ethnic map before elections, hence increase radicalism in Macedonia ... Over the last two months we had radicalism-based murders, involving ethnically based fan groups where a young man was killed.

We have noticed radicalization of fan groups, then there is bullying in schools which turns into radicalization, as well as nationalistic radicalization”.

In fact, the religious radicalism is ethnically related, but mostly political and nationalistic.” NGO female representative (28 November 2018)

“I personally have not faced such cases, but I have heard in everyday private and professional life. There is visible nationalist radicalism in our country ... long-standing intolerance and alienation between Albanians and Macedonians. If we walk through our cafes we can see that young Albanians sit in one and young Macedonians in other cafes. Very rarely together... Religious radicalism is present more in the villages.” NGO female representative (27 November 2018)

“Different ways of thnking, intolerance.” NGO Representative (31 March 2019)

“Usually, political factors are used to manipulate people... Young people are a potential risk of manipulation... My personal perception... I think there is a stronger religious orientation now than before.” NGO female representative (24 December 2018)



“I think that it is more present among the elderly, but it is handed down from generation to generation, and among young people, through different types of groups, through the way in which social life is organized, the upbringing of children and the like.” NGO female representative (27 Novemembr 2018)

“I think that religious radicalism comes from the outside, while national radicalism comes from the inside. Religion should exist in the heart of man, but we manifest it in the environment (praying in public places, special dress code, etc.). In my opinion, extremists and radicals are always trying to introduce a novelty, to become attractive and interesting to young people... Today, it’s easy for someone to radicalize the youth because young people have access to various forms of information (media and personal) through which they satisfy their interest, which has not been triggered by social activities lately (there are not enough attractive activities for young people).” NGO female representative (26 December 2018)

Two of four religious leaders, participats in the interview believe that the country faces a certain dose of radicalization. They see it as conflicting and violent behavior, extreme and negative opinion. Regarding what the reasons for this are, there are two opinions: some think that it is the conflict of 2001, and others disagree, they think it is the current conditions in the country. They also think that the use of digital technology by children causes lack of communication with adults. Politically based radicalism is identified as the most dominant and most present among young people in our country. Moreover, they consider it primarily affects the family, and then parents pass it on to young people. According to some interviewees (religious leaders), this is most often handed down in the form of ethnic intolerance and turns into ethnically based radicalization. Some of them point out that sometimes radicalization is painted with religious labels, but they add that religious institutions, on the contrary, work to prevent radicalization of young people.



“I do not think there is one reason and I know that it is a set of circumstances that have direct impact on radicalization. Clutter and poverty in some environments, no communication... Political division is very intense, as a result of many sociological phenomena that occur in the country,” Religious leader (28 December 2018)

“The idea that we are practitioners of a particular law school was widespread by certain individuals, for a short period of time, but in fact, that is not true... on the contrary, we do not allow anyone on the territory of our country to spread political, xenophobic radicalization or religious one...” A religious leader (24 January 2019)

The interview with an expert on violent extremism provides a kind of rounding up of the previously presented data. According to him, radicalization on religious grounds is present, but less visible. During this period, radicalization is a result of political influences, while nationalist radicalization can be seen best in the activities and “movements” of fan groups.

“There are various forms of radicalization in Republic of Northern Macedonia, and they are manifested with different intensity in society. Different forms also carry different challenges from a security perspective. Religion-based radicalization has been present for a long time, but was mostly expressed through the large number of young people heading for the battlefields in Syria, although the processes themselves were not so visible in society as they are taking place in closed circles. Politically based radicalization was more visible through various forms of political action, using radical rhetoric, events, etc. Nationalist or xenophobic radicalization is more limited in certain groups and is most commonly seen in fan groups and during sports events where slogans containing ethnic and religious hatred are heard. A typical example was the recent event in Tetovo for which there were criminal charges. Xenophobia was visible through spreading false news about the migrant crisis, the arrival and settlement of migrants and so on, and has limited effect. ” Expert on violent extremism (26 December 2018)



COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN DIFFERENT SOCIAL GROUPS

Looking at the results of the interviews with **representatives of schools / faculties (9)**, one receives the impression that radicalization is seen as more present in public schools, and most often in monolingual schools. This is reinforced in the case of more isolated, rural areas where there are smaller opportunities for communication. On the other hand, it is considered to become more present in multilingual schools, since they do not work on providing proper communication among students. Public schools are more susceptible to political influence, so this is seen as an additional impact factor. Regarding which students are more vulnerable, less successful children in school, especially those with greater ambitions - children coming from rural areas, as well as children from poor and dysfunctional families are seen as more vulnerable.

