Mitigating

Online Radicalization and Hate-Speech

Implemented with the support of Anna Lindh Foundation and co-founded by the European Union

Survey results

About the project

The project is addressing the process of radicalization, leading to violent extremism in the online sphere. With the spread of global pandemics, many aspects of life have transferred to the online area. So did the attempts to radicalize young people towards violent extremism. Online radicalization is not a novelty, but it gained momentum amid the COVID-19 crisis.

The project, therefore, aims to strengthen the resilience of young people - future leaders from vulnerable communities - against radicalization and extremism by their mobilization and activation directly in their communities. The resilience of young people is strengthened via developing their critical thinking and online disinformation awareness. The impact of the project consists of the creation of a network of active young people, who 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 project countries.

The project aims to strengthen the resilience of young people from vulnerable communities against radicalization and extremism by mobilizing and activating them in their communities via strengthening critical thinking and raising awareness about online disinformation. The impact of the project will consist of the creation of a network of active future leaders who will work as multipliers in their respective communities, thus addressing radicalization and violent extremism in the selected countries. The main objective is the activation and strengthening of capacities of young leaders aspiring to become visible actors against radicalization in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lebanon and Slovakia. Young leaders will learn how online radicalization works, "arming" themselves with counter-narratives against its rhetoric/propaganda. They will learn to seek further help to themselves or peers who may be in immediate danger of radicalization. Trainings' curricula will also focus on critical thinking, disinformation, strategic communication and leadership.

The phenomenon is undoubtedly not a new one, and several stakeholders are working on this and related issues. Our ambition is to provide a platform for more comprehensive cooperation on the intersection of addressing radicalization in the online sphere and youth, and we try to look for synergies rather than overlaps.

About Anna Lindh Foundation

The project was conducted with the support of the Anna Lindh Foundation (https://www.annalindhfoundation.org/).

The Anna Lindh Foundation is an international organization working and focusing on the Mediterranean region to promote intercultural and civil society dialogue in the face of growing mistrust and polarisation.

The content of this publication is the sole responsibility of Humanity in Action Bosnia and Herzegovina and does not necessarily reflect the position of the Anna Lindh Foundation or the European Union.

About the consortium

Humanity in Action Bosnia and Herzegovina (HIA) is an international organisation and part of a network of affiliate organisations in Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland and the United States. It focuses on peacebuilding, radicalisation resilience, social exclusion and violence based on discrimination. In the local context, it strives to build a network of students and young professionals committed to human rights and active citizenship while promoting reconciliation and rebuilding social trust among deeply divided ethnic and religious groups.
The main objectives of HIA are engaging student leaders in histories of resistance to institutionalised violations of minority rights in democratic countries; promoting the growth and development of young professionals dedicated to human dignity and the rights of minorities; building a multi-national, intergenerational network of present and emerging leaders in diverse professional fields who share these commitments.

The Aie Serve is a youth-led non-profit NGO from Lebanon that works on youth empowerment through spreading the values of Respect, Acceptance, and Love. Aie Serve works within 3 programs: Aie Skills - the training arm of the NGO. Offers workshops on a wide variety of soft skills at universities and in local communities. The yearly organised ToTs help youth become active citizens in their communities. Aie Clubs - These clubs function at universities and local communities. They act as mini Aie Serves; implement activities under the themes of community: Awareness, Development and Service. Aie Exchange - This program was created to help youth discover other cultures and share experiences. It also helps us widen our network of partnerships.

Strategic Analysis is an independent think-tank from Slovakia providing expertise for the private sector, public institutions, media, and civil society. It focuses primarily on the European Neighbourhood. The Strategic Analysis team combines over ten years of experience working and networking across the European Neighbourhood. Its expertise includes a thorough knowledge of two regions - Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries in terms of geopolitics, internal politics, international relations, security, economy, business environment, civil society, and culture. The Strategic Analysis offers expertise and capacities in four different courses: via Trainings; Support of actions; Networking, and Research.

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In Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina in August 2021.

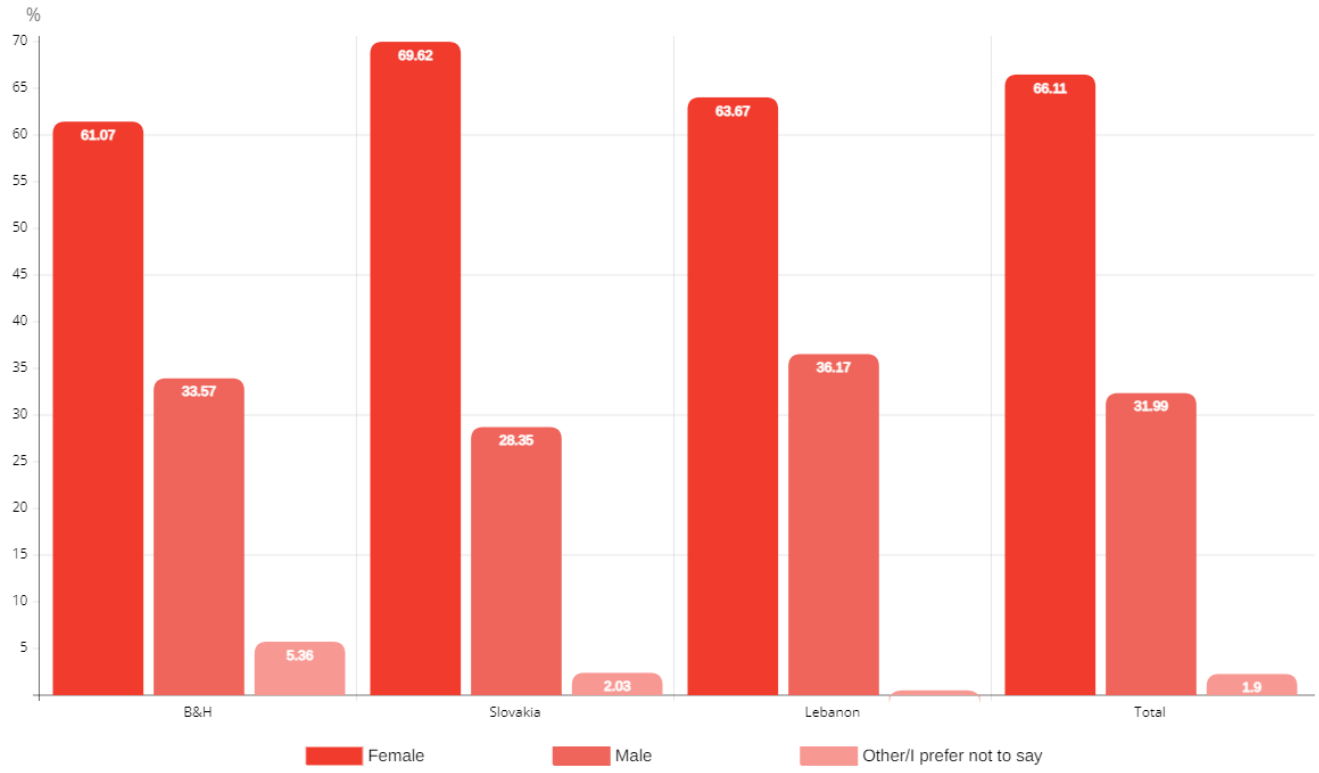
About the data collection

Key for preventing online radicalization that leads to violent extremism is to learn its roots and causes. The goal of the online qualitative survey is to map how young people perceive the problem of online radicalisation and hate-speech in their respective project countries and it's current extent. The data included in this report is measuring the attitudes and knowledge of the young people in the three project countries-- Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lebanon and Slovakia.

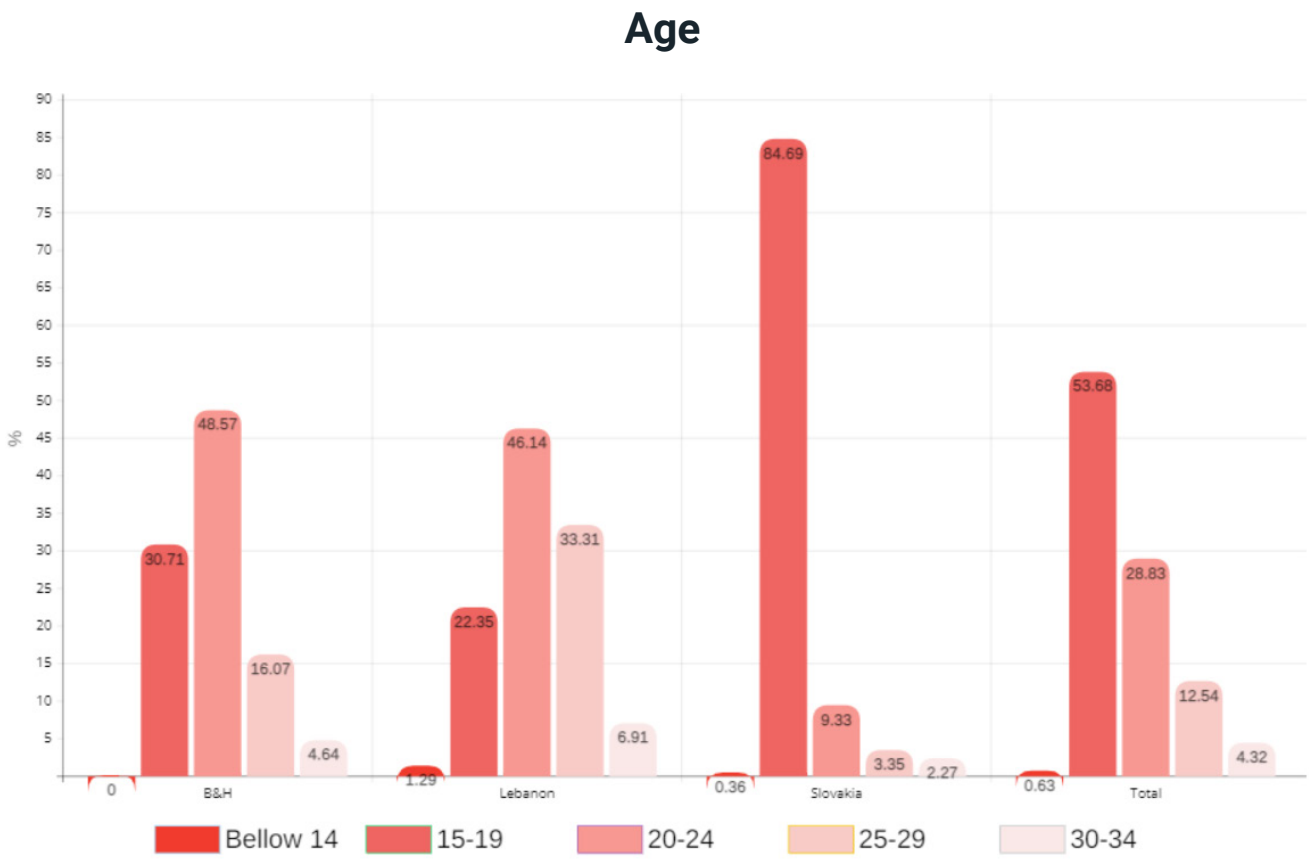
The online qualitative survey was conducted between March 2021 and April 2021 via Google Forms, targeting the youth between the age 15-35. The survey was distributed in local languages by the project participants, project partners, as well as by high schools and universities. Altogether **292** responses from **Bosnia and Herzegovina, 695** responses from **Lebanon,** and **846** responses from **Slovakia** were collected to the survey, adding up the overall number of **N=1.833.**

Socio-Demographic Information of Respondents:

Q40: Gender balance of the sample

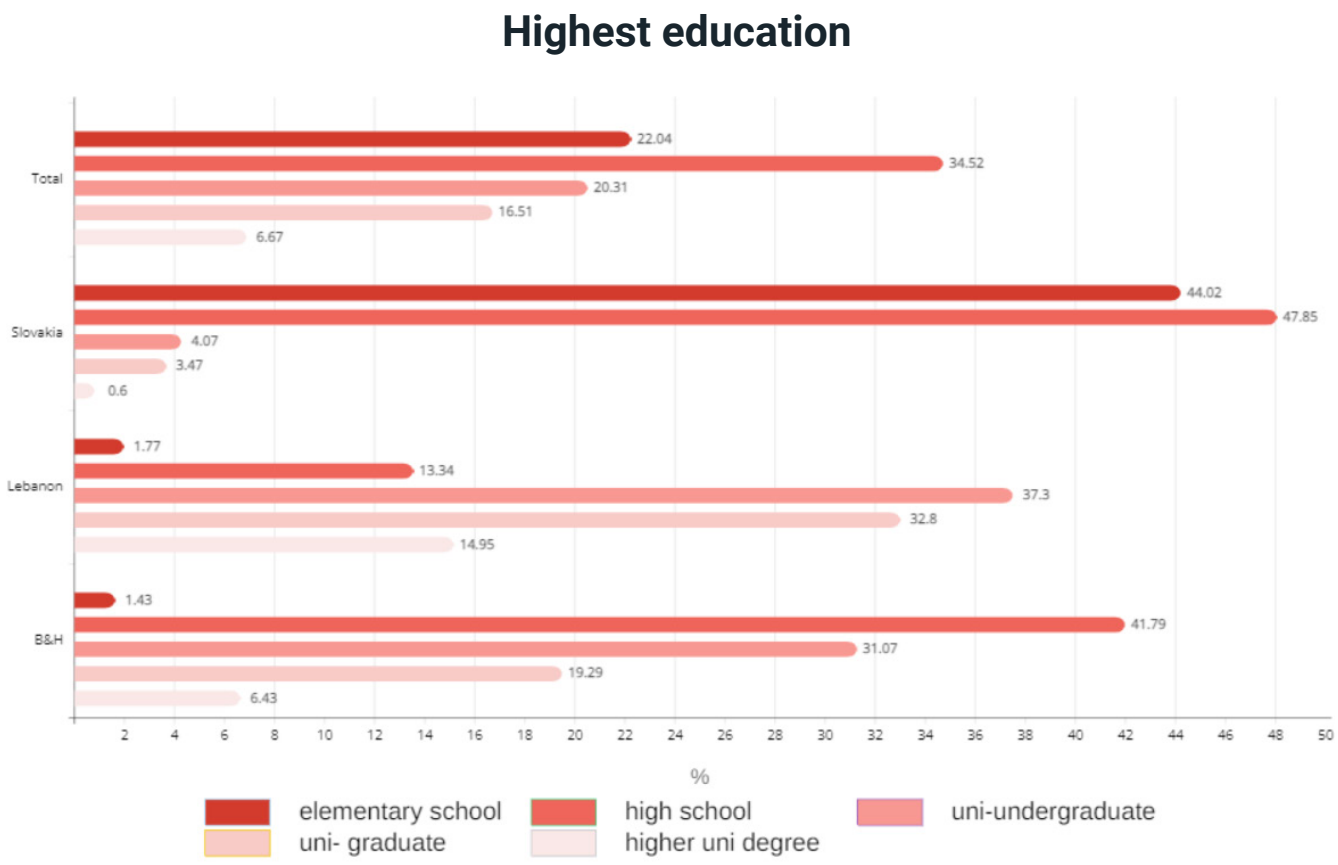


Q41: Age balance of the sample



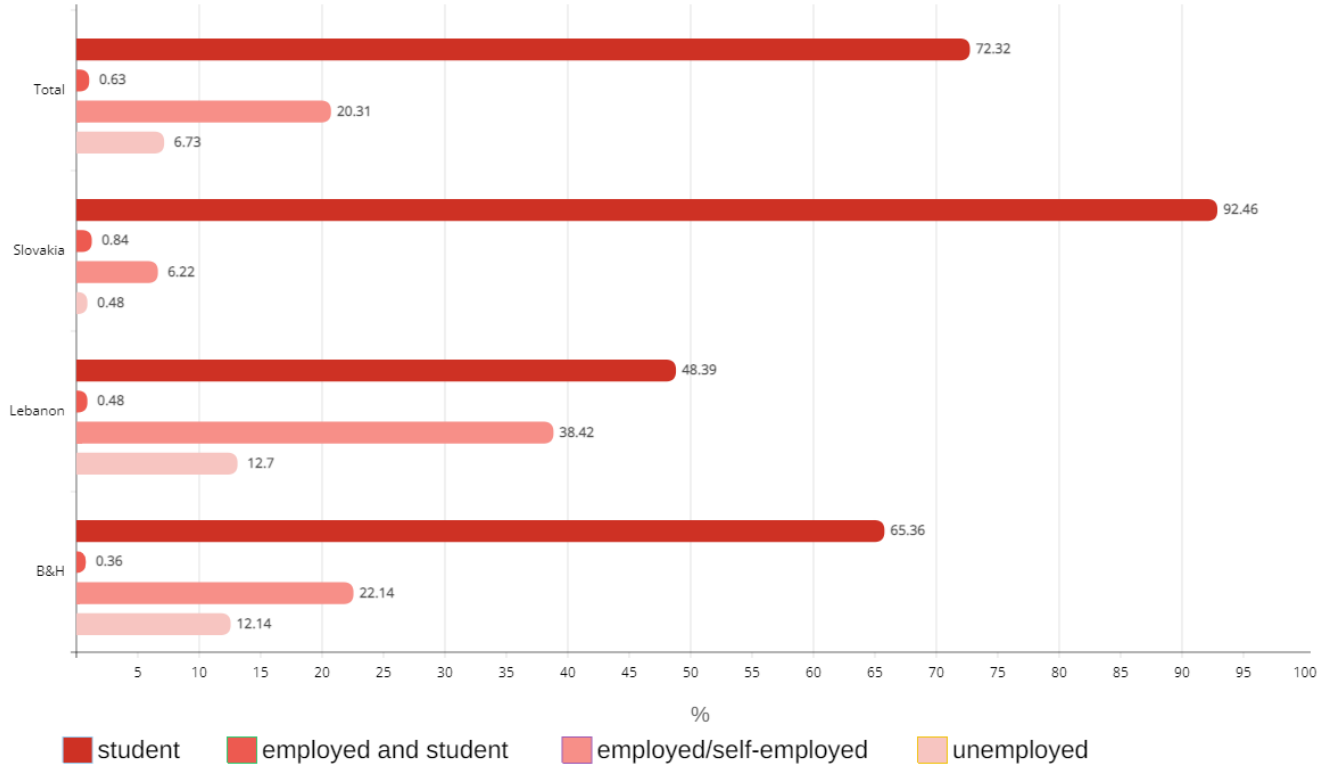
Only data within the required age group of 15-30 was interpreted within this study. While data from the category below 14 and over 31 due to the small percentage of this group was included, data from respondents over 35 was excluded from further processing and interpretation. Overall 17.38% of the respondents were excluded from the final interpretation.

