

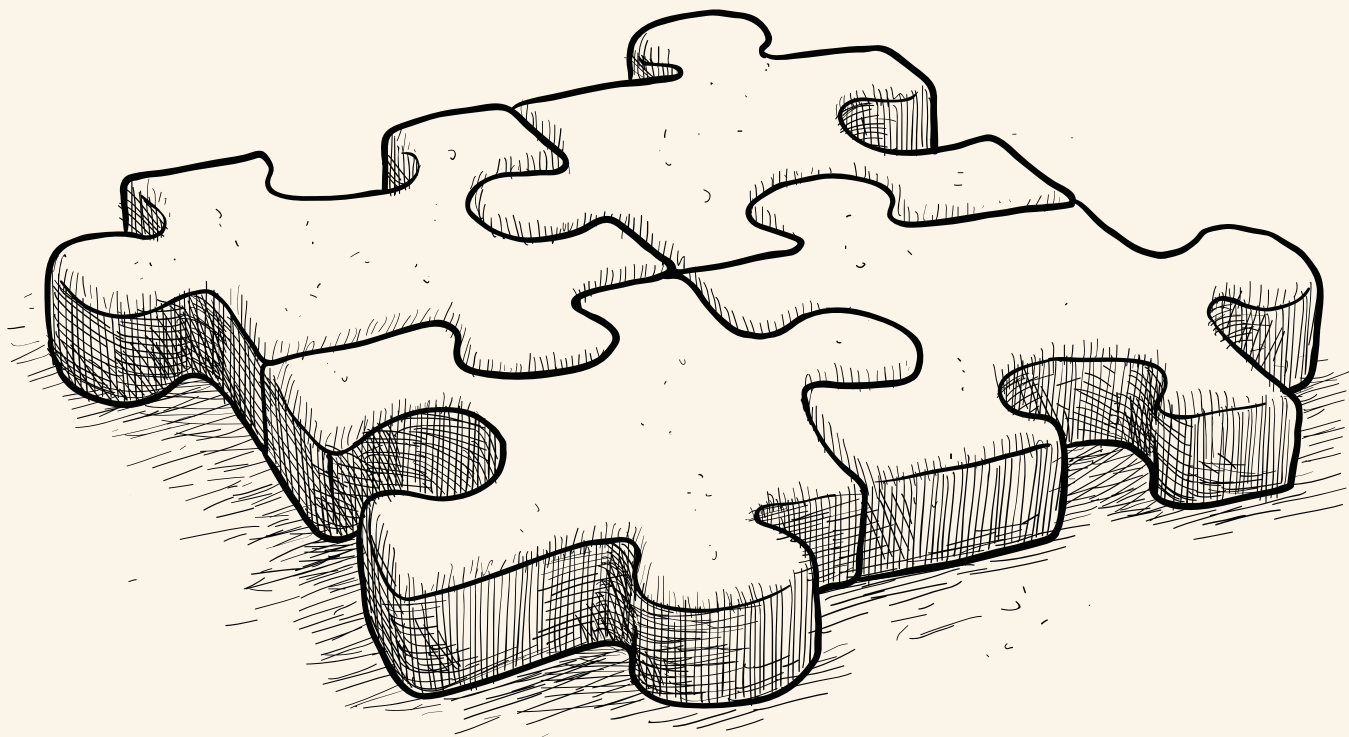


STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE OF THE
YOUTH AGAINST RADICALISATION
IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