“Diversity is the driving force of radicalism. The existence of different structures and different populations and intolerance of differences, sometimes heterogeneity does not allow cohesion. I would put the rural environment on top of the list as a good ground for development of radicalism... The economic situation as a criterion can be a double-edged sword. For those of more vulnerable categories, the economic situation would be a problem... A dysfunctional family is a good basis for development of radical ideas. I think it is crucial whether it is a one parent or two-parent family. Peers as a factor, children’s environment. The media and the Internet, which offers opportunities if one knows how to use them, on the other hand, they pose a threat because they are exposed to all sorts of information. However, as a society, we have not built collective consciousness so that we can find ways to successfully deal with such problems that arise on a global level.” High school teacher (female) (28 December 2018)

“My opinion is mostly public schools because ... I, also, think the teacher might influence the direction a lot of students take.” High school teacher (27 November 2018)

“I consider public schools more susceptible because they are often politicized, which additionally causes increased radicalization... but at the same time I think that it depends on the structure of people working there (teachers, school board, the school organization and curriculum, etc.)” High school teacher (11 February 2018)



“I think that the financial situation of families plays a big role, especially families in rural areas, which are financially more vulnerable. I would associate both the degree and the type of education, as well as the social status as factors, which make students more vulnerable.” High school teacher (December 24, 2018)

“I think that everything is possible, I would like it to be the least possible for A students, considering the potential that A marks at school are an indicator of students’ intelligence, that they have developed critical thinking, among other things, it matters to us, we do not go to school just to gain knowledge, but, also to apply it in everyday life. Perhaps weak students would be more susceptible, considering that in general they are, potential subject to all kinds of abuse. “ University professor (21 January 2019)

I think that the possibility of manipulation is also a factor. Students who have big ambitions, which they do not accomplish at school, look for another source of pleasure.” High school teacher (27 December 2018)

According to **representatives from the municipal administration (5)**, participating in the survey, low-income families are more easily susceptible to radical influences. Next is the influence of i.e. the belonging to a minority group and living in a rural environment. According to them, firstly, it depends on the individual, but at the same time all these factors make the person more vulnerable.

“Minorities and low income / low education youth coming from rural environment are not mainstream, so they are more inclined to radicalization,” A representative from the municipality (25 January 2019)

“In the first place I would put the individual’s psychological state, an unstable person could easily succumb to the above-mentioned influences. Additionally, the environment, socio-economic circumstances, belonging to certain groups can influence the development of a particular personality. People from rural areas and Roma. They are the most exposed. The politically undecided are those who suffer the most from political radicalization. At the same time, the socially disadvantaged are affected by the possibility that you can manipulate them the most.” A female representative from the municipality (December 28, 2018)



“Definitely, the way I see it, the most prone to manipulation by those groups are families with low income, because they get “salaries” for joining these groups and, of course, rural areas with lack of information and knowledge.” A female representative from the municipality (27 November 2018)

The general impression from the interviews with **the five NGO representatives** is that radicalization is more dominant in rural areas, in low-income families, in minorities in particular communities, and in less successful young people. According to them, this is because

“they easily accept ideas, especially if they had previously had certain personal beliefs that were further enhanced, and heated over time.” An NGO representative (female) (28 December 2018)

“I think that young people from small places (especially rural areas) and minorities are easier to manipulate,” an NGO female representative (24 December 2018)

“Those who do not listen to their own voice / opinion (the less informed) and do not invest in independent acquisition of knowledge accept things from the outside more easily and see things with the eyes of others, especially if this is supported with financial benefits.” an NGO female representative (27 November 2018)

“The lack of education and people who do not have a job are more easily influenced by others, especially through social media, which fill in their knowledge gaps ... People who are less religious try to get information from outside because they have not gained enough knowledge from their family or through education, in my opinion, it is a kind of thirst and need for water, when you are thirsty, first, you go home, and if you don’t find it at home, then, you start looking outside your home, and sometimes you go to unverified sources.” An NGO representative (26 December 2018)



Representatives from religious communities and research participants do not separately identify urban and rural environments (they think that youth are equally vulnerable in both environments). Some of them consider young people from low-income families and unsuccessful young people as vulnerable. However, they do not emphasize any particular category because they believe that almost all young people are vulnerable at certain times under the influence of external factors.