Q43: Age balance of the sample



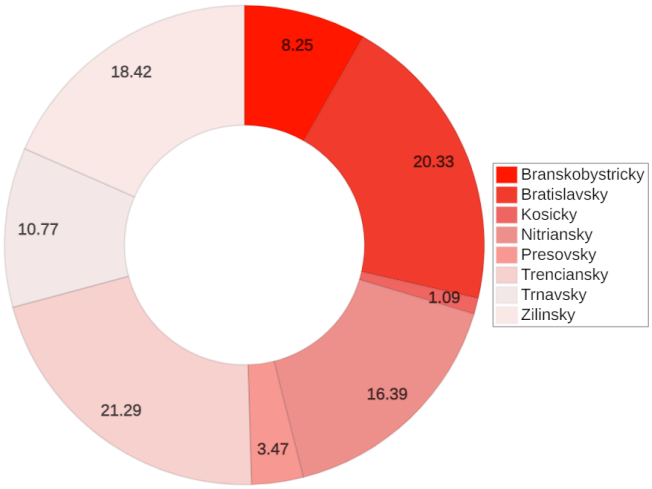
Q44: The occupation structure of respondents

Occupation

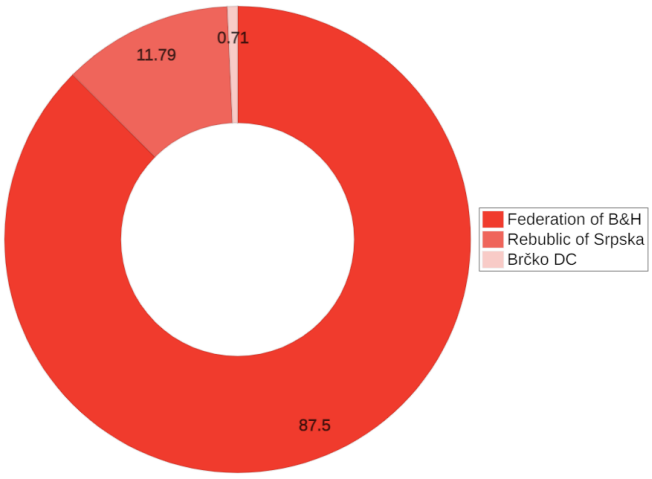


Q42: Geographical distribution of respondents by regions within the project countries

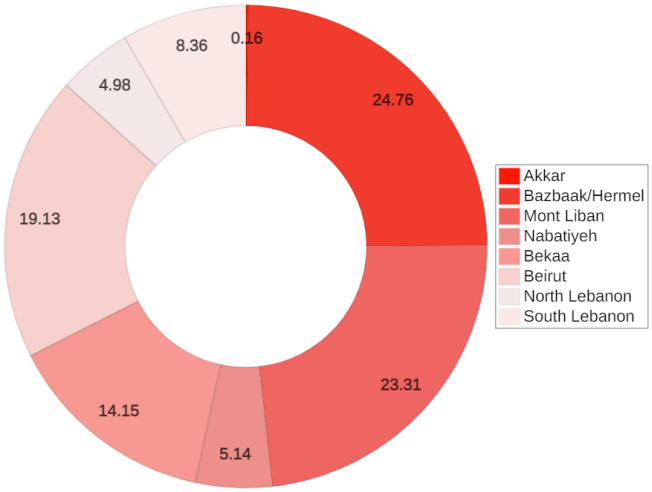
Region Slovakia



Entity Bosnia and Herzegovina



Region Lebanon



Country information and the situation during the data collection

Created by Bence Bezeredy
from Noun Project

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a European country in the Balkan Peninsula, the capital of the country is Sarajevo. The country is characterised by rich diversity in terms of ethnicity and religion: Islam (50.7%), Orthodox Christianity (30,7%) and Roman Catholic Church (15.2%) are all present, corresponding with the three largest ethic groups - Bosniaks (48,8%), Serbs (32,7%) and Croats (14,6%). The estimated population is 3.33 million, from which the youth between the age 15-29 years old represents 17,7%.

Created by Ted Grajeda
from Noun Project

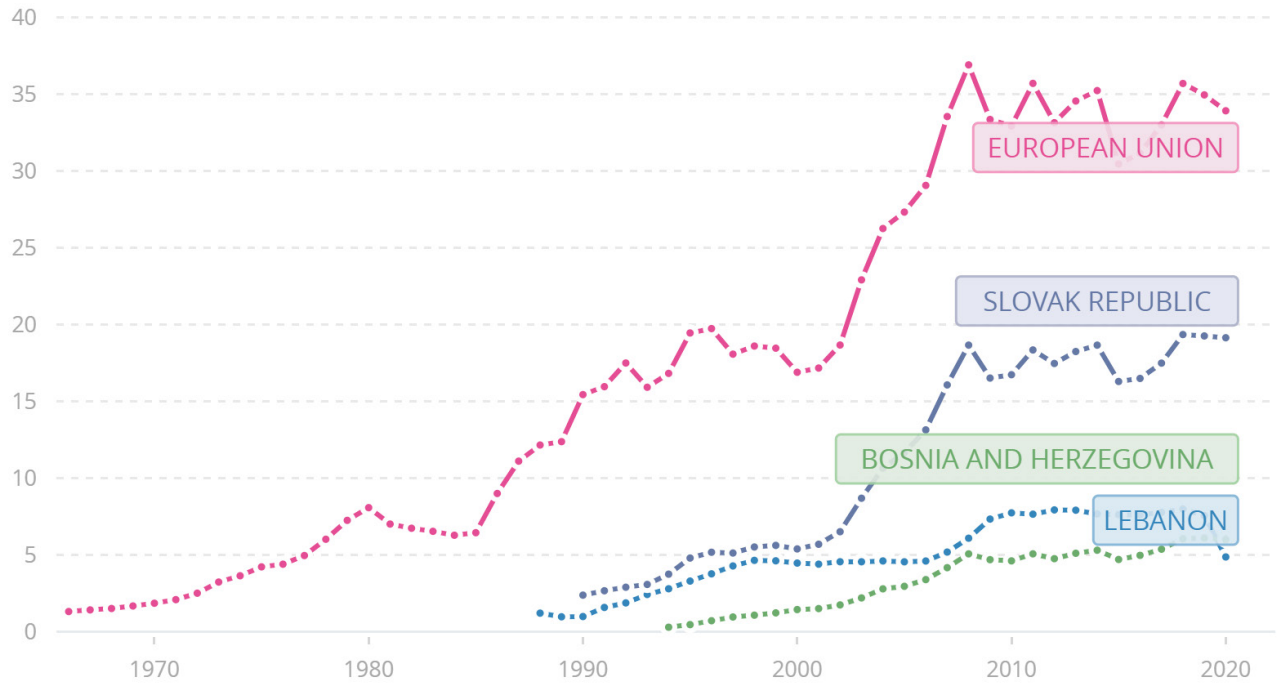
Lebanon is a Mediterranean coastal country in the Middle East and North Africa region, the capital of the country is Beirut. The country has been a crossroad for the Arab world with diverse religious and ethnic groups, which is reflected in the political leadership. The balance between religious communities, however, is delicate. The estimated population is 6.86 million, from which the youth between 15-29 years old represents 24,6%.

Created by Bence Bezeredy
from Noun Project

Slovakia is a Central European country, since 2004 member of the European Union, the capital of the country is Bratislava. 81.4% of the population are ethnic Slovaks, the vast majority of the population is Christian, 62% follow the Roman Catholic church. The estimated population is 5.45 million, from which the youth between 15-29 years old represents 17.5%.

The data collection was conducted during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. In all countries some form of a lockdown was introduced to mitigate the spread of the virus. Given this specific condition, the results of the survey might vary from previous studies.

GDP per capita (current US$)



Source: World Bank national accounts data, and OECD National Accounts data files

Introduction:

We teach our kids not to talk to strangers from an early age, we teach them to avoid thieves, con artists, those who can hurt them, and bad people in general. However, in the online sphere, the situation is different - one would say that the threats present in the online sphere are minor, unreal, intangible, therefore nothing to be afraid of. We tend to think about it as what happens online stays online. However, especially with the COVID19 pandemic moving almost all life aspects online, we are slowly learning the true power of the online sphere - the threats from the online are palpable and can materialize with quite an ease.

The youth access the unlimited internet somewhat unprepared for what they will face there, making them prone to manipulation, radicalization and even extremization. Not to mention cyberbullying, hate speech which is omnipresent on social media.

Modern technologies and online platforms for communication moved social threats of hate speech, radicalization and violent extremism to the online sphere, thus adding a global dimension to the issue - the content can be spread to the global audience with a simple click of a finger. The internet allows the information to travel without being restricted by any border.

Within this study, the authors assess the perceptions and attitudes of threats, hate speech, radicalization and extremism by the youth with special attention to high-school students. This study aims to contribute to the research on online radicalization of youth and their perception of online hate-speech that is present on the internet and social media. At first, we looked at the content they access on the internet and how often they come across questionable or problematic posts. Then, we asked regarding their perception of the society, their values, attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs.

The study aims to formulate further recommendations for working on the topic with the youth based on the evidence from the qualitative online survey.

The online qualitative survey is divided into the following sections:

1. Content on the internet

In this section we examined the problematic content respondents come across while being online.

2. Perceptions of the society

Perceptions of gender equality, laws and rules-obeying, openness towards different ethnicities, and free-time activities were included in this section.

3. Internet access and use

In this section we were searching for answers to the questions which applications do the youth use most often, how do they spend time while being online, how much do they use the internet on a daily basis, and whether they discuss their online presence with their parents or guardians. In addition, a question regarding the verification of information online was included.

4. Safety

Questions regarding the youth's online safety and threat perception were included in this section.

5. Democratic processes and participation

The youth across the globe is often criticized for not being active in democratic processes. This section examined whether they participate in elections, what is their attitude towards democracy, the government and multiculturalism.

6. Beliefs

Beliefs regarding radicals, terrorism and violence was examined in this section.

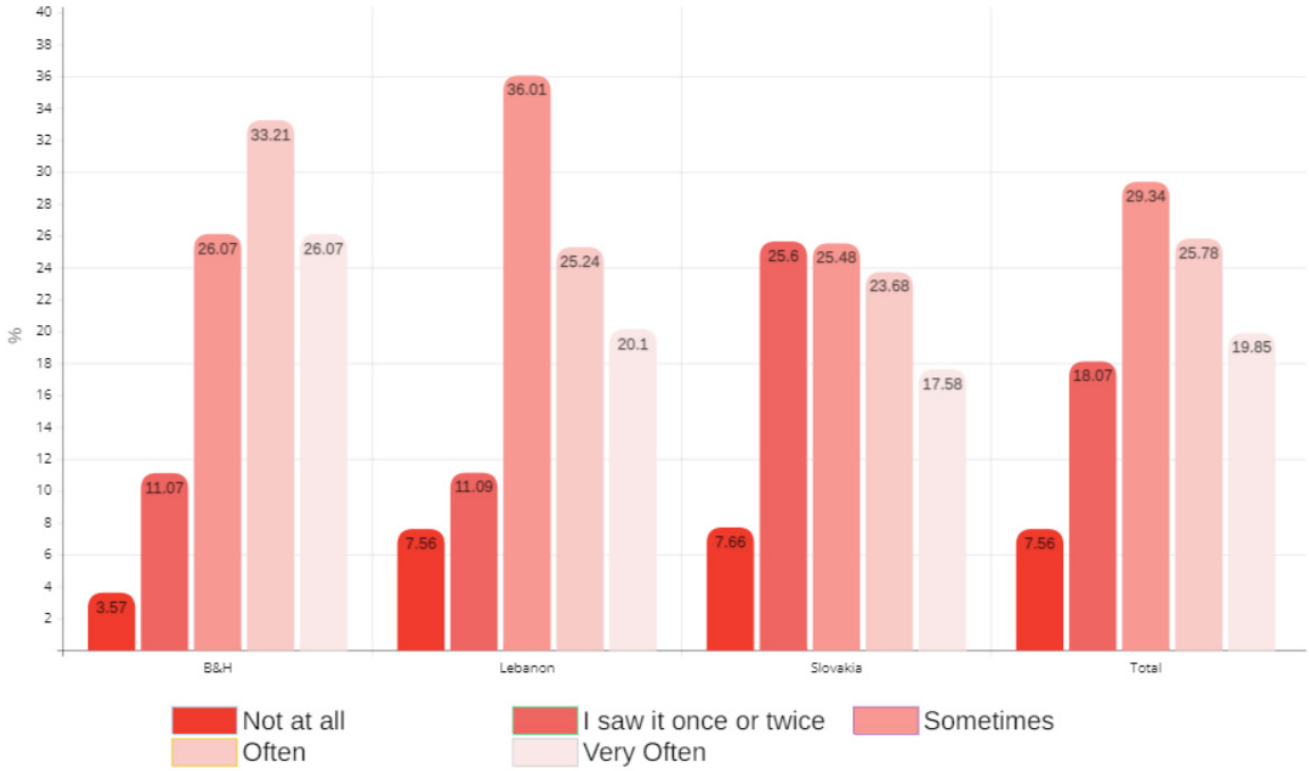
7. Attitudes

In this section we were searching for answers to whom is the youth turning to for inspiration and how tolerant is the youth towards different groups within the society.

Content on the internet

Q1: How often do you come across the following content on the internet?

Hate speech based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation and disability.

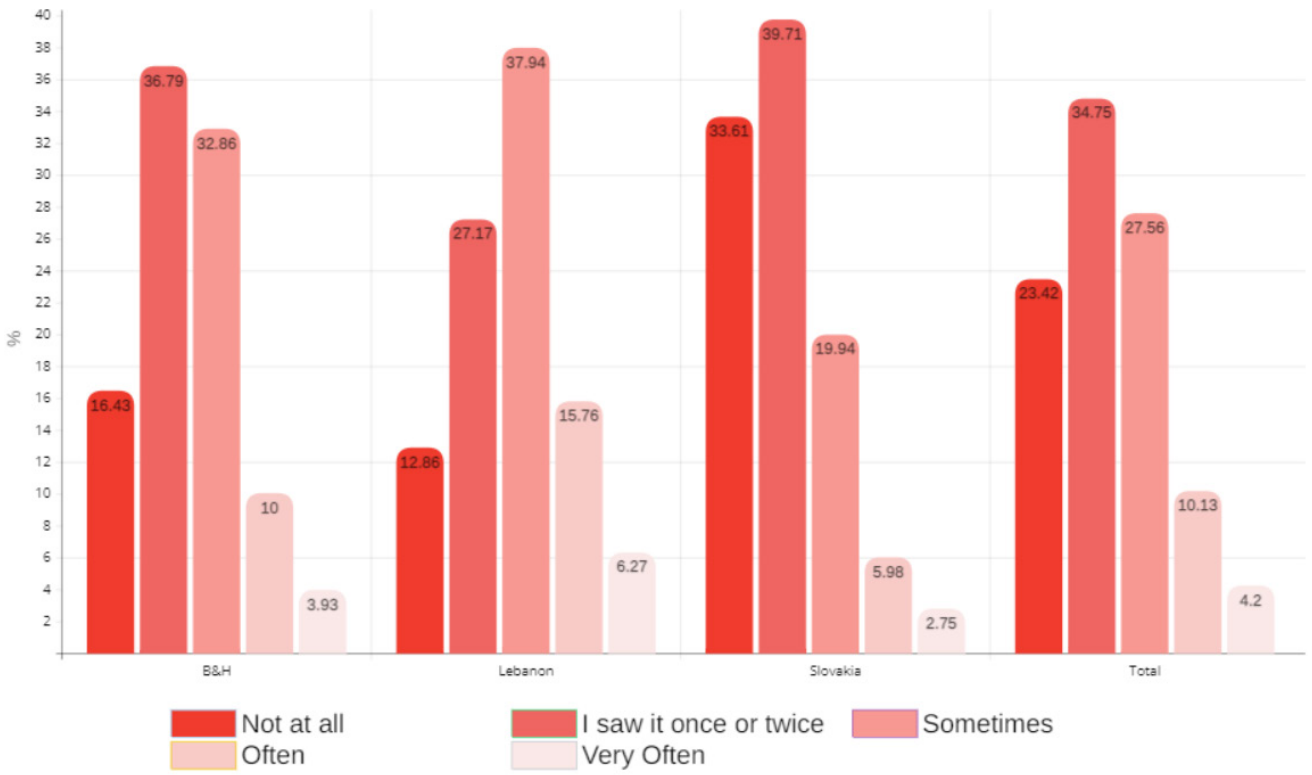


In more diverse societies, hate speech is more frequent on the internet. Based on the survey results, young people come across hate speech based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability on the internet on average "sometimes."

Respondents recognized the highest prevalence of contact with hate speech online from Bosnia and Herzegovina. More precisely, one-third replied they encounter hate speech online „often" and 26% "very often". The survey also found out that young people from the project countries face hate speech online; only around 7,5% of young people replied they had not encountered hate speech online at all. The lowest proportion was in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where only 3,6% of interviewed young people replied they hadn't experienced hate speech online.

However, the youth in mentioned countries prefer living in multiethnic societies, as the graph Q3 shows. Indeed, although hate speech is rather on the common side on the internet, the majority of the youth is tolerant towards other ethnicities.

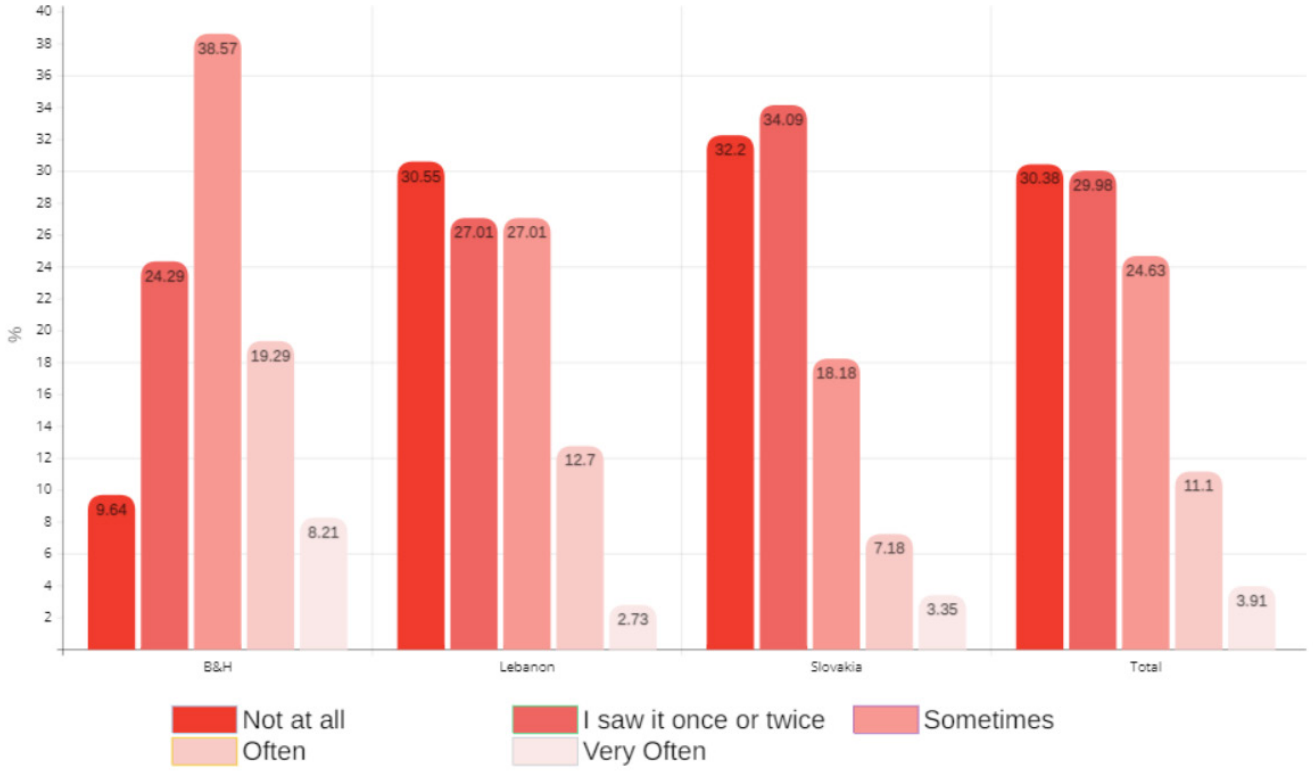
Content displaying murder, torture or decapitation (photos/videos)



Banalisation of aggression can lead to increasing extremism. The media, including social media, expose brutality and violence to generate views, but as a side effect, the media is desensitizing society to fatal crime and violence. In Bosnia and Herzegovina and Lebanon, radical groups such as ISIS or Hezbollah that produce extremist content are active. Therefore, the youth is exposed to such content more often. Moreover, both these countries have leadership that contributes to the culture of intolerance and violence by downgrading diversity for the sake of favoring one group (or another) from the society and creating pronounced identities that may clash.