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

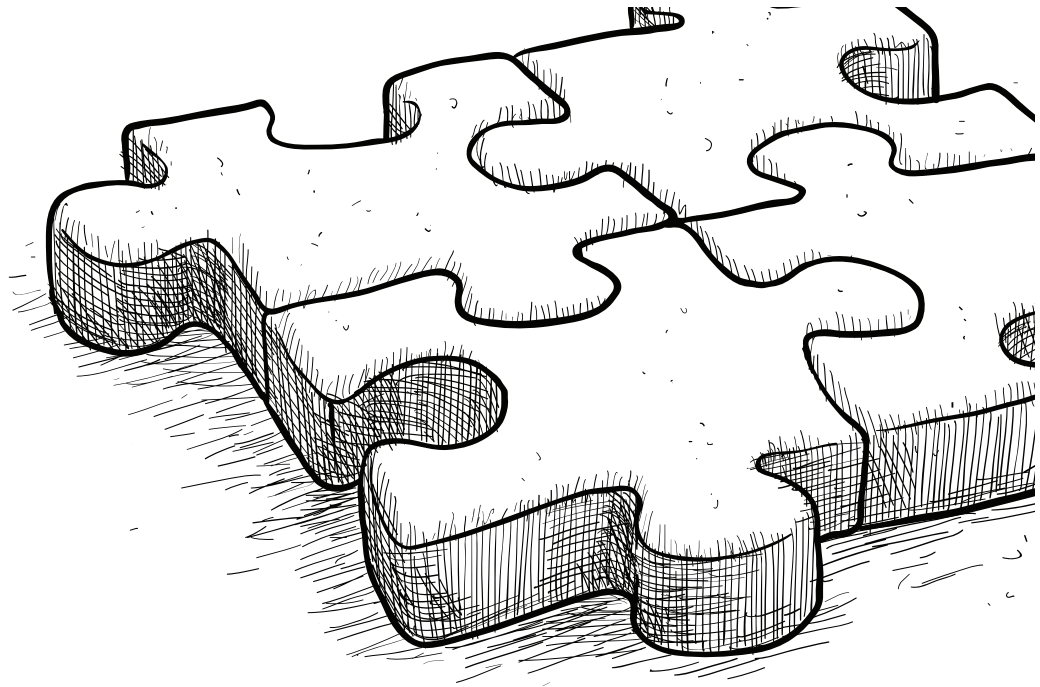


PARTNERS



DONORS





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

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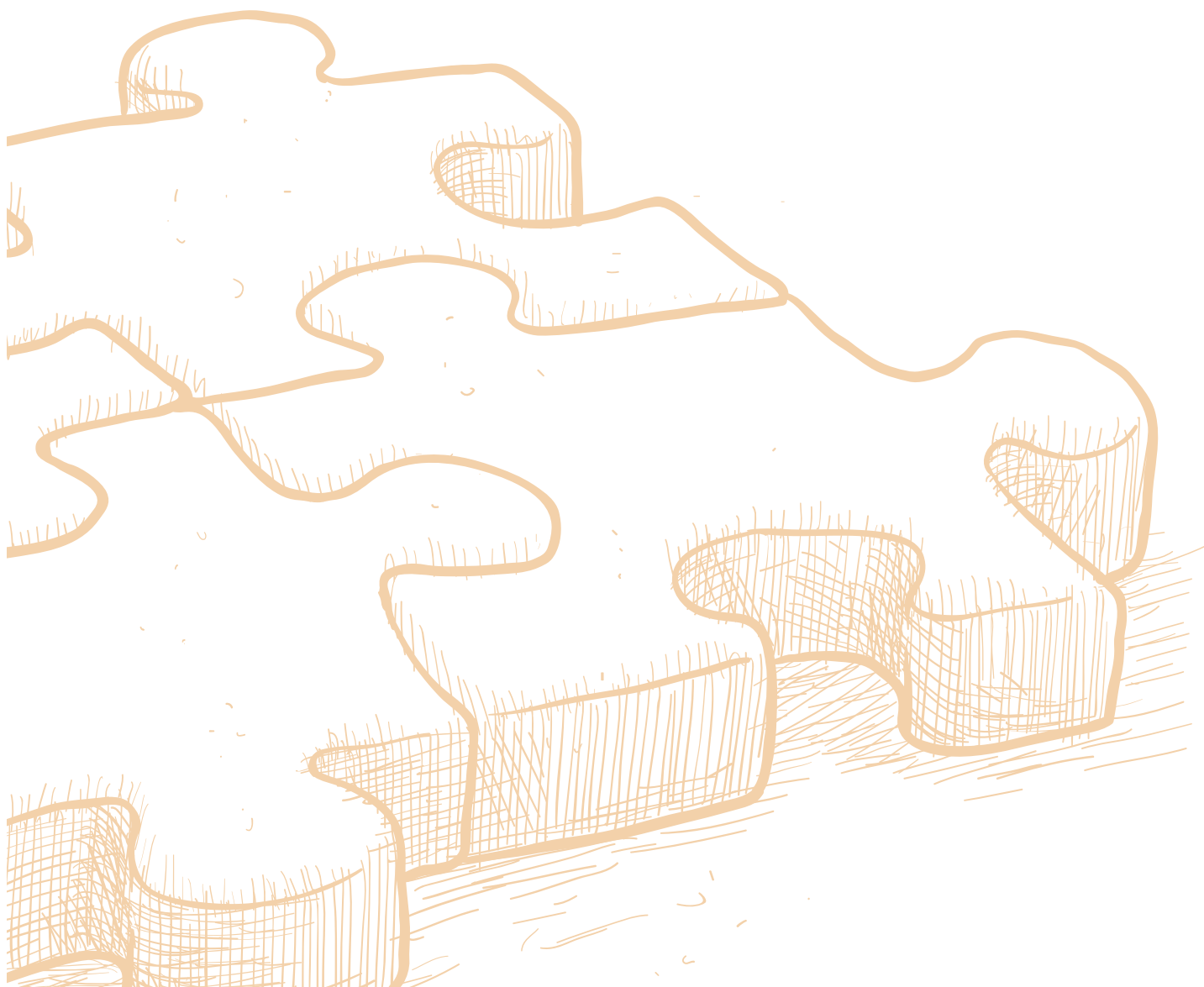
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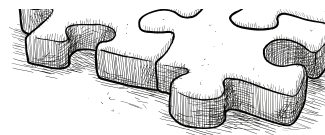
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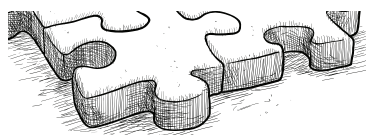
COUNTRY REPORT: BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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