“Vulnerability comes from the family and attitudes of young people. Therefore, I would not single out a particular type of young people who are more vulnerable.” - Religious leader (28 December 2018)

“I would distinguish two important general factors: the social factor (initially the family and then the environment) and the economic factor (the unemployed young people are more easily influenced by the groups that promise them financial support).” - Religious leader (24 January 2019)

“I think everyone can be vulnerable and victim of a certain type of manipulation under the influence of various factors either social, or intellectual.” - Religious leader (27 November 2018)

The expert on violent extremism sees the youth as a very vulnerable category. Their need for belonging to groups, the influence of developmental aspects during the adolescent period, and the way of seeing the outside world, according to him, make the young population a vulnerable category susceptible to radicalization.

“The most vulnerable to radicalization on a religious basis are youth in adolescent age when the character is built, identity is wanted, and there is need for peer grouping, etc. Young people at that age have their own view of the world, ideas that are more radical and own attitudes. Young people of that age are also very active in youth associations of political parties and in wild sports fan groups. Although it is not a rule, nevertheless, young people in rural areas, coming from lower socio-economic backgrounds and lower levels of education are more prone to religious radicalization.” - Expert on violent extremism (26 December 2018)



LOCAL RESILIENCE TOWARDS THE YOUTH RADICALIZATION IN NORTH MACEDONIA

Regarding whether **high school and university teachers participating in the poll** had talked with their colleagues about the topic of radicalization, it can generally be concluded that they do not openly discuss this topic as related to their students, except in situations where it is made relevant due to a particular event. But in general, it is considered that there is a certain level of awareness about the existence of this phenomenon, although at the same time the level of non-acceptance is high. They therefore consider that it is primarily necessary to work on raising awareness of the existence of radicalization and then of activities that are more adequate for the prevention of radicalization leading to violent extremism.

“We partly discussed the topic of the classroom PTA meeting. Recognition of these initial forms of misconduct indeed, but I cannot call them radical changes as such; and later we can differentiate it, whether it a deviation, juvenile delinquency, or just plain vagabondism. We do not allow it to gain further development; we take measures at the school level.” - Female high school teacher (28 December 2018)

“Of course, it is about something that does concern everyone, and after setting up the topic you have for research, it means that there are some symptoms, indicators in the conversations. I have been fortunate enough to talk to appropriate people who think similarly, coming from different universities or religious backgrounds, so that we can share the same meaning that religion cannot be used in any way to inflict evil to the other.” - University professor (21 January 2019)

“We have discussed couple of times but I said the main purpose is not to make students become radical and to make as much activities, to have students to make dialogue and to get along with the teacher, this is what we discussed... about this radicalization, also we try to do some activities related to multi-ethnic groups and different religious groups... everybody can enjoy along with each other and one day all can get along, after we get rid of this radicalization, nationalism and similar things.” - High school teacher (27 November 2018)

“We do talk; it is not that we do not talk; but this only happens when it becomes a current topic because of certain recent events. The general impression is that we should not give much space to these topics.” - High school teacher (27 December 2018)



Regarding the question of whether teachers do talk to their students about this topic at all, the general conclusion is that this is very rare, and this is influenced by an event that raises interest with the students. Otherwise, in principle, it is avoided to directly talk about the topic, but in certain situations, whenever possible, certain prevention activities with students are conducted; still this is also very rare, usually in circumstances when it is initiated from outside.

“The problem is that the subjects I teach do not allow this. As far as I am concerned, we remain in the area of the Scriptures, meaning not having this openly as a topic; but it is always about, I repeat, raising the awareness of what the Scriptures convey as a message that is contrary to all forms of violence or radicalism.” - University professor (21 January 2019)

“Actually, we discussed general radicalization of staff, maybe in some spontaneous-like conversation sometimes... but even this is not too far from what I happened to hear in the discussions about radicalization of students.” - High school teacher (27 November 2018)

“Specifically, as a topic no; however in the beginning what we do, and usually when we have a homeroom class with the homeroom teacher, we say that this environment is such an environment, we all need to know our boundaries, to respect each other and not directly about this topic, but about all that is related to this topic.” - Female high school teacher (5 December 2018)

“We did not discuss anything specifically; only when needed, rarely. We had a student who changed his behavior; and when we noticed it, we talked in the school (I in the capacity as a homeroom teacher of the student) with him, but roundabout in order to influence his behavior.” - High school teacher (11 February 2019)



Representatives from the municipal administration, participating in the survey,

are aware that they usually do not undertake direct activities, but mostly support the local NGOs in carrying out such related activities. On the other hand, they encourage local NGO activities that indirectly influence the prevention of radicalization as such. But in the municipalities with vast majority of the local population belonging to one ethnic group, there is less awareness of the need to undertake activities of this type.