The violent content online like videos or photos of murder, torture or decapitation was less prevalent in Slovakia, where one-third of surveyed youngsters replied they hadn't encountered such content online, or just very rarely – nearly 40% of surveyed saw it once or twice. Compared to Lebanon, where almost 38% of surveyed replied, they encountered such content sometimes, and over 15% said often. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, nearly 37% of surveyed young people replied they saw such content at least once or twice, almost 33% sometimes and over 10% often. On average, two-thirds of all surveyed young people have experienced highly violent content online – in the form of videos or photos.

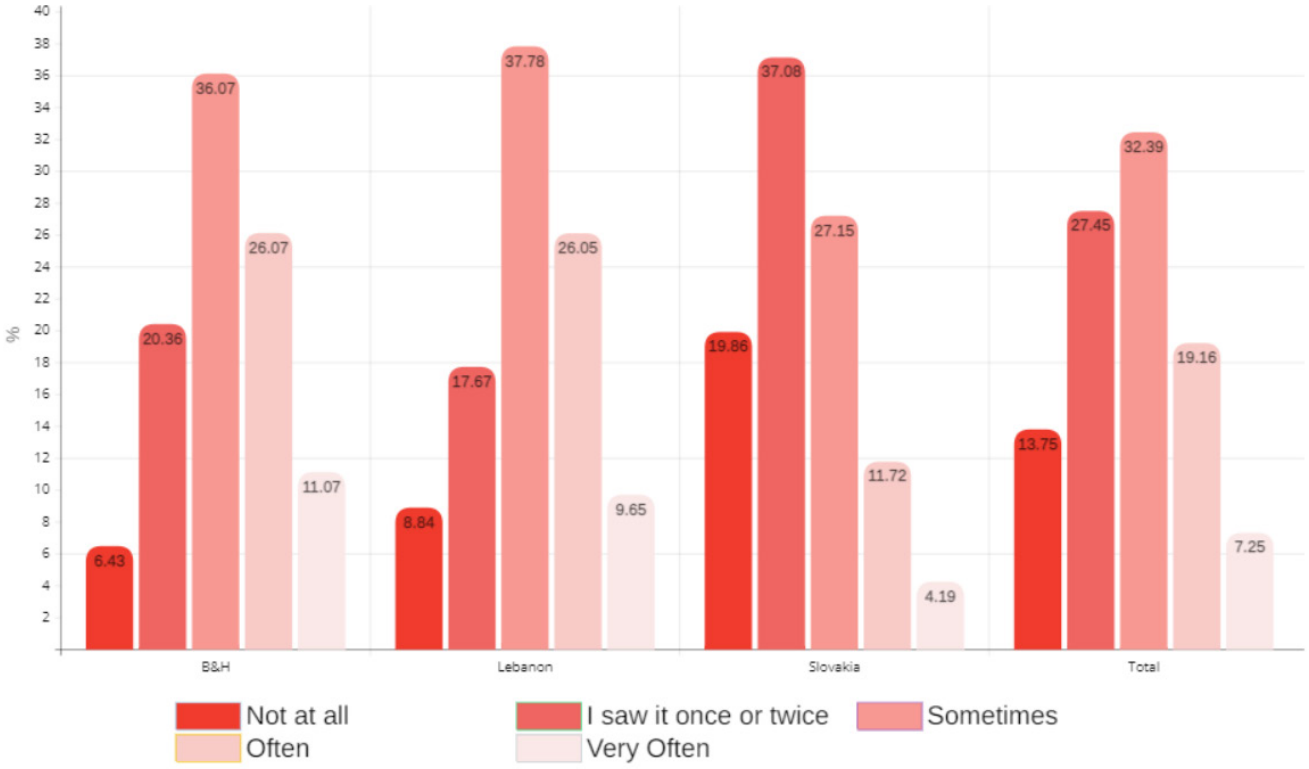
Encouraging posts to commit an act of crime and violence



Encouraging crime and violence online – over two-thirds of surveyed young people experienced posts on social media to incite violence and conduct crime with the highest prevalence in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where over 38% surveyed expressed they saw such content sometimes, over 19% often and over 8% very often. In Slovakia, on the contrary, over 37% of surveyed young people replied they hadn't experienced posts encouraging committing crime or violence on social media or encountered it only once or twice (34%).

Various international reports show that Bosnia and Herzegovina and Lebanon are countries with less functioning law-enforcement, corruption in police and state institutions and thus, the fight against crime and violence is less effective.

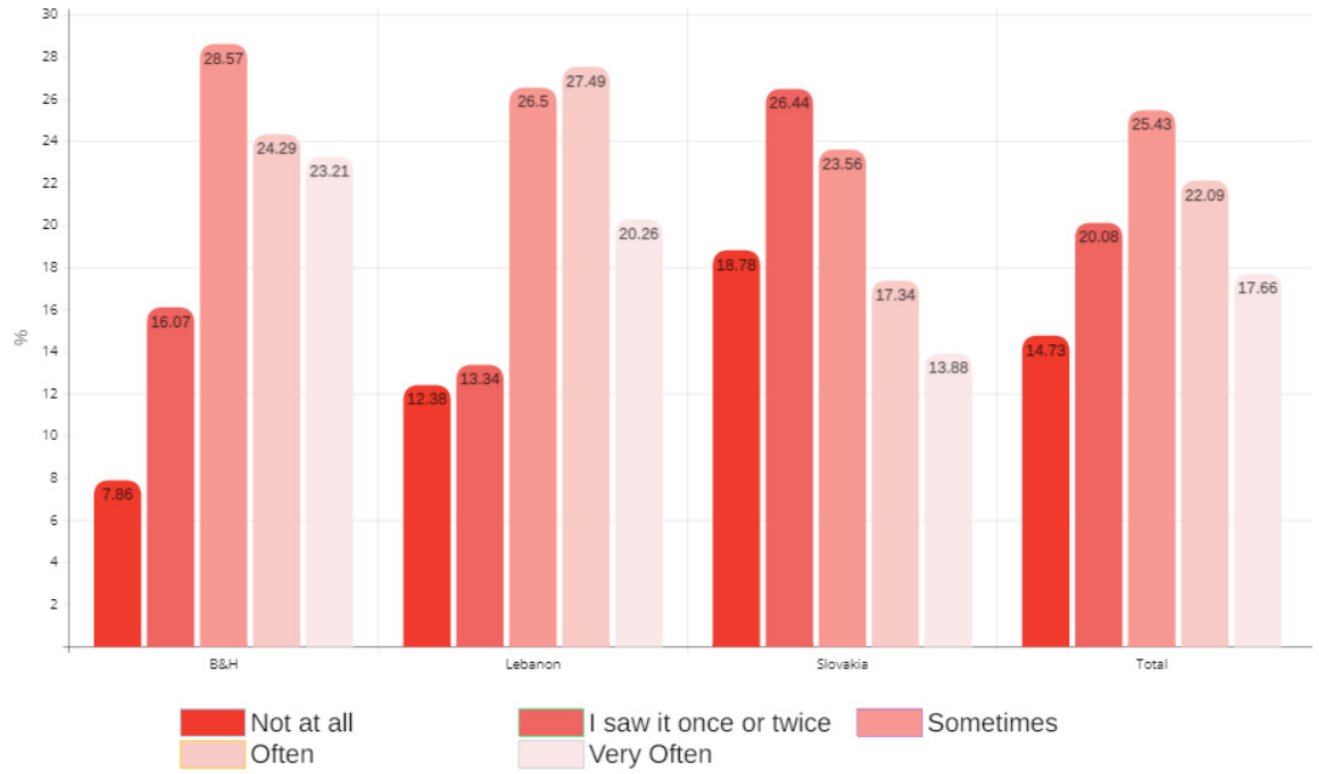
Content showing physical or psychological agression (beating, verbal or physical abuse) - in forms of photos and videos



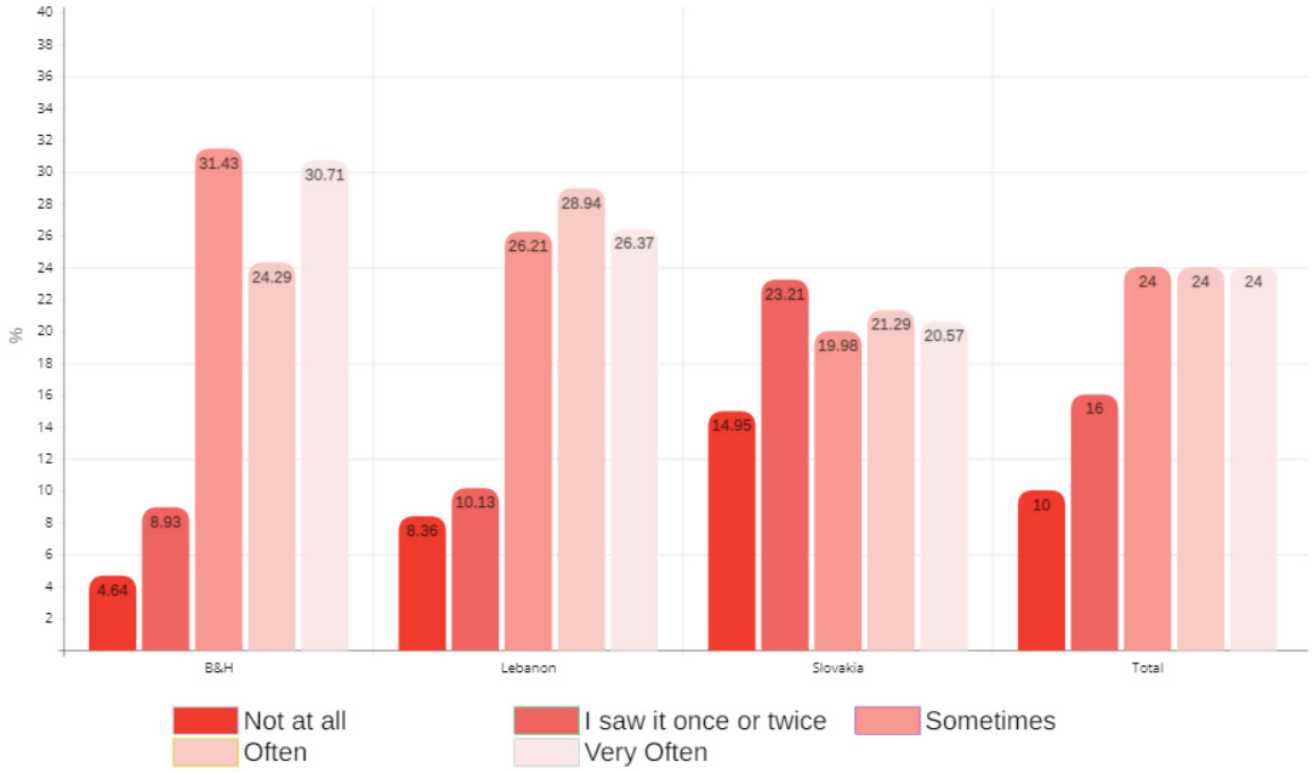
Over 86% of surveyed young people encountered content showing physical or physical abuse such as beating, verbal or physical abuse in the form of videos or photos online.

As already mentioned, In Bosnia and Herzegovina and Lebanon, radical groups that produce extremist content are active and the fight against crime and violence is less effective. As a consequence, aggressive content is more frequently visible on the internet in mentioned countries.

Bullying or insulting online - in any form either against you or someone else



Bullying or insulting online in general towards people, that you don't even know

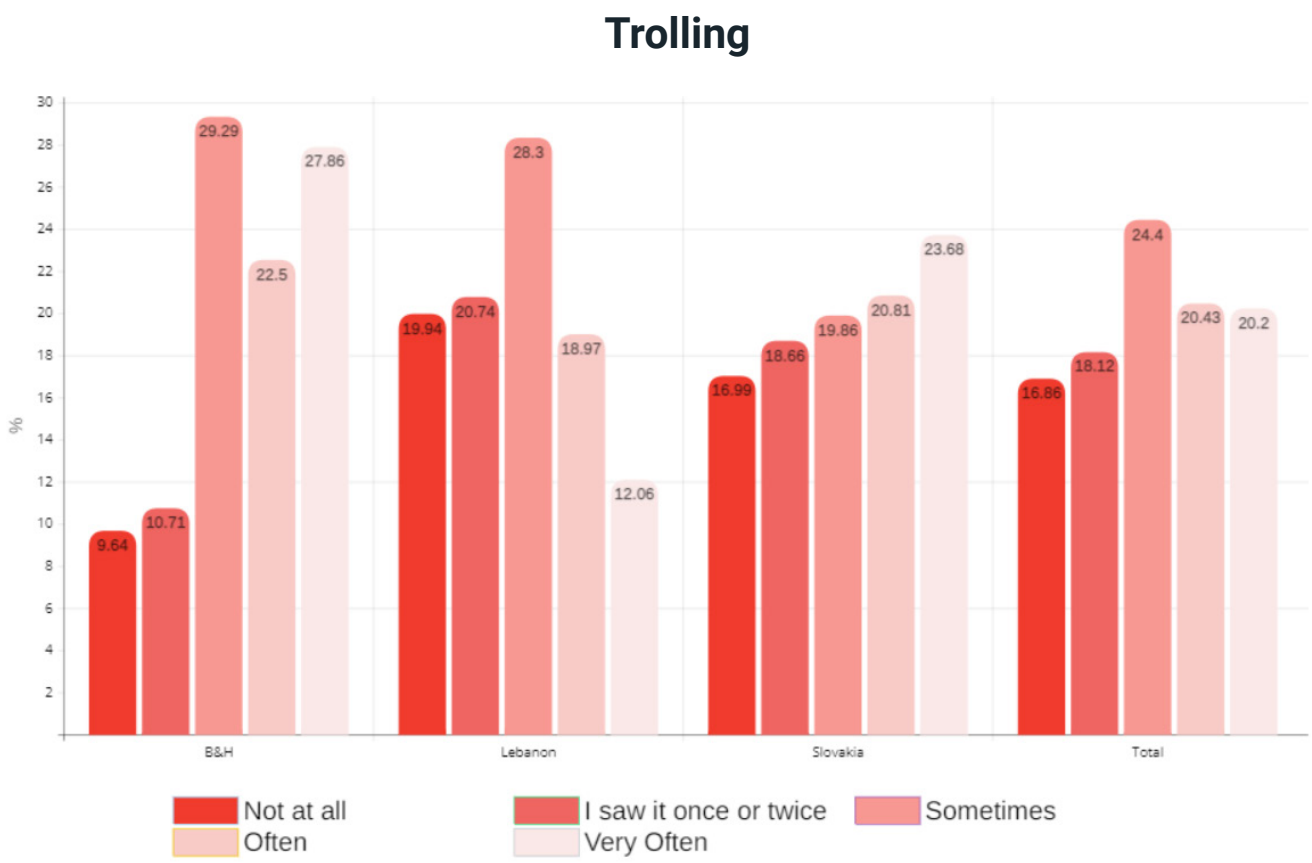


The age when children and youth are facing cyberbullying is decreasing. Based on studies, at an early age, the victims of bullying are primarily boys; during puberty, the ratio equalizes.

Social media and the internet, in general, is also an amplifier of certain behaviours, especially among the youth-- it is easier to write mean comments to someone than to say the exact words face-to-face since the aggressor is not facing an immediate emotional reaction such as disappointment, regret or anger provoked by their comments. The same can be applied for blackmailing, bullying, or so-called outing when the aggressor publishes leaked material with intimate content.

The relatively high numbers were shown when surveyed young people were asked about cyber-bullying and insulting online. Over 85% replied they experienced cyber-bullying against themselves or people they know, and nearly 90% witnessed cyberbullying or insults against people they didn't even know. Monitoring bullying is less functioning in BiH and Lebanon.

Recommendation: strengthen police social media monitoring efforts to filter bullying online, especially in BIH and Lebanon.



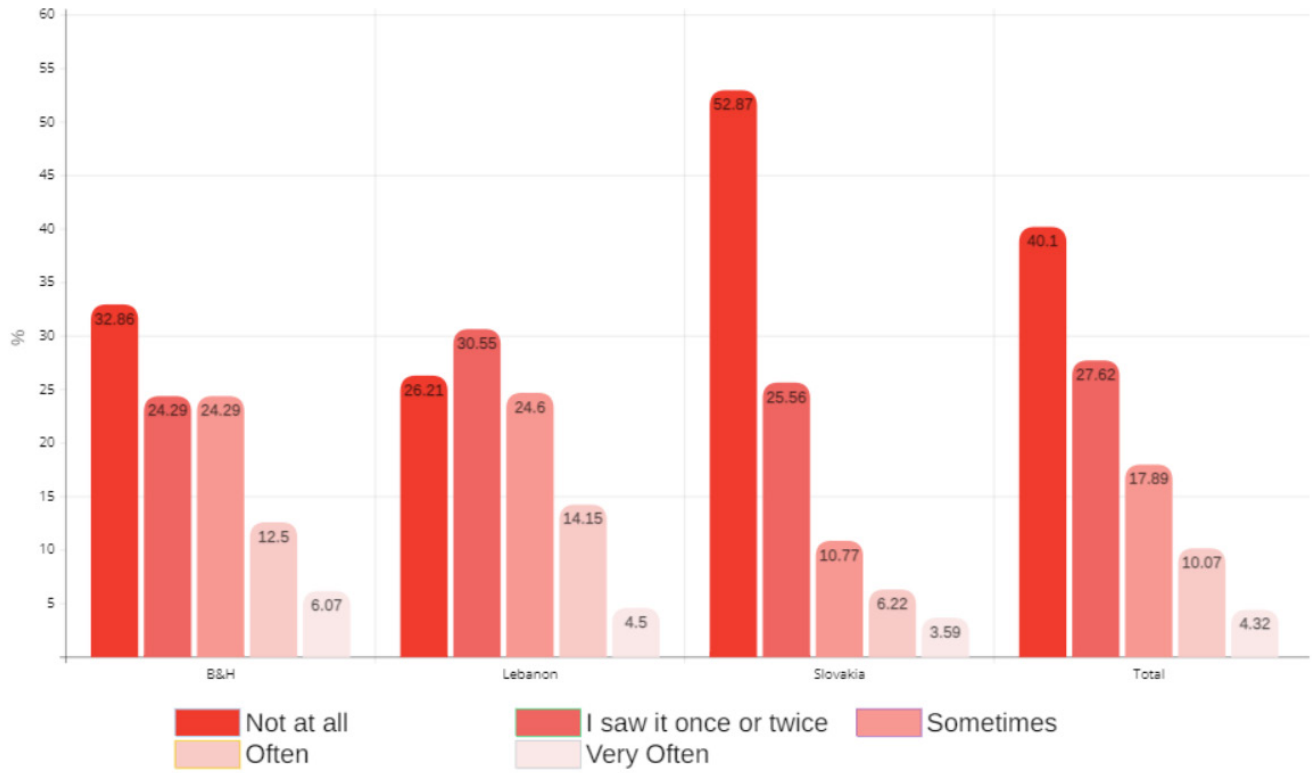
In the world of the internet, we call trolls people who deliberately hurt and provoke others in discussions to evoke or fuel aggression, harassment, or belittling, often using fake accounts to remain anonymous. Trolls hijack the conversation in a way that makes constructive and cultivated discussion impossible-- with swearwords, vulgar expressions, sometimes even lynching.

Sometimes trolls can be hired to plead the interests of those who pay. Sometimes trolls do it out of boredom, fun or the urge to express their exhibitionism. However, there are a few characteristics all trolls share: first, psychopathy, or the lack of sensitivity towards feelings and absenting consciousness or social dullness; second, Narcism, the obsessive importance of the self and constant urge for attention; third, Machiavellianism, the tendency to manipulate and casting others by whatever means necessary, and last, sadism, the need for seeing others suffering to ensure the feeling of superiority.