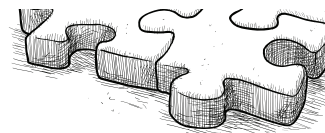
Competencies in designing and implementing youth policies in BiH are devolved to the entity level: Federation of BiH (FBiH) and Republika Srpska (RS). At the level of FBiH, matters regarding the youth are managed in accordance with the Youth Law of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was 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 - Bešlić, J., & Pobrić, 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>



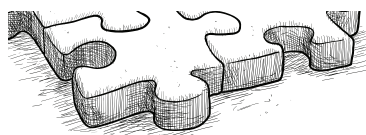
sional work and training, youth manifestations, international youth cooperation, information and development of bodies for youth policy”, stating as its objectives the following:

“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>



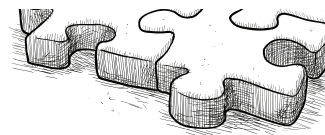
SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS: BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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.

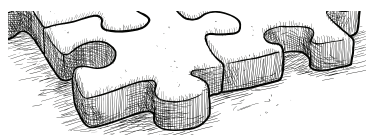
Almost all interlocutors have identified governmental sector (including the education system) as the weakest link in the chain, and the lack of institutional capacity to tackle the growing problems. Radicalization and extreme violence issues are not being treated systematically and with specific measures, 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.

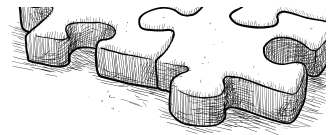
Previous research on the matter suggests that young people are particularly vulnerable to radicalization in an age of accessible social media. Similar worldviews are habitually exchanged and reinforced online,¹² while the dissemination of extremist narratives have gradually shifted into less visible 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.



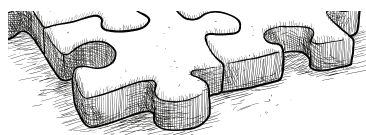
ethnicity, just like that of their fellow citizens, does not play any significant role in the shaping of perceptions or attitudes about radicalization. Moreover, some of the interlocutors expressed strong beliefs that life in a multicultural society prevents the occurrence of radicalization, but were 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-



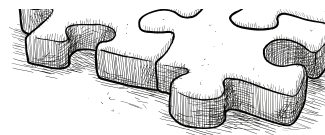
According to our sources, isolation, as such, does not necessarily lead to radicalization, but opens up opportunities for deviant political ideologies and their agents to shape the thoughts and actions of vulnerable individuals. Radicalization in BiH cannot be explored in isolation, as one type of radicalization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



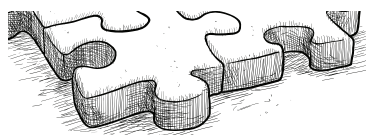
the youth, and growing radicalization trends in relations among ethnic groups, which is evident in discourses on social networks, especially in online fora focusing on recent conflicts in the Balkans. These trends are increasingly present and more pronounced in Republika Srpska entity where public displays 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

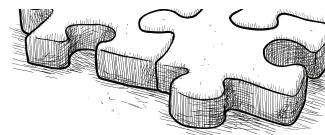
During the sessions, respondents in both focus groups showed high-level awareness of the factors underpinning the low quality of life in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which primarily refers to the scant education system and high unemployment rates. Their remarks clearly mirror the findings of previous studies 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.