“By means of public addresses of officials, press releases, public awareness campaigns”. - Representative from the municipality (25 January 2019)

“The municipality... has not yet faced a large-scale radical behavior among local young people; still the phenomenon is at the level of peer-to-peer intolerance, which fortunately is put under control even in its very initial appearance by proper actions by the authorities in the schools or by public security institutions... The municipal Youth Council is specifically open to all young people and we work hard to help them... We have not had any complaints of any type of radicalization. The municipality and the mayor are also open.” - Representative from the municipality (24 December 2018)

“The very municipality does not react in this type of cases, but there are local NGOs, which cooperate and get funds from the municipality to deal with different issues according to this topic.” - Female representative from the municipality (27 November 2018)

“In the area of prevention, in the very schools lectures are organized on issues of peaceful resolution of conflicts, interethnic integration; the Ministry of the Interior also organizes preventive measures like building of trust; the local self-government organizes various cultural and sporting events that focus on the youth; but I think that in this field we can work with greater intensity in order to have organized lives of young people as to provide alternatives for self-finding and organizing content for fulfilling spare time of local youth.” - Female representative from the municipality (28 December 2018)



Representatives of the religious institutions, participating in the research, respond that they have not discussed this topic with the youth, especially not directly and specifically, but it was done occasionally at certain meetings, public forums, and/or debates that were organized and attended also by young people. Furthermore, the trainings organized in cooperation with various institutions and NGOs were very beneficial. Religion studies at school level are further considered as useful for the prevention of radicalization. However, they also note that it is necessary to study this in the longer term and involve people who have knowledge in that field to teach it. This is noted because almost all participants consider that this subject is often taught by people who do not have knowledge of religions, or are against the practice of religions, which per se is often counterproductive.

“Our youth is now different, more informed; young people have more opportunities to read and be informed... in order to prevent, there is the need to provide conditions for our youth (Muslim) to be present everywhere in society, in the police, in hospitals, so the trust in institutions is developed.” - Religious leader (24 January 2019)

“As representative of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, we believe that the subject Ethics of Religions should be more present in primary education, that is, to be taught in the seventh and eighth grade, not only in the sixth, as before. The lack of knowledge about the religion and its improper practice triggers the idea that ‘religion causes radicalization’. Also, I think that the subject should be taught only by theologians, not sociologists.” - Religious leader (28 December 2018)

“We talk to young people at various events organized in mosques or at joint meetings... and we always judge the things that happen in our country, we educate them to be for peace, coexistence, understanding... We have had useful trainings with the US Embassy and the OSCE; Muslim priests from the area where there was mention of radicalization, terrorism and interreligious tolerance, participated in the training... we have other trainings and meetings where we discuss topics that are of public interest for us and the community.” - Religious leader (27 November 2018)

“If the subject of religion is more present in the curriculum, then we can act to reduce radicalization. In other words, to tell the young people what to do, to respect parents at home in order to be well and to live longer.” - Religious leader (24 December 2018)



“Fortunately, I teach this subject at school (Ethics), and among other things, I have seen that it has a positive impact on students; their behavior has improved; it has influenced the reduction of fights among them (because we talk about that topic). Our institution has submitted an application for this not to remain only at the level of 6th grade, but to be taught further... to be a continuing process in education in order to improve education and upbringing of students.” - Religious leader (24 January 2019)

“At the moment when an atheist seeks to teach the Ethics of Religion, he develops a new kind of radicalization, so-called atheism, makes students to become an opponent of religions, something I think should be avoided in schools.” - Religious leader (27 November 2018)

The general impression is that **the representatives of the NGOs involved in the research**, if they worked on this topic with young people, did not use terms that directly point to the topic. In doing so, they implemented activities that provide multiculturalism, interethnic integration, and similar things.