Nowadays, trolling is a common phenomenon one can come across on the internet, which is supported by the respondents as well. In all project countries, the majority of the respondents often see trolling on the internet-- in Slovakia, more than 64%, in Bosnia and Herzegovina more than three thirds, while in Lebanon almost 60%. Due to the improvement of trolling as a threat in the online sphere, the youth can quickly identify the content.

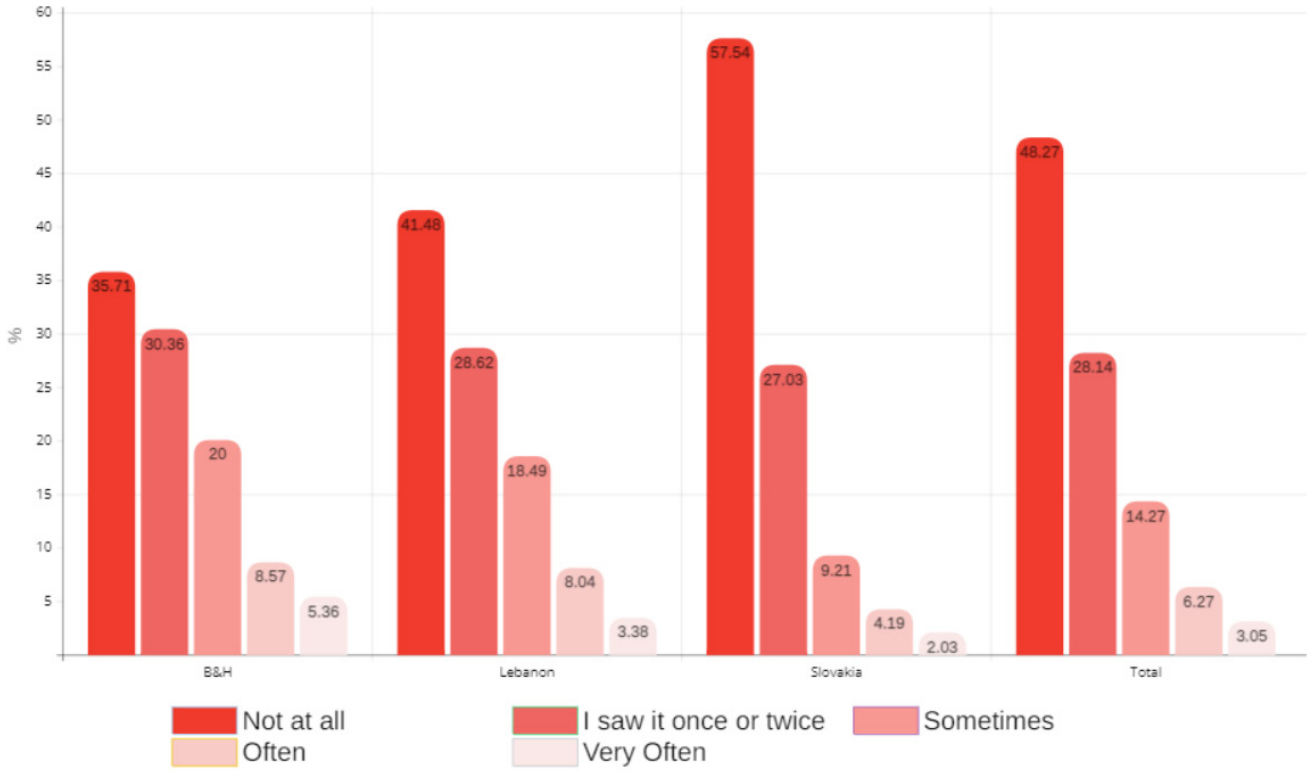
Recommendation: strengthen the awareness on troll activities.

Sexual violent content (rape, phsycal abuse, child pornography, hardcore pornography) - in forms of photos or videos



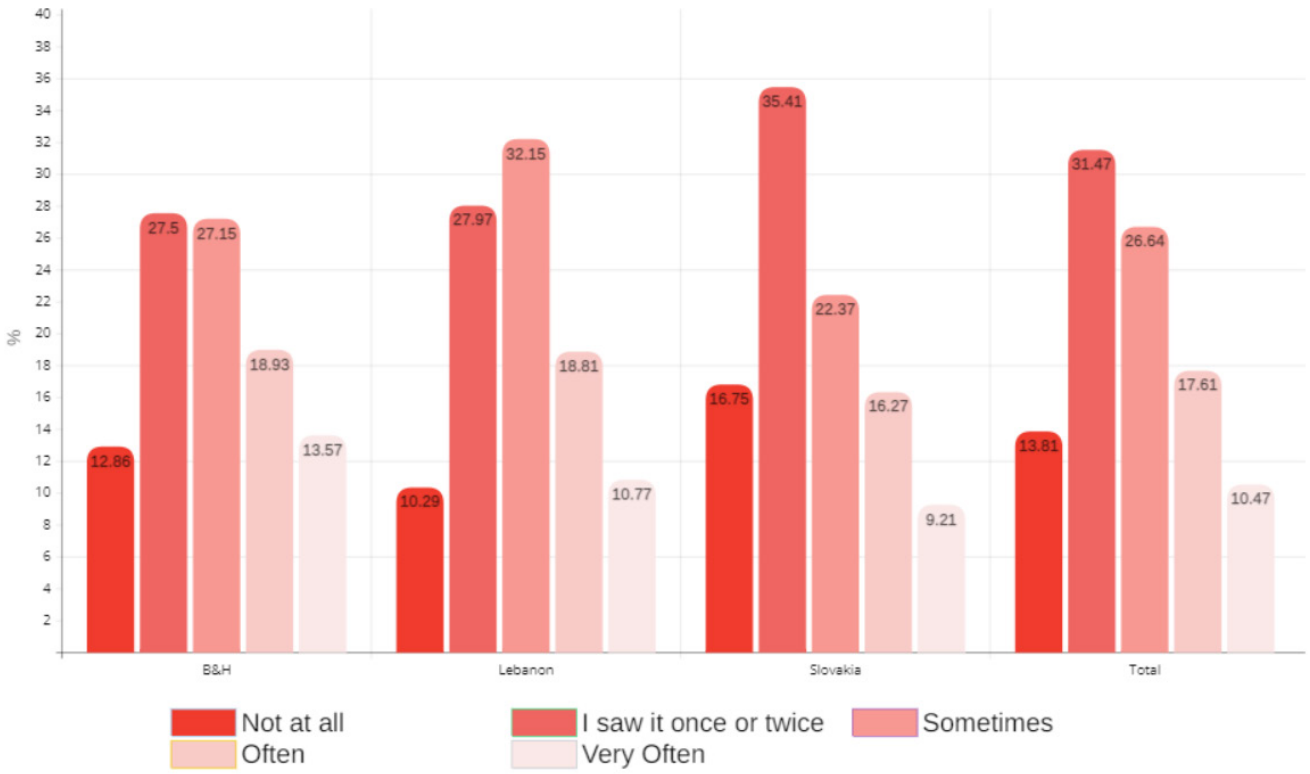
Unsolicited sexually explicit content online was experienced by around 60% of surveyed young people from all three project countries.

Encouraging posts to commit suicide or self-harm



Slightly over half of the surveyed young people experienced posts encouraging them to commit suicide or self-harm. The young people from Bosnia and Herzegovina reported the most severe such attempts – around 65%, Lebanon approximately 58%, and Slovakia about 42%. Social media giants such as Facebook and Instagram are stepping up to fight the trend by identifying and deleting automatically posts that promote self-harm and suicide. Other platforms are searching for a reliable technological tool that would fight such content online.

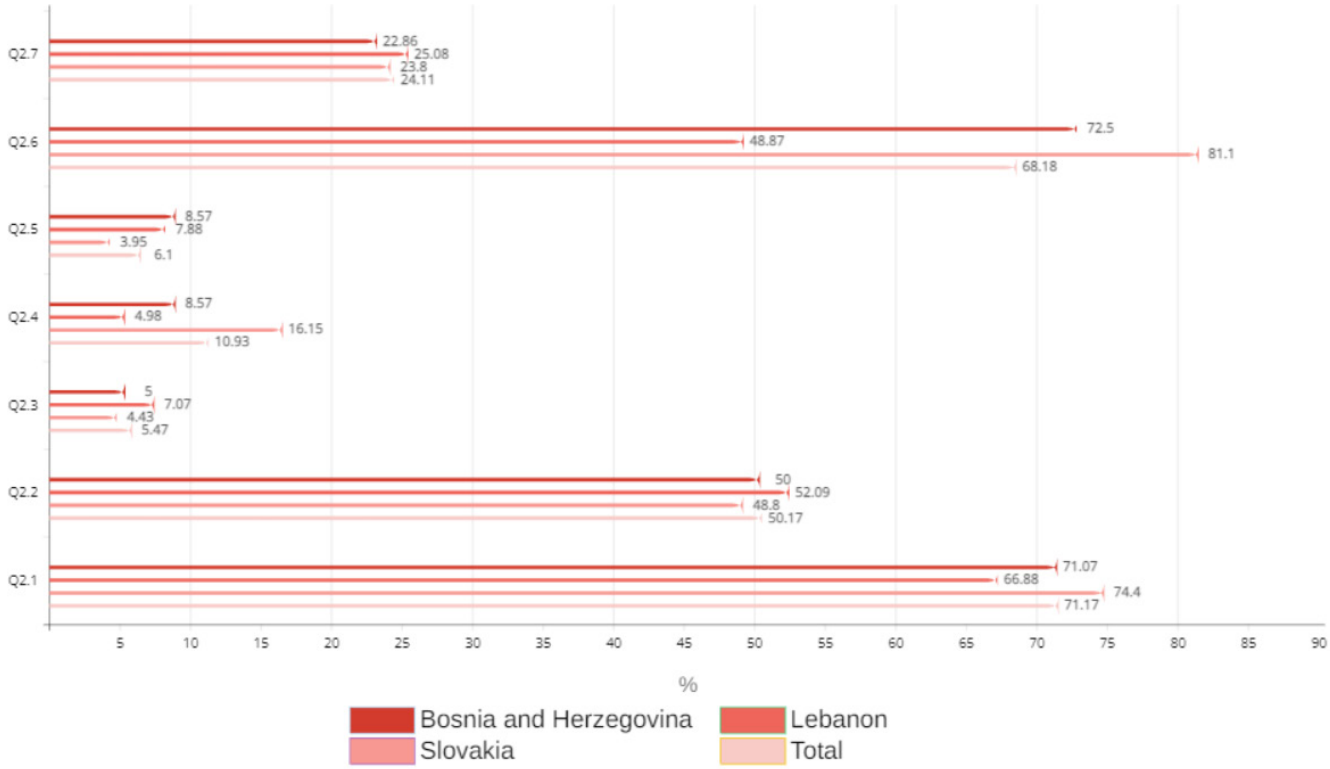
Harming and torturing animals



Authorities and law-makers reflect on the global trend to protect and respect animal rights in all project countries. Content displaying harming and torturing animals often contribute to the desensitization of violence in the online domain. Online, such content is quite common based on the data gathered from our respondents, more than 61% in Lebanon comes across such content “sometimes”, “often” and “very often”. This number is almost 60% in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while almost less than 50% in Slovakia.

Perceptions of the society

Q2: I believe that (choose multiple)

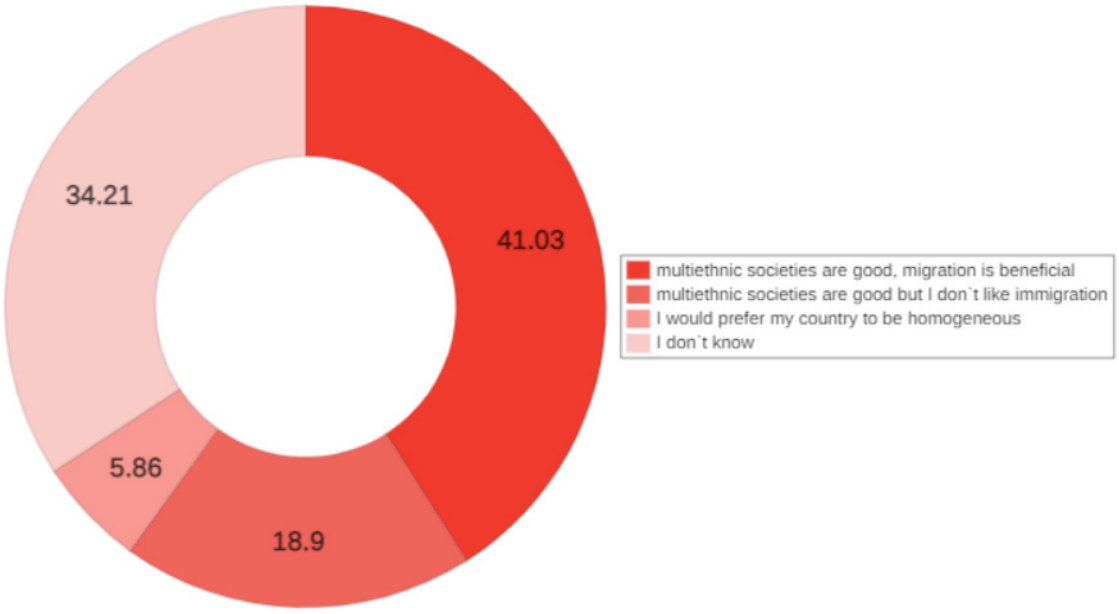


Q2.7 - people around me (my family, friends, acquaintances) think that some people are better than others, based on their birth, race or ethnicity.
Q2.6 - some people can break the laws and rules and that is NOT okay
Q2.5 - some people can break the laws and rules and that is okay
Q2.4 - the laws and rules in my country treat everyone equally
Q2.3 - some people are better than others by birth (based on ethnicity, religion, race...)
Q2.2 - although every person is equal, some have greater privileges than others (based on money, talent, knowledge, family background, other characteristics). Not everyone can achieve their goals with hard work
Q2.1 - every person is equal, anyone can achieve their goals with hard work

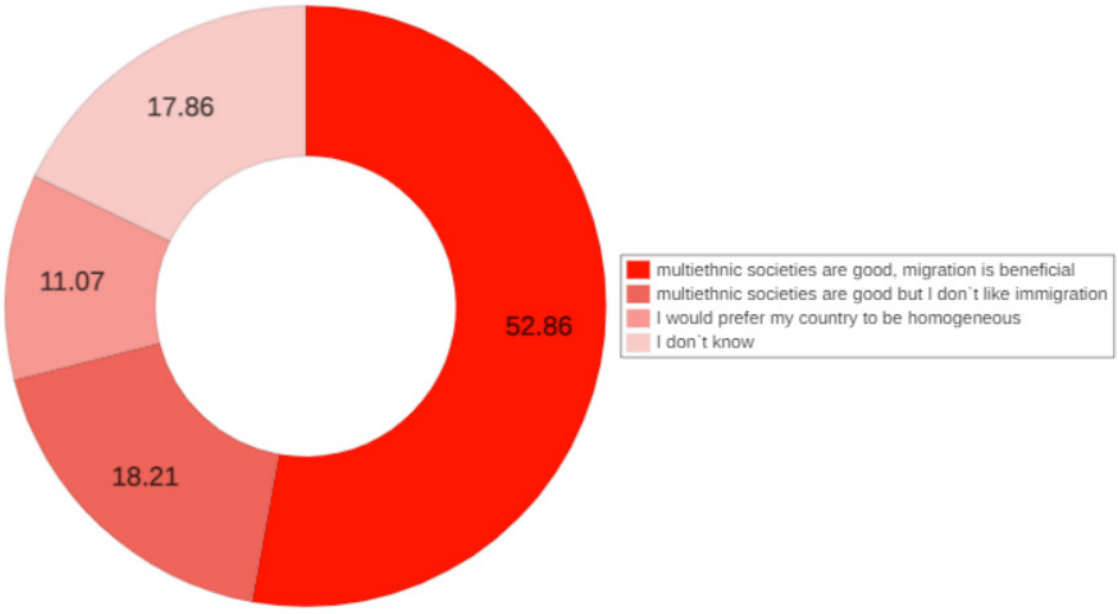
Surveyed young people from all three project countries believe that people are born equal, and the rules and laws should treat people as such. Also, they tend to think that with hard work, they can achieve their goals in life. They also stand the opinion that, in general, society should support social mobility to achieve equality among women and men. At the same time, they indicated in their responses that there are people that are privileged based on their wealth, talent, knowledge, family background or other characteristics. Therefore, they recognize the rules and laws and think it is not OK to break them (over 81% of young Slovaks, 72,5% youngsters from BIH, and just over 48% from Lebanon.

Q3:

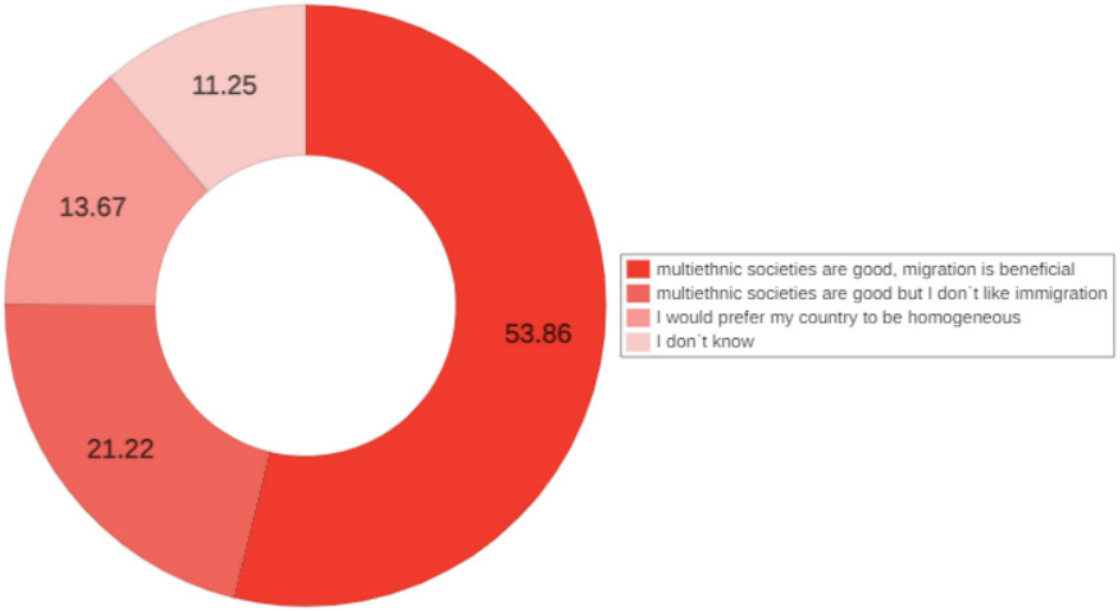
Slovakia



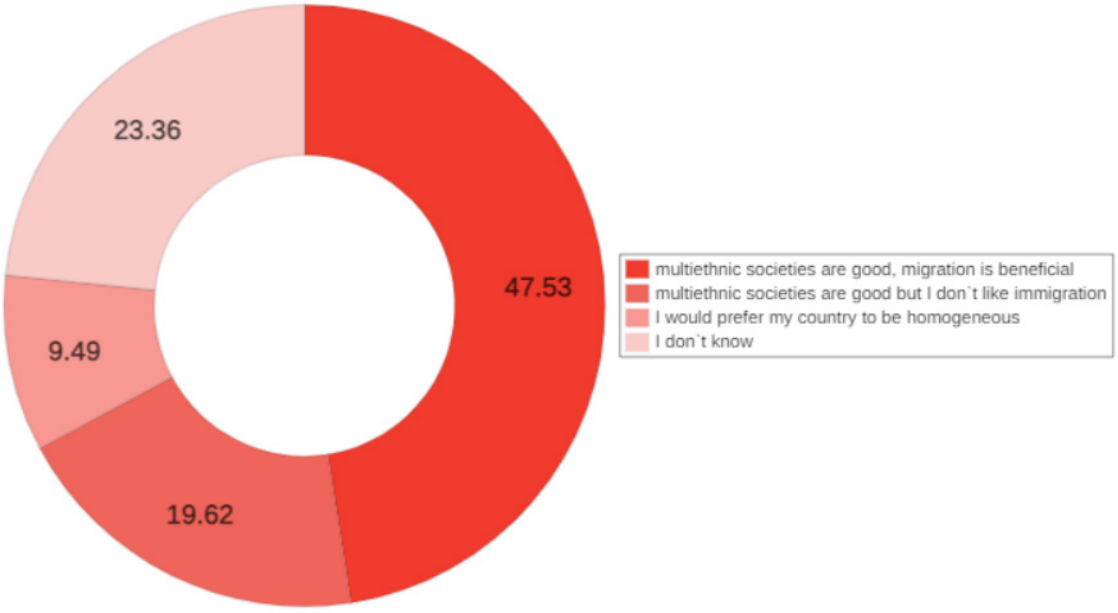
Bosnia and Herzegovina



Lebanon



Total

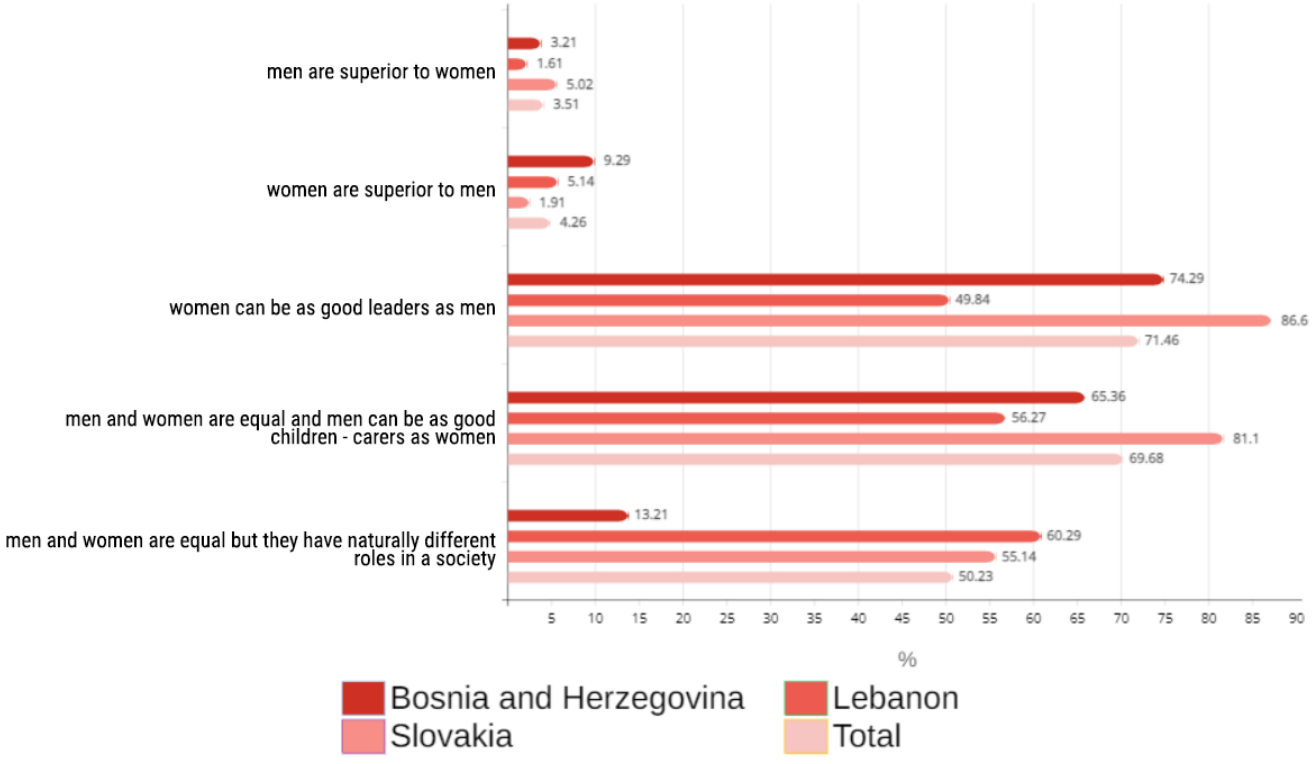


One of the underlying factors that can lead to radicalization leading to violent extremism is the inability to embrace diversity. Extremist groups oppose the values of democratic societies such as inclusion, tolerance and multiculturalism and multiethnicity. The aim of the study was to map the attitudes towards multiethnic societies, to identify the degree of vulnerability of the youth in the selected project countries.

Surveyed young people tend to support the multiethnic society, though there are some differences. Quite a significant portion of young people from Slovakia – over 34% - could not answer whether a multiethnic society is positive or negative. Slovakia is a relatively ethnically homogenous country, and as also the survey shows, young people do not think that much about issues related to the multiethnic society. Whereas both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Lebanon are very diverse and multiethnic countries with concrete state structures - both official and unofficial – the young responders had made up their mind on the issue of multiethnic state (nearly 53% or almost 54% respectively positive perception).

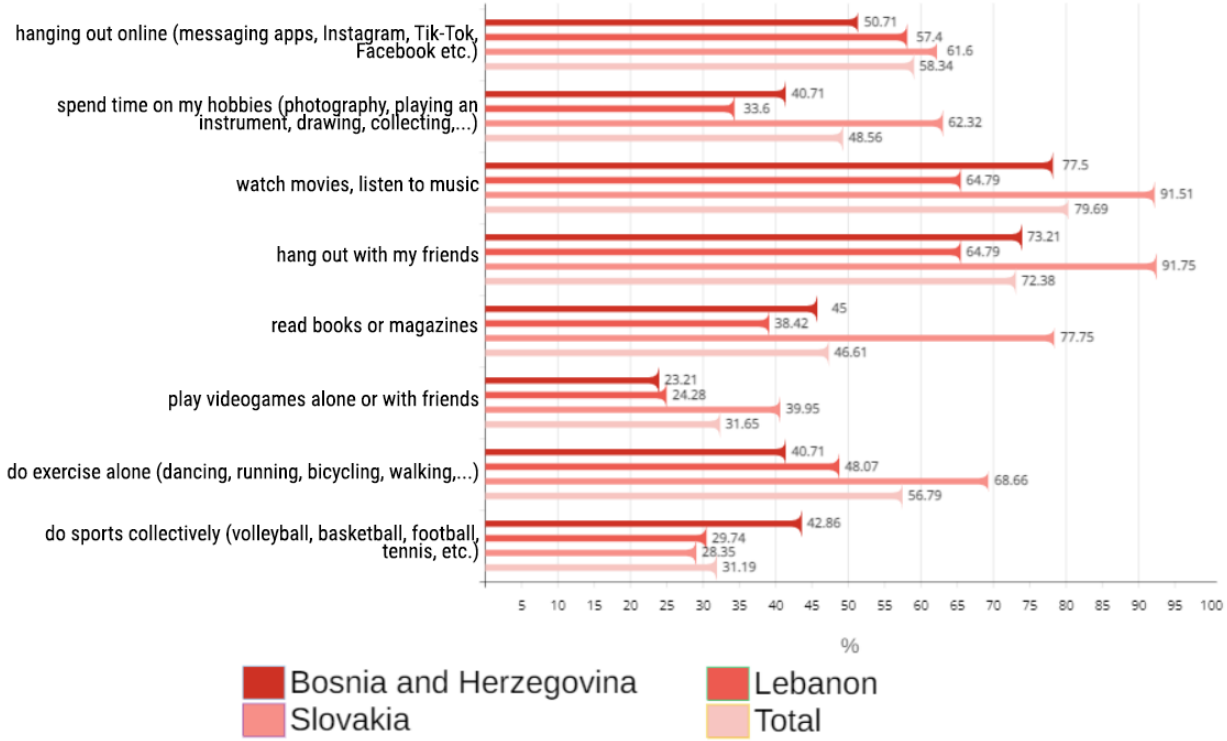
Almost half of the respondents believe that multiethnic societies are good and migration is beneficial. These results could stem from their positive experience with other ethnicities and migrants in their country. The attitude of the youth in this question was also further mapped in Q39, which reaffirmed the trend that the youth embrace diversity - the majority of respondents would befriend someone with a different ethnic background, country of origin, sexual orientation, economic background, etc.

Q4: I believe that (choose multiple)



The graph shows that the vast majority of respondents support gender equality and equal career and childcare opportunities for both genders. Only a fraction of respondents share a patriarchal worldview. Surveyed young people have, on average, quite balanced views on the roles of men and women in society in terms of roles and equality.

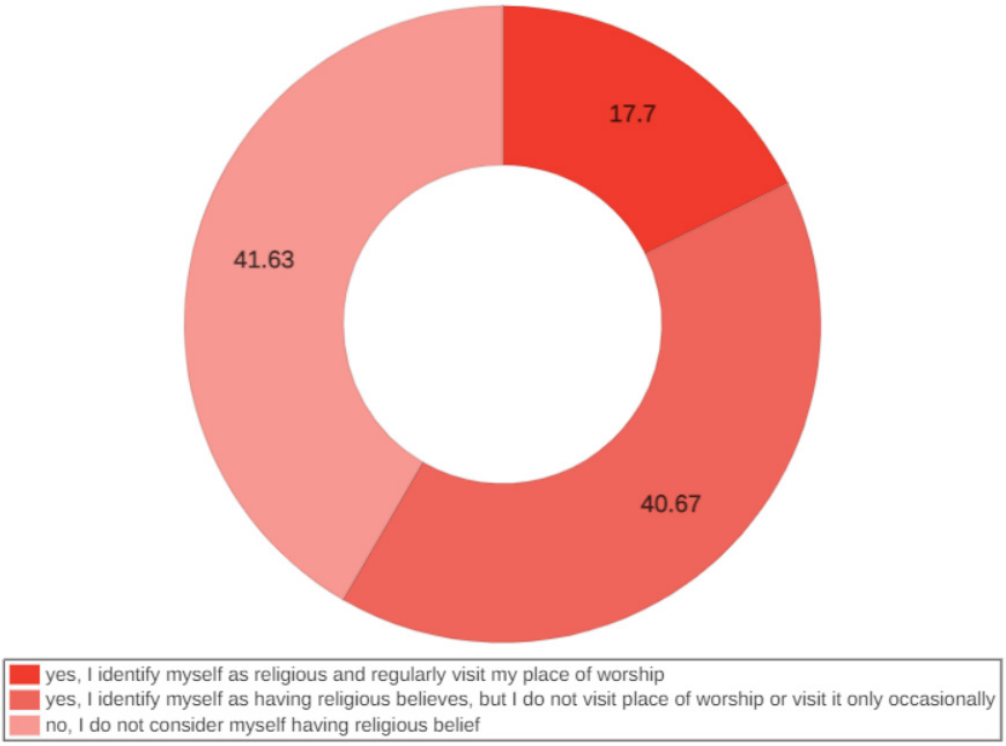
Q5: In my freetime i like to (choose multiple):



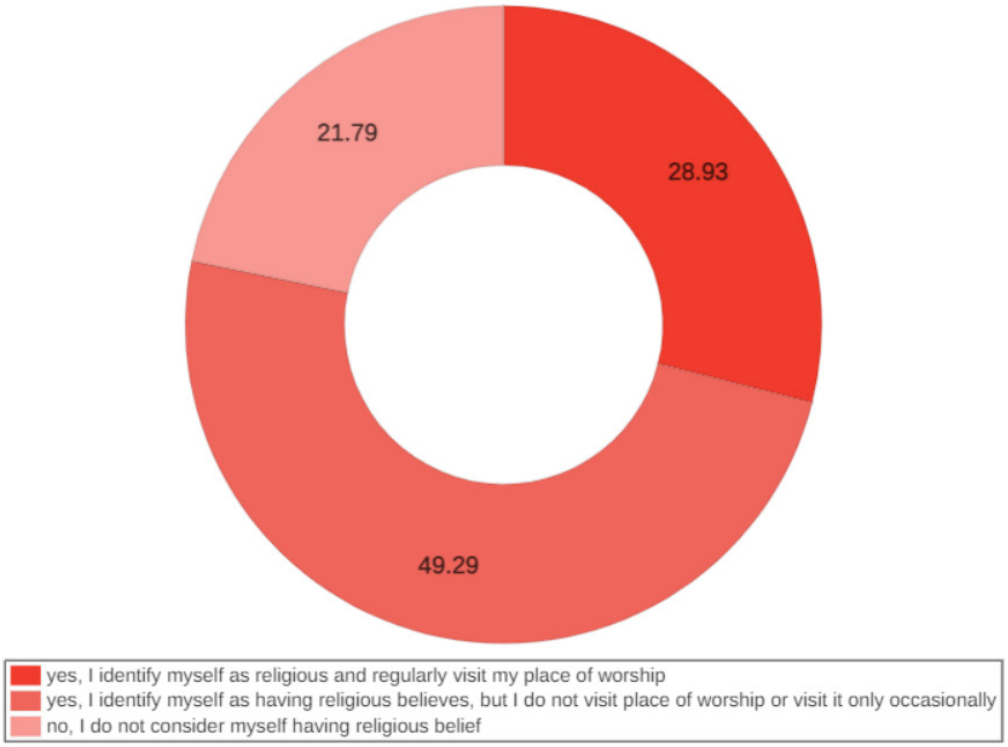
When young people were asked to describe how they spend their free time, most of them watch movies or listen to music, hanging out with friends would come in second before doing individual sports activities. The ongoing pandemics might have influenced these results since during the data-collection lockdowns, restrictions and social distancing were implemented in the project countries to mitigate the spread of the COVID19 virus.

Q6:

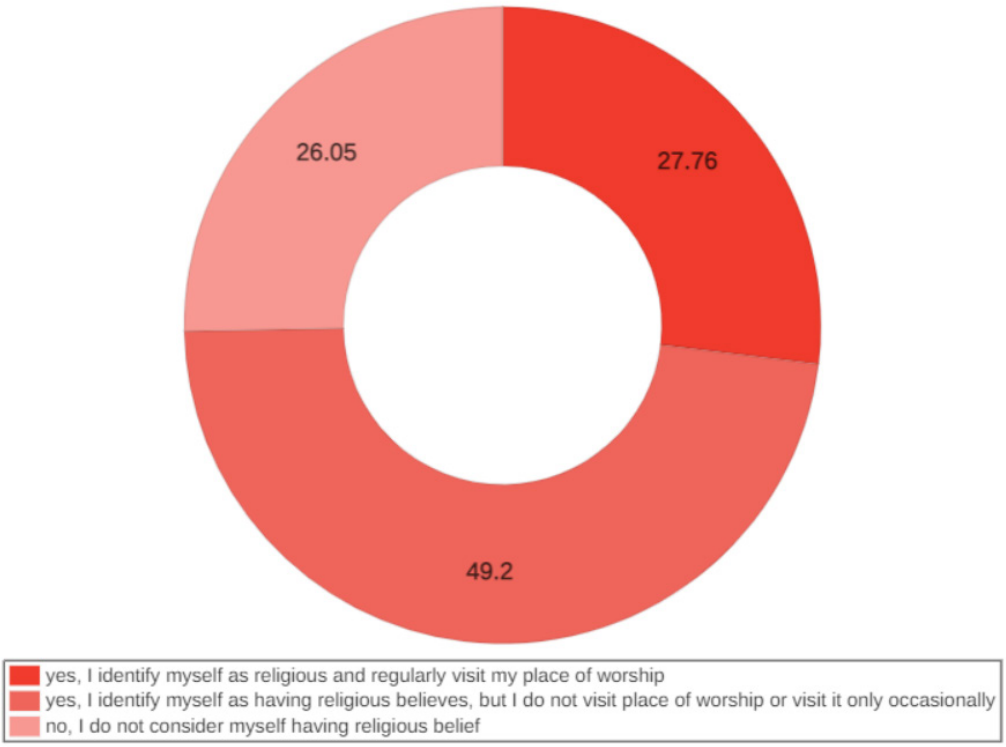
Slovakia



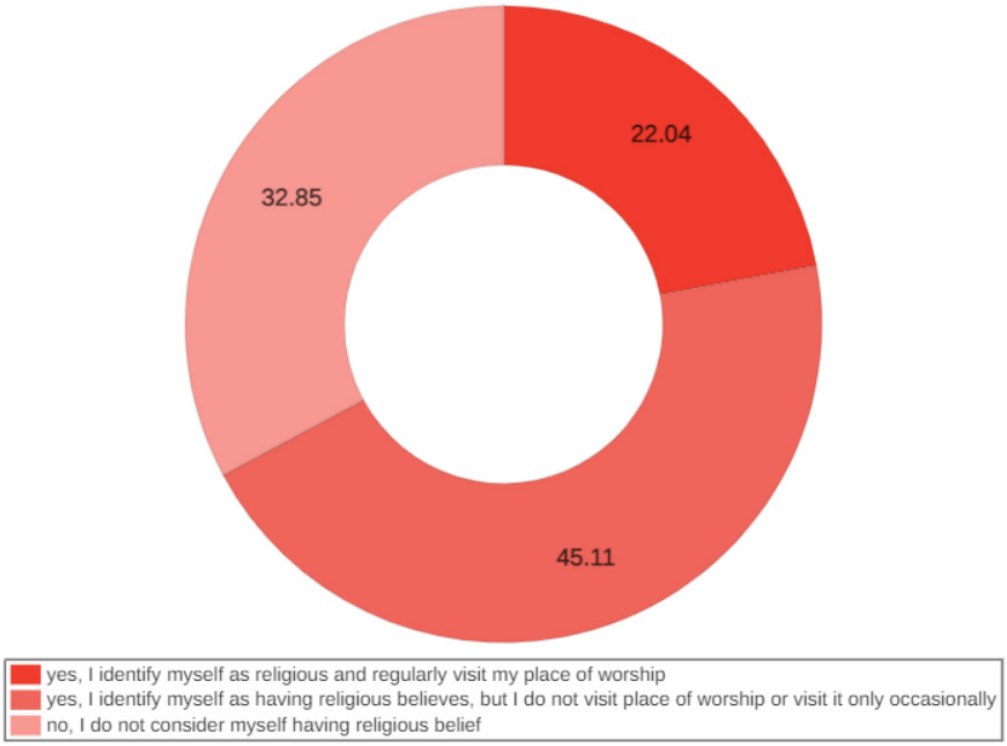
Bosnia and Herzegovina



Lebanon



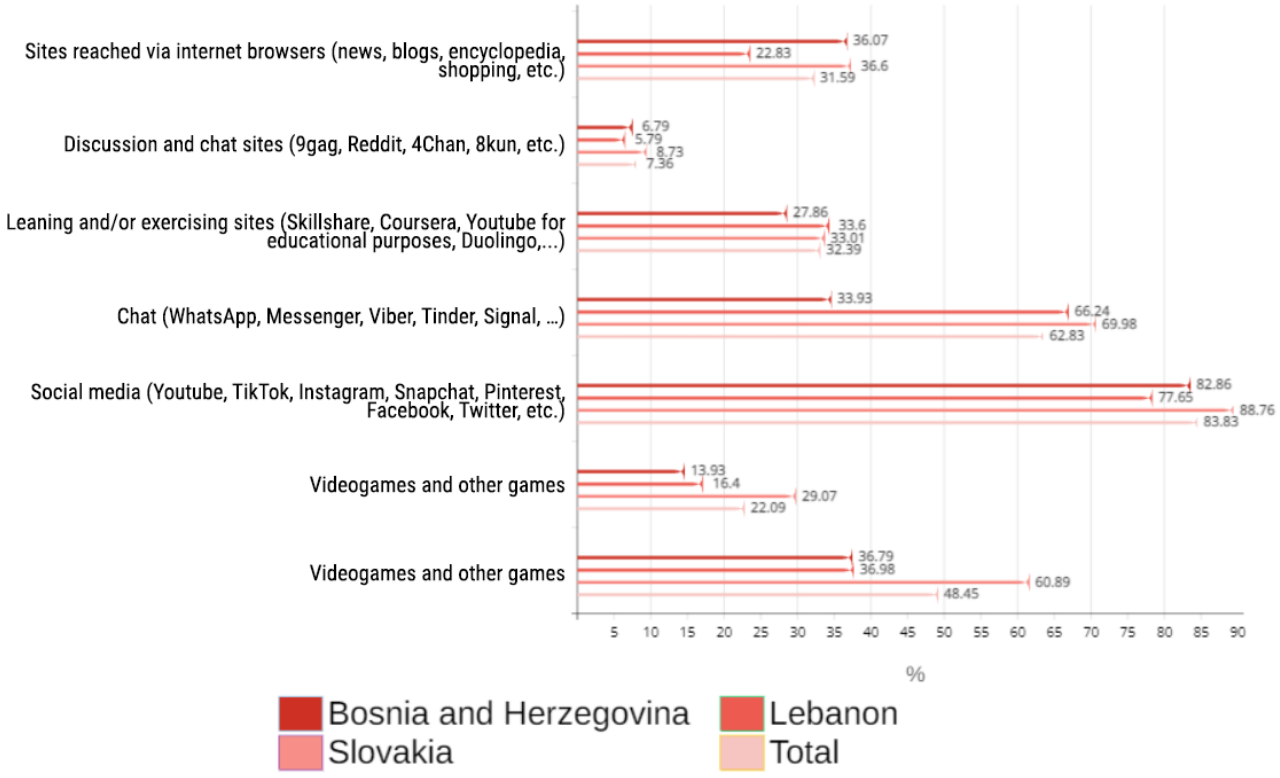
Total



In terms of religious beliefs, over 58% of young Slovaks consider themselves religious, though only nearly 18% actively attend religious services in places of worship. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, over 78% surveyed young people declared having religious beliefs and almost 29% also regularly participate in religious services. In Lebanon, nearly 74% of surveyed young people responded as having religious beliefs, and of those, almost 25% regularly attend religious services in places of worship. Based on responses of the young participants, Slovakia is the least religious of the three project countries (with nearly 42% of young people not identifying themselves with any religion).