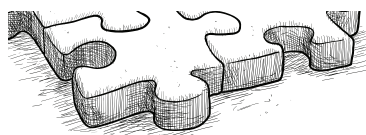
¹⁶ - Richardson, C., Cameron, P., & Berlouis, K. (2017). Radicalisation of Young Adults in the Balkan States: Counter-Measures, Healthcare Provision, and Community Involvement. *Journal For Deradicalization*, 11 (2363-9849).



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.

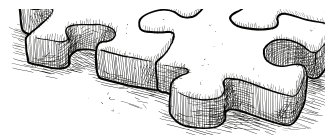
When it comes to prevention, young people in Sarajevo and East Sarajevo believe that peers, parents and extended family members are the primary ‘line of defense’ and can protect the youth from radicalization. Apart from the conversation about the current challenges with primary circles of socialization, 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 can 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.

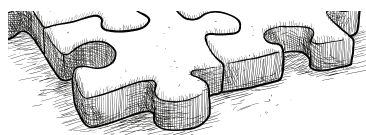
In Bugojno, on the other hand, young people described radicalization as a phenomenon that resides only in the prevailing politically molded divisions in the society, wherein each group has distinct interests, opinions and attitudes. They believe that every form of radicalization is harmful, and that 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.

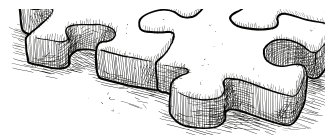
The interlocutors from Bijeljina shared fairly different thoughts on the topic. Overall, they believe that new generation did not have the opportunity to break out of the cycles of political influences of the older generations. Even though the majority is



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



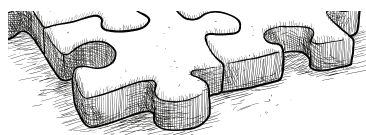
phenomena. They also cited 'intolerant attitudes of their friends and family' about homosexuality and inter-religious marriages as examples of radicalism, stating that the crucial factor supporting the rise of radical ideas is the fear based on previously existing beliefs, coupled with the unfavorable 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

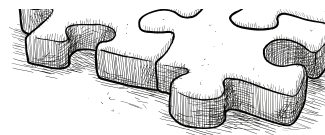
Some of the interlocutors pointed out that young people from families where religion did not play a key role are most susceptible to become radicalized.

‘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.

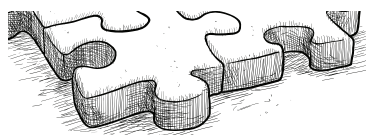
PREVENTION OF RADICALIZATION AND P/CVE IN BIH

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 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

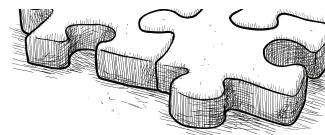
There are several institutions involved in combating radicalization, including social services, centers for mental health, schools and other related organizations (parents’ councils and students’ associations), detention and rehabilitation centers, religious organizations, city councils and local community 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

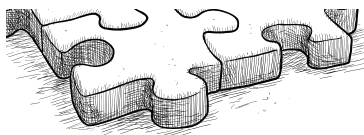
Other, potentially dangerous, venues for youth radicalization are unsupervised local and online media outlets. Experts on media and information literacy call for more educational programs and more involvement by all relevant parties. One of the experts explicitly stated

‘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.

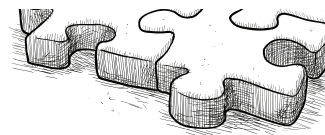
²⁷ - Interview with a Journalist, Online Media Expert, March 2019.



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.

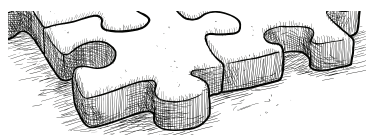


RECOMMENDATIONS: BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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).

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