“We worked first of all through the exchange of youth, on multicultural, intercultural basis, involving different cultures; we worked indirectly on this topic; specifically in the future we plan to work more on the topic of radicalization... Previously, I do not think that they had it; nevertheless indirectly, this topic was covered because our volunteers here go to schools to cooperate with youth organizations in schools, transfer part of their culture, their customs, traditions and organize workshops and so on.” - NGO female representative (28 December 2018)

“We have not conducted research on this topic, but two or three weeks ago we realized that the topic is very current.” - NGO female representative (28 December 2018)

“We have implemented activities in an indirect manner, but I feel that there is still plenty of room for work because I see that the students are friends for a short time during the activities, and then everyone departs his own way, unfortunately.” - NGO female representative (28 December 2018)

“I have worked on education activities for teachers and municipal representatives, while with children it involved more indirect activities of cooperation and socializing.” - NGO female representative (27 November 2018)



According to **an expert on violent extremism**, the central government is engaged to prevent radicalization. But since different types and levels of radicalization are visible in different municipalities, he implies that municipalities might also try to tackle this phenomenon at the municipal level.

“The efforts to oppose radicalization in the Republic of Macedonia are centralized and are the task of the central government and the institutions at the central level as such. Bearing in mind that radicalization on a religious basis was particularly present in several municipalities, it also requires local authorities to consider measures that they as local authorities would take to counter this phenomenon. No one limits the municipal authorities to discuss and resolve issues at local level, especially if one takes into account that there are bodies and institutions at local level dealing with security issues.” - Expert on violent extremism (26 December 2018)



PREVENTION OF RADICALIZATION AND P/CVE

The professors from the secondary schools and the university, as participants in the research, emphasize the need to openly discuss with the students on this subject, especially to use the homeroom classes for this purpose (one gets the impression that this conclusion comes as a result of the conversation during the interview). It is also said that schools should be managed by people who would not promote political and nationalistic values in schools.

“...It would be good during homeroom classes to take a little time to discuss these terms and definitions, because, if the students are not given explanation, they so become unaware and ignorant of such phenomenon. As a homeroom teacher I should discuss this; as a sociologist I can talk about this; it is desirable even to be included the subject of civic education, to insert that topic.” - Female high school teacher (28 December 2018)

“People need to talk about this during homeroom classes, even though we already do that. Often we talk about violence, propaganda... It should be known to the students that they should respect other people’s opinions and even different opinions, not to build stereotypes without investigating the issue at stake. Young people, at first if they have a different attitude, often know aggressively to express it, but the professor’s job is to explain it to them and make them evaluate themselves later.” - High school teacher (24 December 2018)

“I think we should not just talk about radicalization, but to emphasize the significance of the harm of radicalization as such. It is important to know and to prevent the very idea of finding a hotbed for such radicalization... The main point is that those who have a responsible role in the local community need to recognize it and quickly undertake something in that preventive context. I cannot speak of the radical elements within the Islamic community, but if they appear to me, that is then my responsibility and responsibility of our community.” - University professor (21 January 2019)

“I think we need to work to reduce politicization in local schools... I think that school management also should not be affected by these influences, either national or political. The management of the school should be universal, a visionary and should not impose their own opinion on others.” - High school teacher (11 February 2019)

On the other hand, the involvement of students in extracurricular activities is seen,



by the teachers involved in the research, as very useful. At the same time, it is important to include the activities that are directly discussed on the topic, although they consider that more important are activities that indirectly contribute to the prevention of radicalization and which enable the development of critical thinking among young people. Joint activities involving ethnically mixed groups of students are considered to be very useful because they offer contacts among students and mutual acquaintance. Also important is the inclusion of parents and the strengthening of the triangle consisting of parent-teacher-student.

“We can have lectures from time to time by NGOs or some experts who are more involved in the topic to cover these issues. However, I think that in those topics it is not good to include politics, religious fanaticism, and the like. I think that young people should be encouraged to think critically and make conclusions on their own.” - High school teacher (24 December 2018)

“By means of workshops, presentations, talk during classes, lectures delivered by school administrative departments, debates, openly speaking about a problem. One has to find the etiology of things; how it happened and how to deal with the consequences later. If we do not know the root causes, we cannot even defend ourselves from the very consequences.” - Female high school teacher (28 December 2018)

“...One way to do it is by exchanging lectures, meetings.” - University professor (21 January 2019)