Internet access and use:

Q7: Where do you spend most of your time when online (choose multiple)

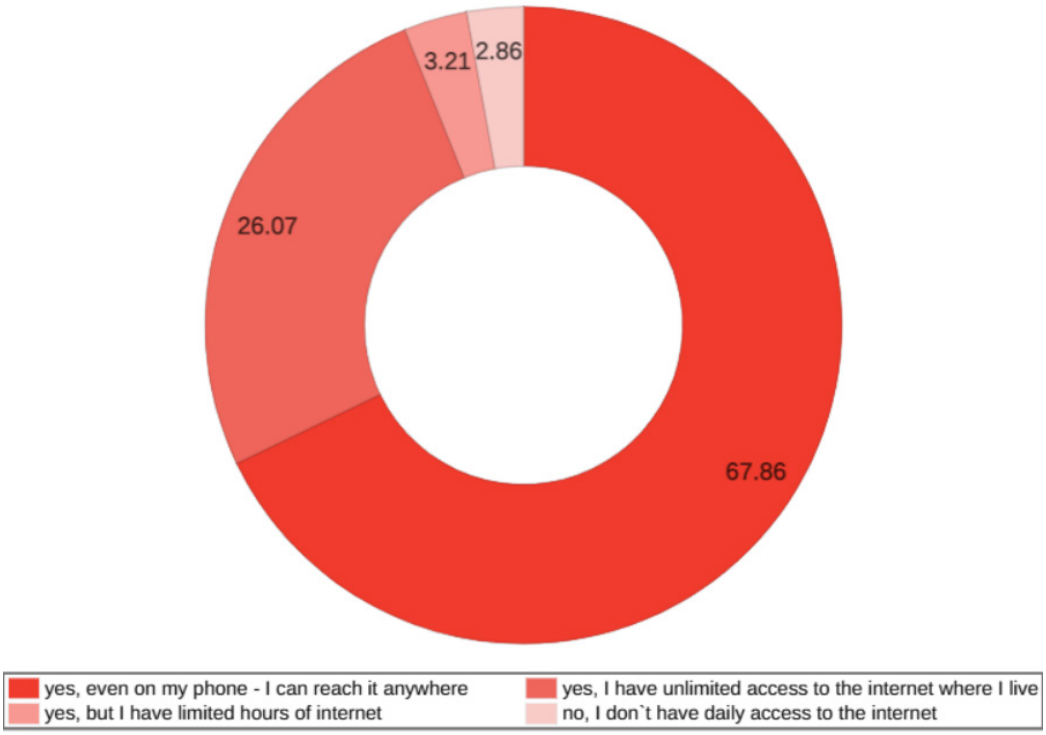


As the survey shows, most of the time young people spend on the internet using social media (Slovakia nearly 89%, BIH over 82%, Lebanon almost 78%). They share that time using communication apps and platforms, and only in the third place is the internet use for work or school purposes. On the other hand, discussion platforms – some of which are well-known for peddling disinformation and fake news, are being visited just by a tiny portion of surveyed young people.

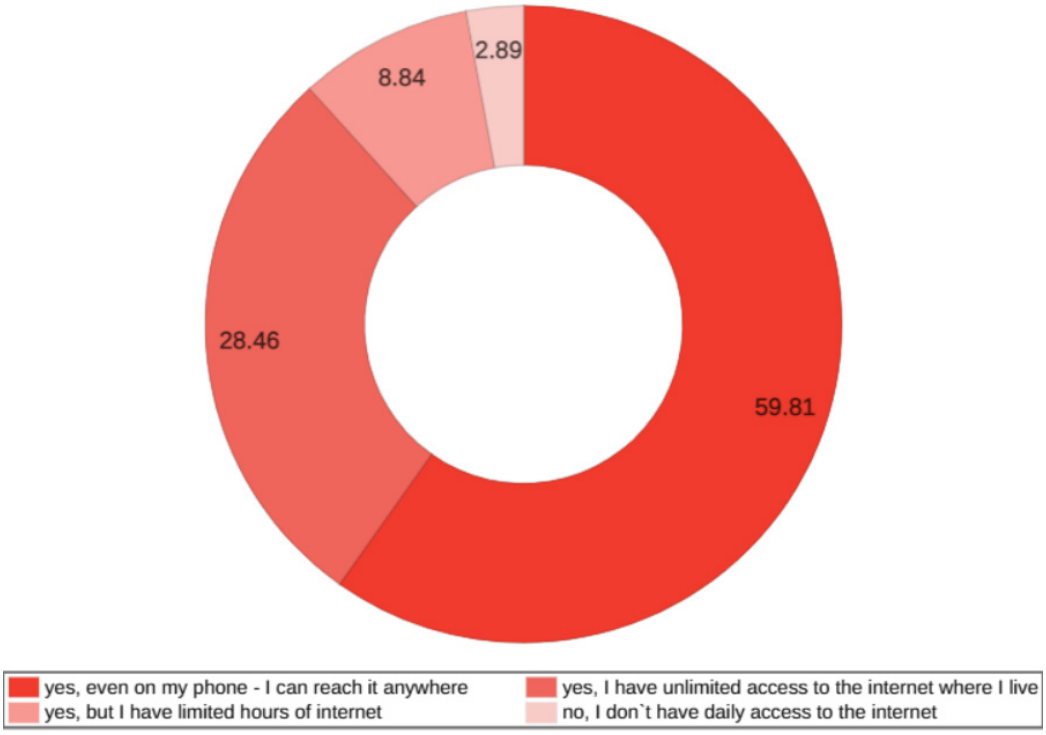
Therefore, questioning social media content is an essential request in today's society since youth spend most of their time there. But, unfortunately, the content they come across via social media (see Q1) is often questionable.

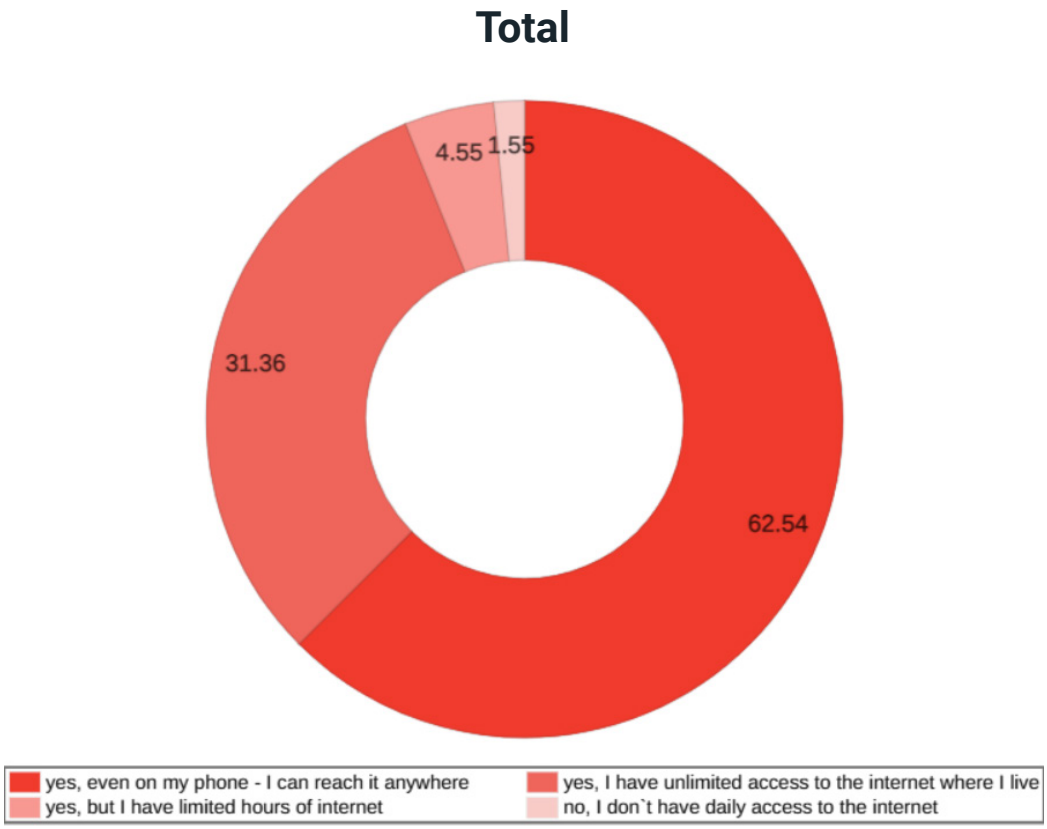
Q8:

Bosnia and Herzegovina



Lebanon

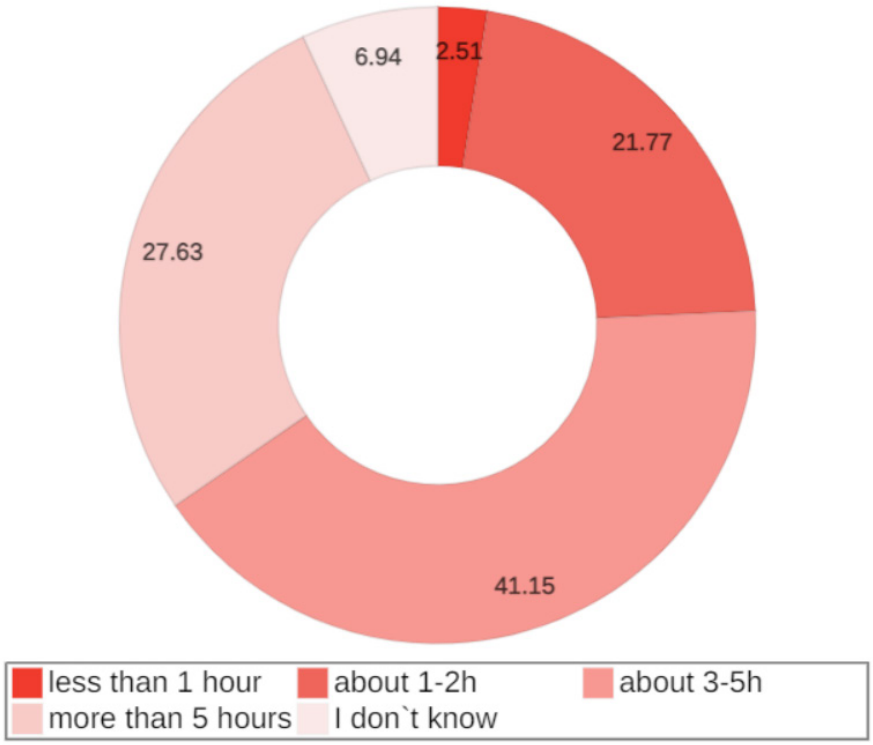




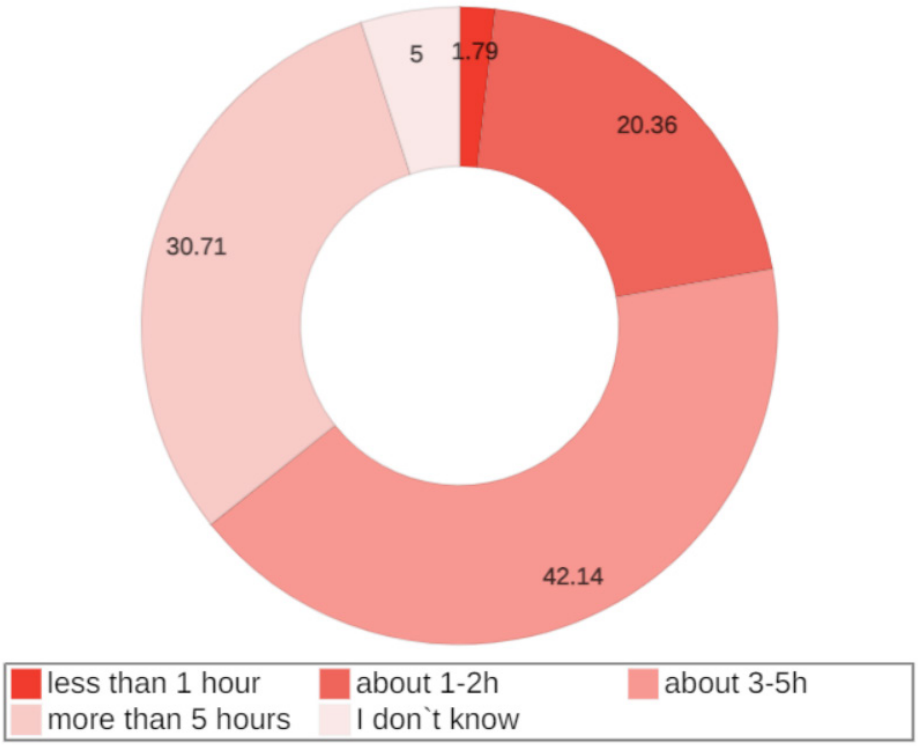
The majority of respondents have unlimited access to the internet. That could have positive and negative effects. First, they can find information quickly. But, on the other hand, they are exposed to harmful content practically constantly.

Q9: How much time do you usually spend on the internet apart from your school and/or working obligations (choose one)?