“Actions to be included by every ethnic group in their overall activities... So, we have, for example, science activities... in the science activities, we always choose similar students from different ethnic groups... one Albanian, Turkish, Bosnian; they get to work together, stay together, get to know each other and better...” - High school teacher (27 November 2018)

“...It is necessary to strengthen the role of the parents; in addition with the students, to talk with the parents as well. In some way to seek help from the very parents...” - High school teacher (27 December 2018)

Regarding whether teaching about religions is important for the prevention of radicalization, there is a divided opinion among the teachers participating in the research. A majority of them thinks that there should not be a separate subject that teaches religion as such or that something should be discussed on that topic within other school subjects. It is evident that the schools involved in the research have no



separate subject to teach religion (with the exception of religious schools). Those who believe that the teaching of religion should be introduced consider that one should be very careful in this regard, taking into account what and how is taught, as well as who teaches. Because according to them, inappropriate teaching can even be the basis for another type of radicalization as well.

“To understand the religion properly and its interpretation is very important.”
- High school teacher (25 January 2019)

“I am exclusively opposed to the insertion of religious subjects or religious activities in schools, whether it is Islamic or Christian. I respect the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia; it says that our country is a typical secular state. It should be, but unfortunately, it is not. I think it is absolutely the private matter of any parent to let his child go to church or mosque; I do not differentiate. But this is a public school and you cannot practice it here.” - High school teacher (28 December 2018)

“If you leave curriculum vacuum, more opportunity of what should be presented is offered, such as the elective courses, possibly religious courses, offering the basis for the principles that would guide the future young man in his later life, then the possibility of abuse is given. Again, I must say that there is a lot to be kept in mind when entrusting people what they should do. There is a necessity, of course, of the very presence and increasing of such presence, but not in the context where it was also formerly presented and misunderstood, as a religious studies, but as information provided for our own religion, an integral part, not just our present life, but our whole previous history.” - University professor (21 January 2019)

“These subjects should be managed under the umbrella of related institutions, to be in accordance with the curricula. It is not to be allowed that anyone teach what he wants, because this creates further problems.” - High school teacher (27 December 2018)

Representatives from the municipalities participating in the survey show an awareness of their insufficient involvement in the prevention process, but at the same time show willingness to engage as well. Vast majority of participants think that there is a need to work on raising the awareness of the existence of the phenomenon in the local community. On the other hand, they believe that a referral mechanism for radical prevention should be devised where different stakeholders



at the same time are involved and informed (local institutions and local NGOs). It is also considered that there is a need to have well defined tasks and responsibilities of the participants in this body or organization that would deal with such issues at the municipal level in coordination with higher institutions, and in certain circumstances also in coordination with other entities, such as the police.

“We need to pay great attention to this set of related issues. First, we need raising awareness about the phenomenon, because I personally think that, as a society on the whole and of course also locally, we have not built a sense to recognize what it is about.” - Female representative from the municipality (28 December 2018)

“It cannot be implemented by the municipality alone; NGOs and relevant ministries should be included in the municipality; trainings with senior government officials to be organized: minister or prime minister to inform us; to encourage that there should be no radicalization in any given segment of the society.” - Representative from the municipality (24 December 2018)

“One factor is not a solution; the response should come from several competent institutions.” - Female representative from the municipality (28 December 2018)

“Mayors, heads of police, heads of the religious communities, school principals should get involved through the established referral mechanism, offering strategies and financial support for implementation of these strategies.” - Representative from the municipality (25 January 2019)

“To involve the mayor even now if we have such cases expressed by means of writing graffiti and the like, then the interior ministry... Through a conversation. We do not see other way. They should be received by the mayor, to have a conversation, to consider the problem from their side and to consider it from the side of the local self-government, in order to find a common consensus.” - Representative from the municipality (24 December 2018)

All participants in the research, representatives from the NGO sector, although not having conducted immediate activities related to prevention of radicalization, consider that more activities should be undertaken, even in circumstances where there are no open signs of radicalization among the youth in the community. In addition, the responsibility is shared with the municipality, which according to them should seriously undertake activities with young people for the prevention of radicalization.



It is obvious that participants from ethnically mixed environments encourage the implementation of joint activities among young people, while in almost mono-ethnic communities, the emphasis is on taking action in order to prevent events that might happen and affect radicalization.