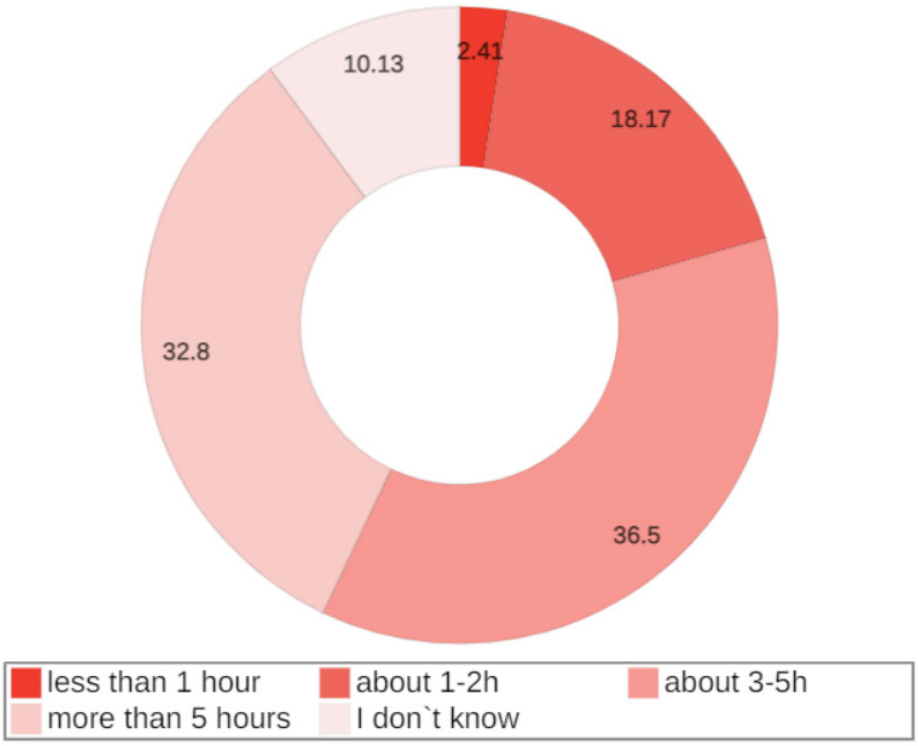
Slovakia



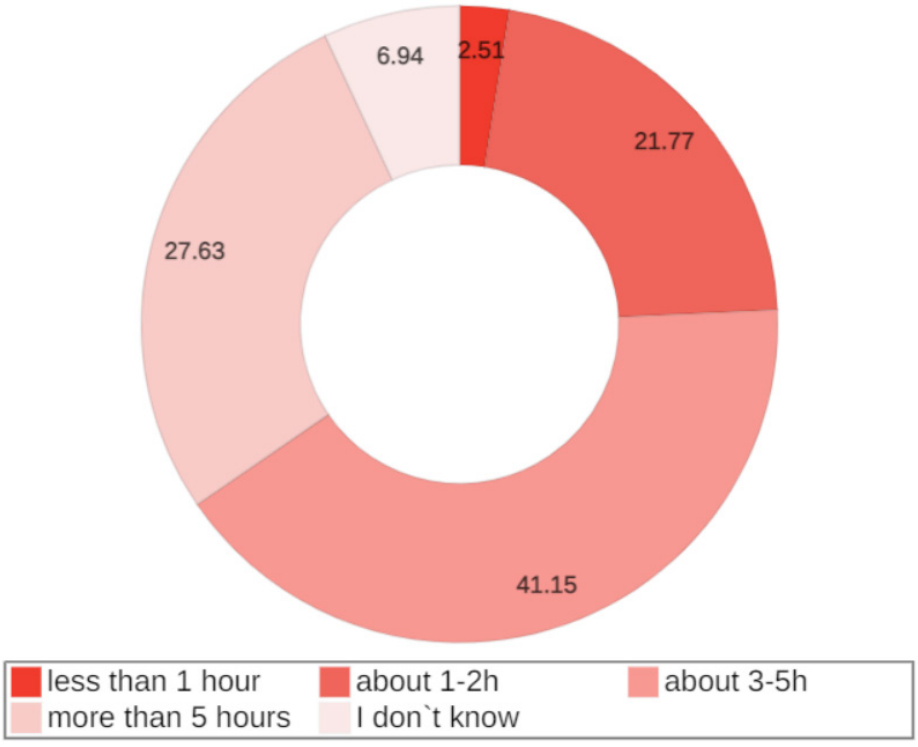
Bosnia and Herzegovina



Lebanon

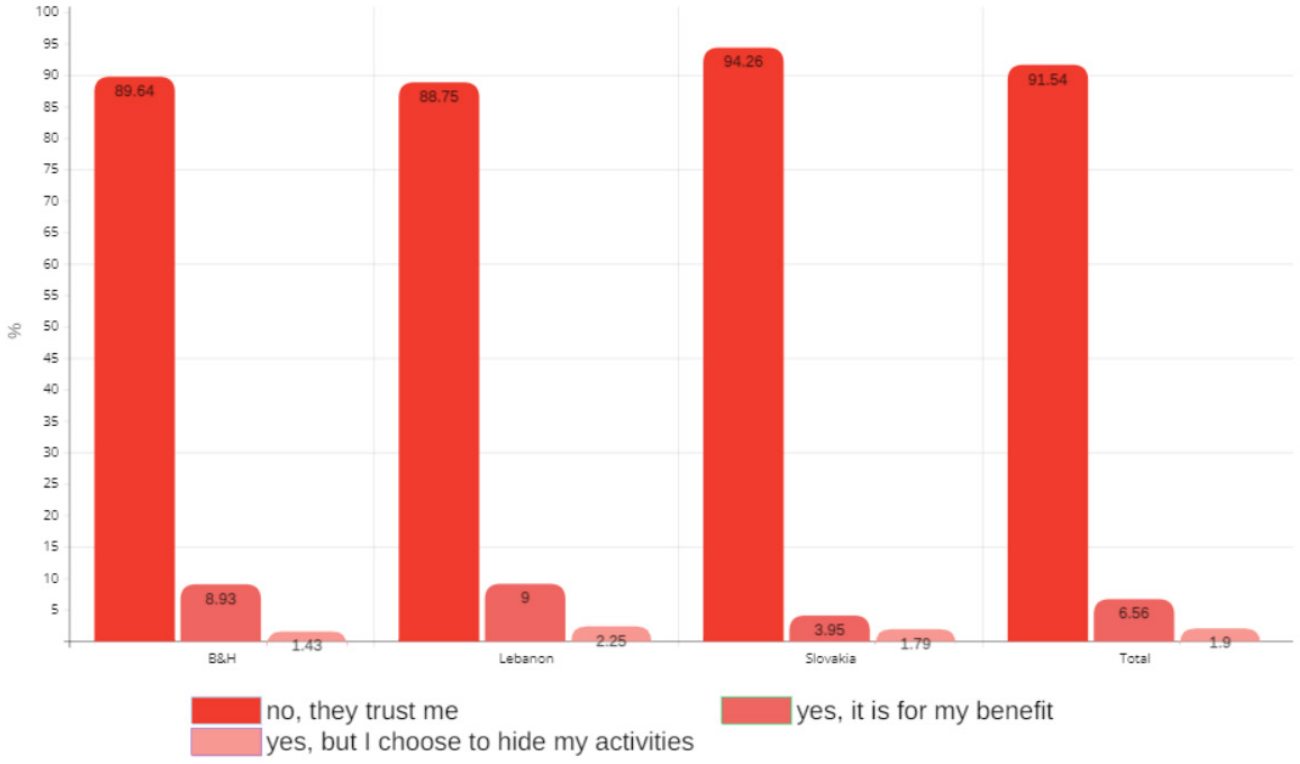


Total



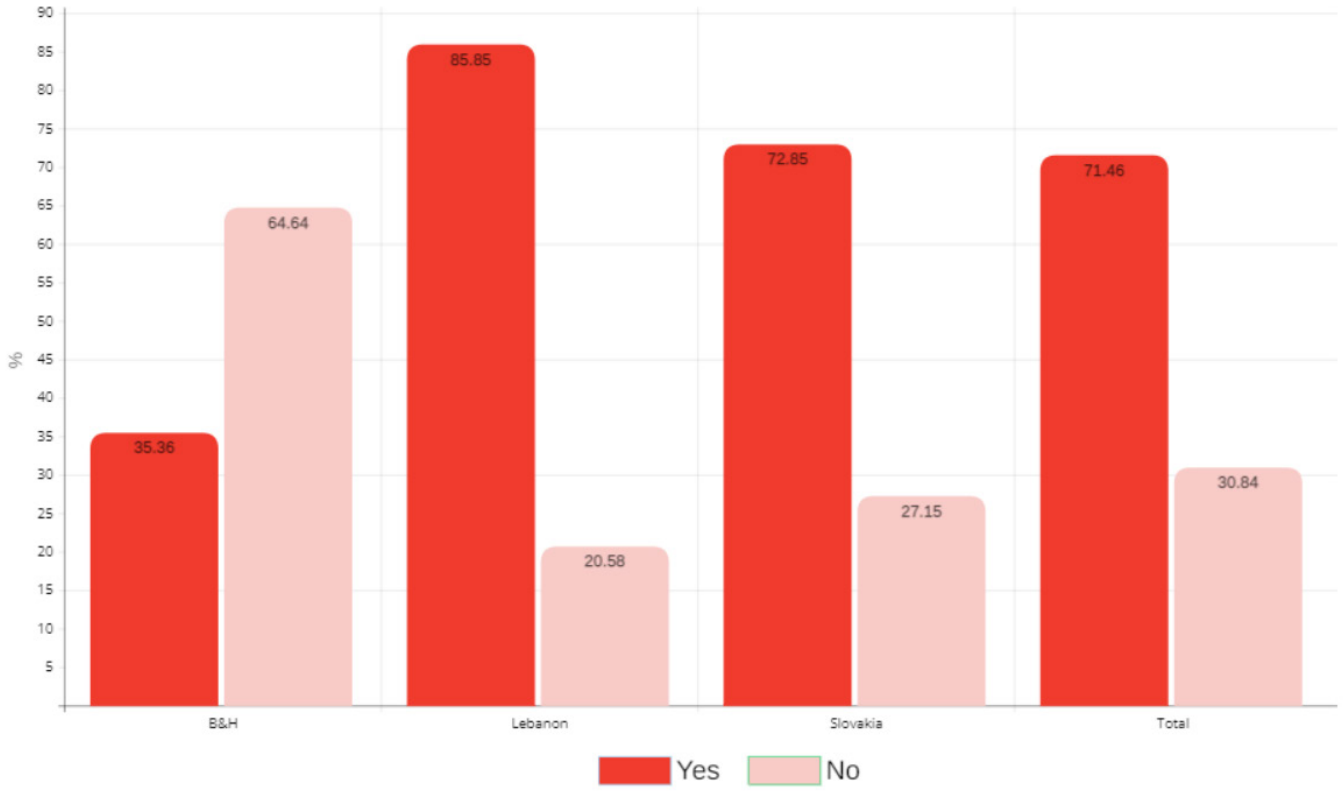
Overall young people have good access to the internet in all project countries – usually at the tip of their fingers in their cellphones. And they are its very active users – on average spending more than 3 hours a day on the internet with overall nearly one-third of surveyed young people that spend on the internet more than 5 hours a day. That means they are practically constantly at the source of various information and nearly regularly exposed to potential threats from the internet. The questioned youth spends three to more than five hours on the internet. Therefore, such a portion of time makes it more possible to come across harmful content.

Q11: Is anyone supervising your online activities (choose one)?



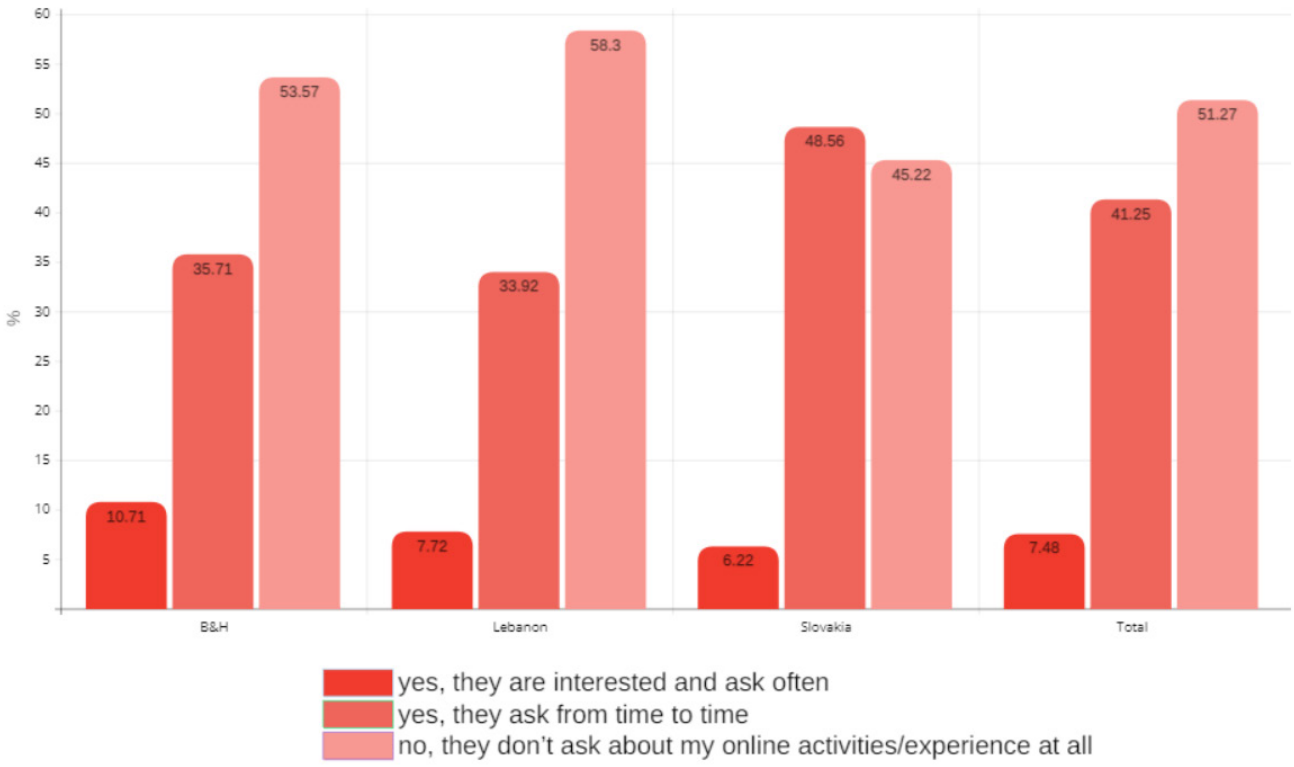
As this graph shows, the youth´s online activities are not controlled or supervised, making them vulnerable to harmful content.

Q12: Do you have to follow rules set by your parents/guardians that you can or cannot do online (choose one)?



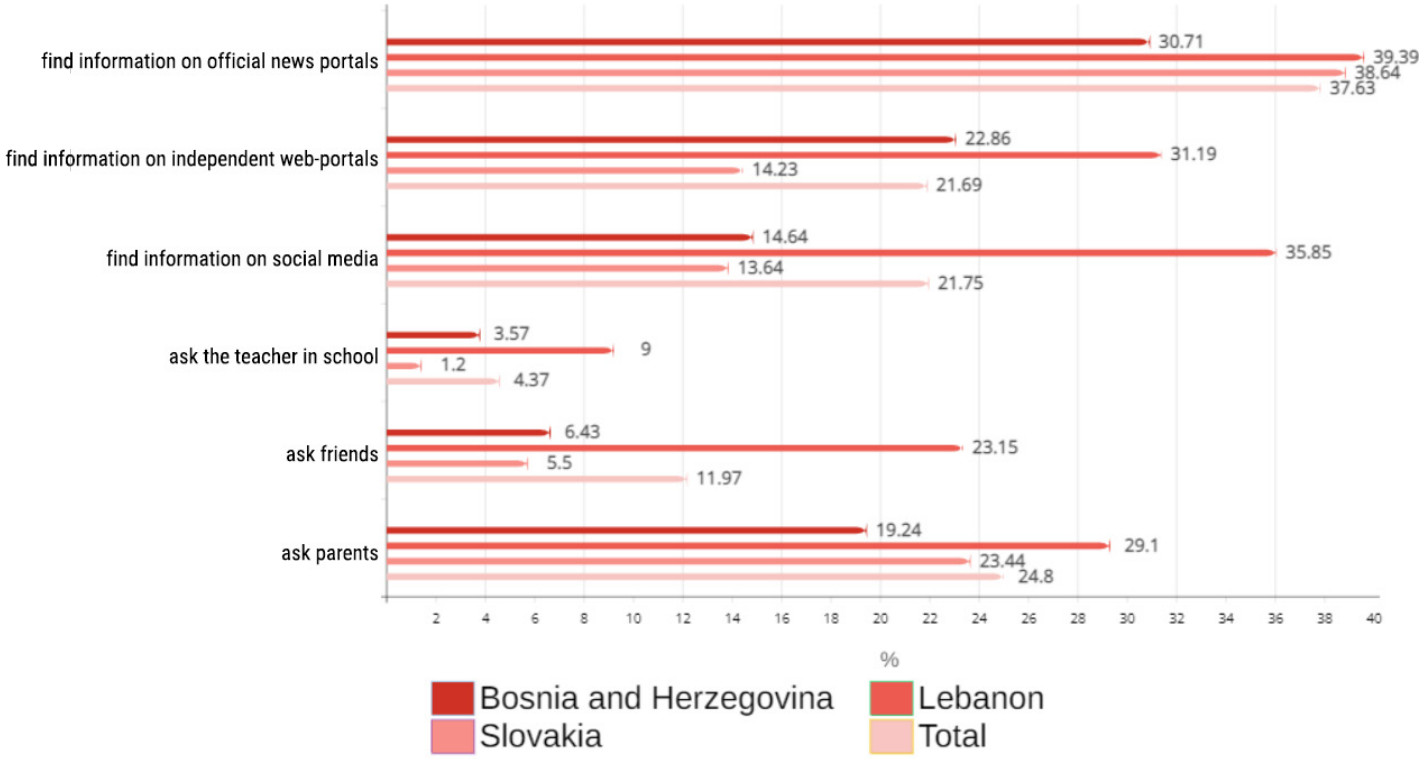
Given the age group of the survey, the majority of the respondents were legally adults or close to the age of legal adulthood, which is 18 years in all project countries. Most of the surveyed young people declared that they are not being supervised by anybody, neither parents nor legal guardians. On the contrary, they reported that they trust their parents/legal guardians in terms of internet usage. Only a tiny percentage of surveyed young people admitted having supervised time on the internet, with approximately 9% of young people from Lebanon, over 6,5% from BIH, and less than 4% in Slovakia claiming it was for their good. On average, 2% of surveyed young people from all three project countries admitted hiding their internet activities from parents or legal guardians

Q13: Do your parents/guardians or teachers ask you about the online activities or experience (choose one)?

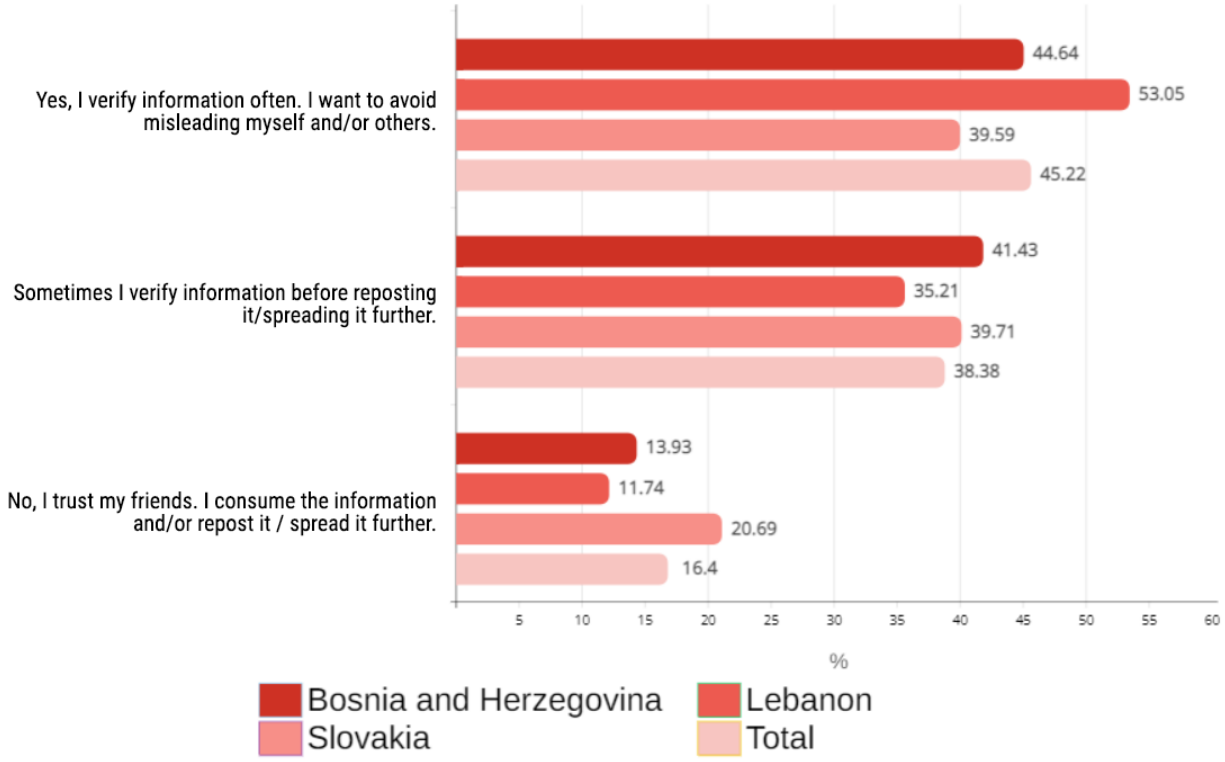


Again, the respondents´ answers show that they are not controlled in their online activities - which provides plenty of chances to come across harmful content without the knowledge of parents or authorities. When asked whether they have to follow specific rules on the internet set out for them by their parents or legal guardians, approximately two-thirds answered that they have particular rules that they should obey. At the same time, one-third declared they do not have to mind any restrictions while on the internet. When asked further whether their parents or legal guardians are actively discussing with them their online activity/experience, slightly over half of the interviewed young people replied their parents/legal guardians are not asking about their activity/experience online. On average, around 7,5% of parents/legal guardians of surveyed young people regularly discuss their activity online, while approximately 41% of them discuss it from time to time.

Q14: When you want to learn something new or understand what is going on in the world around you, you would (choose multiple):



Q15: When your friends or family share something on their social media, a post or information, do you verify it? (choose one)?



The youth primarily seek information on the internet. On the one hand, it is beneficial as most of the reliable sources are reachable there. On the other hand, the negative side of this phenomenon is that along with reliable sources, radical and extreme sources of information are also available to the youth.