“This issue may not be topical in our community. But in context of local self-government, it has the potential, because there is an ethnically mixed local population (the existence of local religious school). So far, there has been no bigger problem or something visible, but we do not know what is happening in the background. We have some reservations whether it is real or not.” - NGO female representative (24 December 2018)

“Informing is the most important, not only for the youth, but for the whole community. The topic is up-to-date and it is worth asking yourself what is going on here. People must be aware of the problem and its background.” - NGO female representative (24 December 2018)

Many of the interviewed NGO representatives do not know if there is a profiled organization active in context of the given topic, while they think that it is necessary to continue working with the youth in an indirect way, by engaging the youth in actions that activate and involve youth in the community. Especially in multiethnic environments, actions that promote joint activities and friendship between different ethnic communities are to be strengthened. In this context, they see the role of the institutions (municipalities and schools) as very strong and so it is important for them to cooperate with the NGOs.

“We as an organization have a youth program. When we founded the association we did not have such youth program, but we then noticed that there are no activities for the youth in the municipality and we decided to start such program. We started organizing debates, various creative clubs, related to photography and media. We also monitor the work of the Youth Council of the Municipality; we also organize workshops and trainings for high school students on current issues, etc.” - NGO female representative (24 December 2018)

“I believe that providing conditions for greater friendship among different ethnic communities is crucial, encouraging joint activities among young people in order to develop positive values from both sides... To create shared activity premises (for different ethnic communities).” - NGO female representative (27 November 2018)



“To conduct activities that will influence local people to get rid of their closed or exclusive opinions that easily become radical.” - NGO female representative (27 November 2018)

“Research should be carried out to see where the radical groups are active, especially in schools. In this way, we can work with those schools and with the young people there not to fall under such an influence, and for this, we need enhanced cooperation with the institutions. We do not know about the existence of such profiled organization that is active in this context, not only in our town, but also in entire Macedonia either... Perhaps we need to engage a bit more and write in the social media the appropriate information, to write books and so on.” - NGO representative (26 December 2018)

Representatives from religious institutions participating in the survey, in addition to other activities, consider it important that religion be represented as a subject in schools because, according to them, religion has a strong positive impact on people, as well as provides answers to many questions that people want an answer to. It is also considered that debate panels and meetings on the topic should be organized.

“We do not focus on events in church. We teach to respect one another; if one begins to have radical views, then we will try to bring him back, we will teach him, we will even give him literature to read and get to know the real things.” - Religious leader (24 December 2018)

The expert on violent extremism believes that all institutions (government and non-governmental, local/national) should be engaged in the development of shared mechanisms for the prevention of radicalization. “In doing so, one should initially work on raising awareness, especially the representatives of the institutions so that they can further seriously deal with the given issue.

It is necessary for local authorities to have awareness of the problem/problems existing in their municipality, including the problem of radicalization, then have reviewing of the mechanisms at their disposal, initiating measures in cooperation with all known entities at the local level, cooperation with entities which function at central level, cooperation with state institutions, etc... On the other hand, central institutions, especially those most responsible for fighting radicalization, need to recognize the role of local authorities, to foresee their role and place in central-level strategies and programs, to establish communication with local authorities, to have joint meetings, to jointly examine forms



of action, to devise and initiate joint projects, etc. NGOs can also contribute to initiating greater engagement of local authorities, as well as greater cooperation between local and central authorities in efforts to combat radicalization. First of all, these are NGOs, religious communities, schools, social services. Each entity, from its own aspect, can approach the issue and contribute to its prevention...” - Expert on violent extremism (26 December 2018)



RECOMMENDATIONS: NORTH MACEDONIA

The recommendations for stakeholders such as public institutions, civil society, and community. It is expected that recommendations of this report will serve as a positive step forward in their efforts.

1. To improve capacities of religious preachers about inter-religious dialogue and use it effectively at the local level.
2. To advance joint activities between different mono-ethnic schools and students coming from different ethnic backgrounds.
3. To enhance cooperation between high schools and civil society organizations in conducting joint extracurricular activities.
4. To conduct raising awareness activities for high school staff and students about gender equality.
5. To increase promotion of role-models among youth and increase civic engagement activities.



STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE OF THE
YOUTH AGAINST RADICALISATION
 IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

Research Study Publication

PERCEPTION ABOUT RADICALIZATION BY YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE WESTERN BALKAN REGION

„Strengthening Resilience of the Youth
 against Radicalization in the Western Balkans“ Project

PARTNERS



DONORS