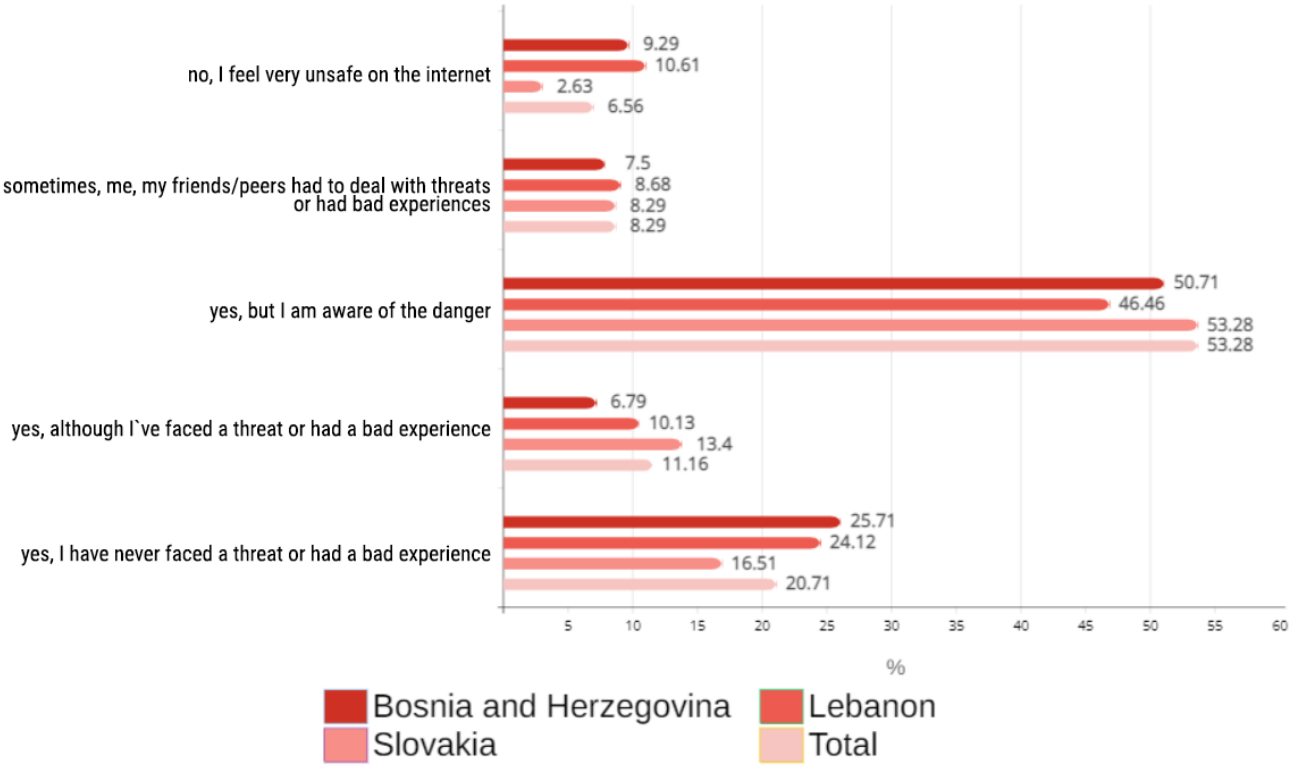
Although official news portals seem to be leading among young people from all three project countries when they search for information about what is going on around them in the world, „independent" web portals scored relatively high too. They are followed by social media as the source of information. Therefore the combination of verification of information and promoting critical thinking is crucial.

Based on the responses of surveyed young people, it seems that they prefer to verify the information they receive or verify them at least sometimes. That is encouraging and probably is a merit of anti-disinformation campaigns in the project countries. However, on average more than 16% of surveyed people claimed that they trust their friends and automatically, without verification, repost/retweet/ share on their social media what their friends posted.

Recommendation: train the youth how to interpret the content, avoid disinformation threats, further stress the need for verification of information, and teach critical thinking.

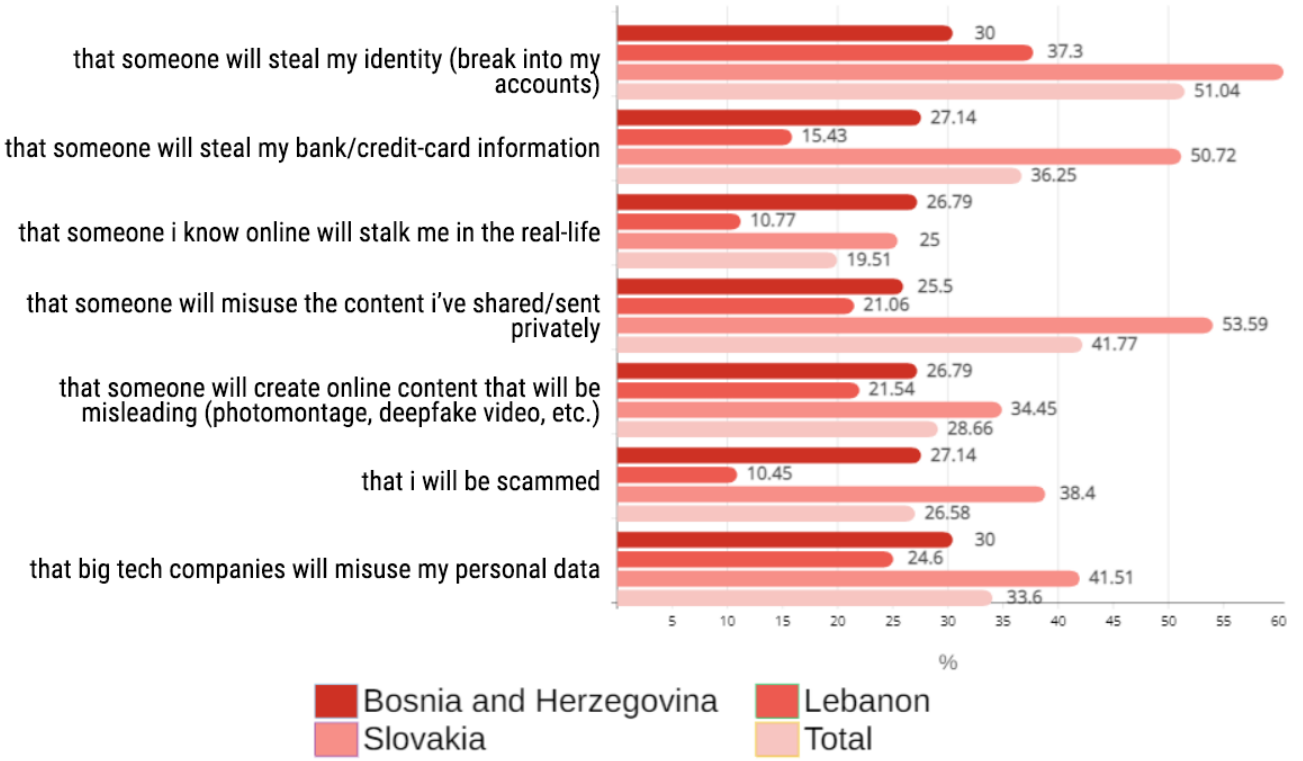
Safety

Q16: Do you feel safe while online? (choose one)?



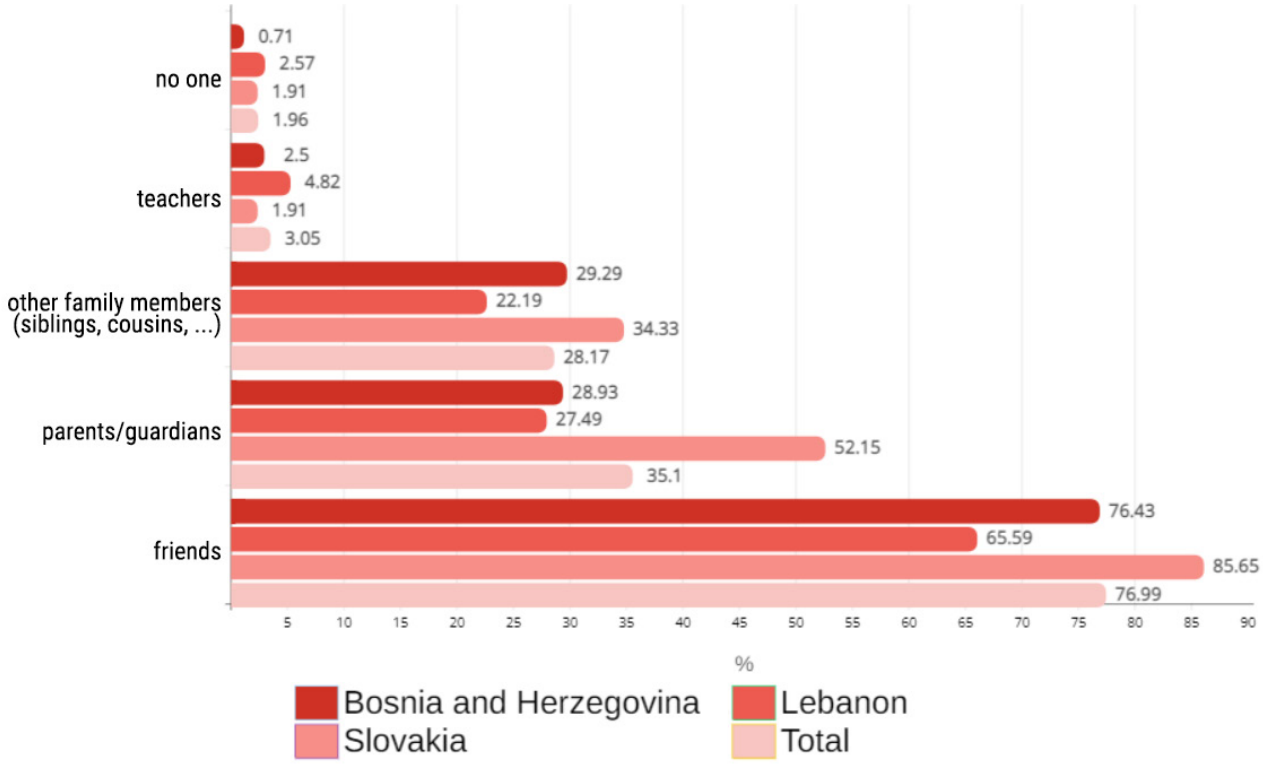
The youth is mostly feeling safe on the internet. But, what is more, they simultaneously understand that they can be receivers of dangerous information there. According to the survey the young people are confident on the internet – they mostly feel safe but claim that they are aware of potential threats. The Slovak respondents were the most confident, though, at the same time, there was the highest number of respondents that reported terrible experiences on the internet, too. The highest number of young people that don't feel safe on the internet (over 10% of respondents) were from Lebanon. On average in all three project countries, the majority of the respondents never faced a threat on the internet. However, they are aware of the danger since the internet is a place where trouble might occur.

Q17: What concerns you while using the internet (choose multiple)?



Identity theft, breaking into one's account, and outing are the biggest concerns by the majority of respondents. They were followed by the fear that the big tech companies might misuse personal data. However, the interviewed young people were the least afraid of spilling malicious stalking from the online to real-life, though there were slight differences between the project countries, with young people from Lebanon the least concerned about this threat.

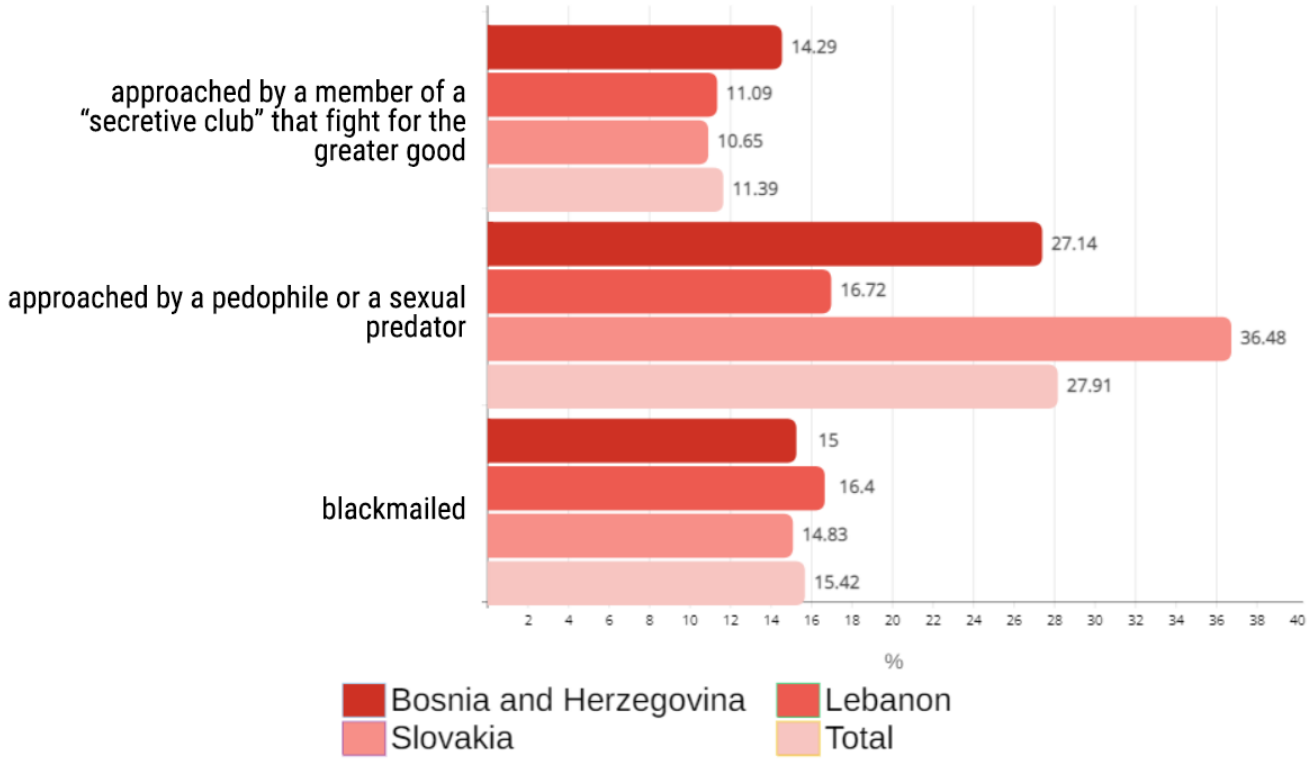
Q18: If something concerns you on the internet, who do you discuss it with (choose multiple)?



According to the surveyed young people, the first authority to turn to and discuss in case of a threat identified on the internet are friends. This is because friends are the first instance to go to for knowledge and discussions--it is easier to share something among friends and peers than to report it to the authorities such as teachers or parents.

Coupled with the lack of awareness concerning transferring the threat into real life (Q16) and sharing the negative experience only with friends instead of authorities is a worrying combination. While sharing negative experiences online with friends might contribute to their awareness. However, as a preventive measure not to fall into the trap of a concrete online predator, this does not solve the threat of online-based maliciously motivated individuals and groups seeking to misuse the young people and their trust as they could be adequately addressed only by the state authorities.

Q19: Have you ever been (choose multiple):



In 2019, the Internet Watch Foundation's Annual Report found that 9 out of 10 websites containing child sexual abuse are hosted by websites registered in Europe, Slovakia is one of the top 10 countries--hosting 6% of the content. Based on the report, the amount "self-generated" content of child abuse created via webcams is worryingly on the raise.

It is very worrying that almost one-third of the respondents replied that a pedophile or a sexual predator approached them. The so-called grooming, a phenomenon when usually an adult is building an emotional connection with the future intention of sexual abuse or exploitation, is present across all social media sites. Fake accounts are targeting inexperienced youth who cannot yet assess the risk. In addition, the trammels are often reduced while being online, making manipulation easier.

On average more than 15% of surveyed young people also admitted that they were being blackmailed online.

Recommendation: train the young people about internet security and what not to share online (once it's online, it stays online). Educate young people about the threats of grooming with that connected outing or blackmailing.

Democratic Processes and Participation

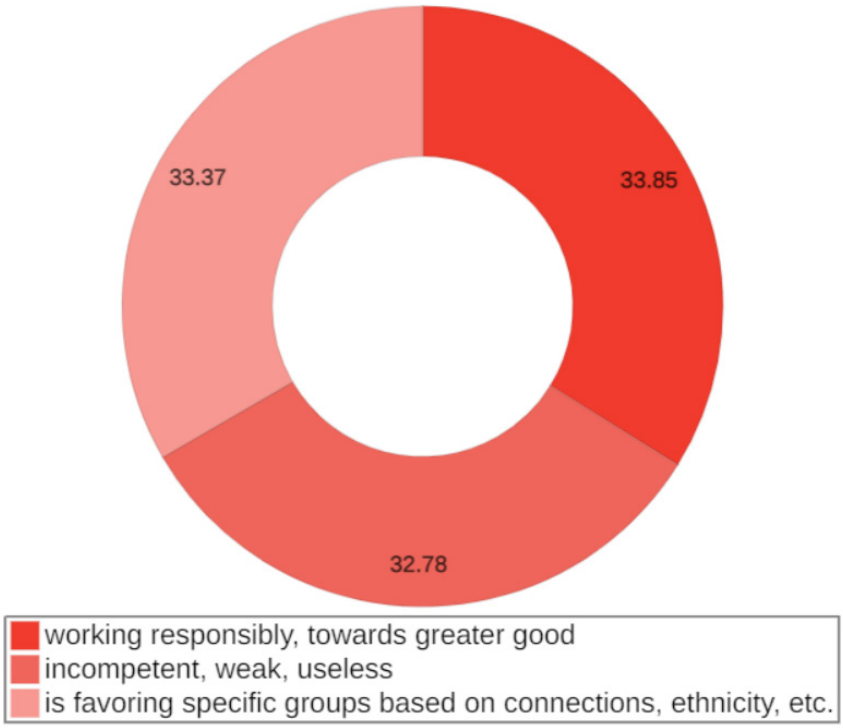
Q20: When elections come, I usually (choose one):

The target group was quite broad, including high-school students (especially in Slovakia), that do not vote yet, but the survey wanted to know their level of active involvement in the democratic processes. On average, the surveyed young people displayed a high level of citizens' engagement when it comes to elections. Also, those who identified themselves to be too young to vote showed interest in the democratic processes and are following what is going on around them with their parents or peers.

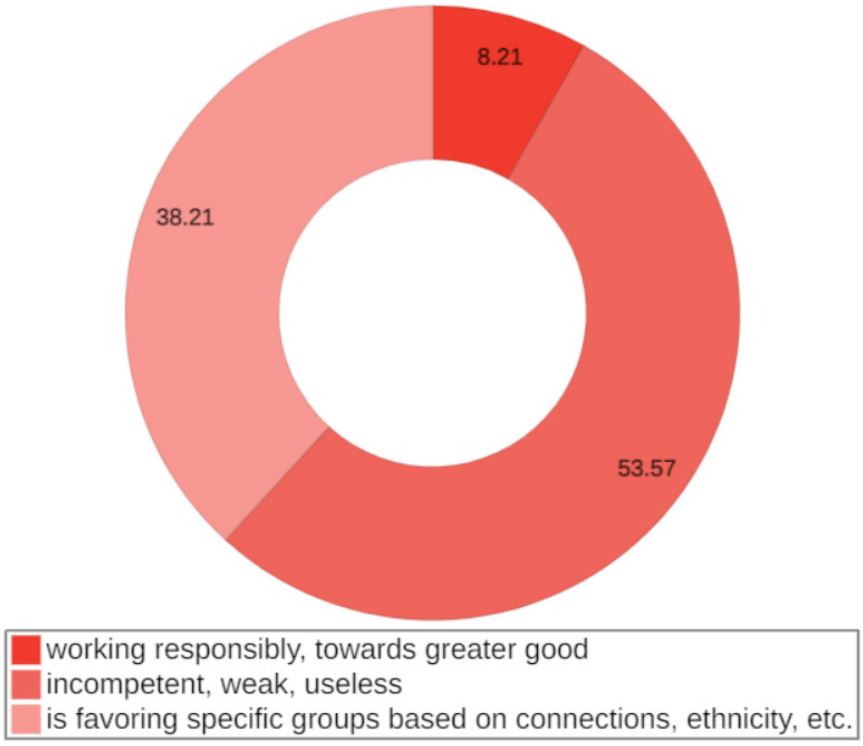
Youth is probably not the target group of the politicians in mentioned countries. However, the youth are following politics and actively participate in elections.

Q21: I believe that govenment is (choose one):

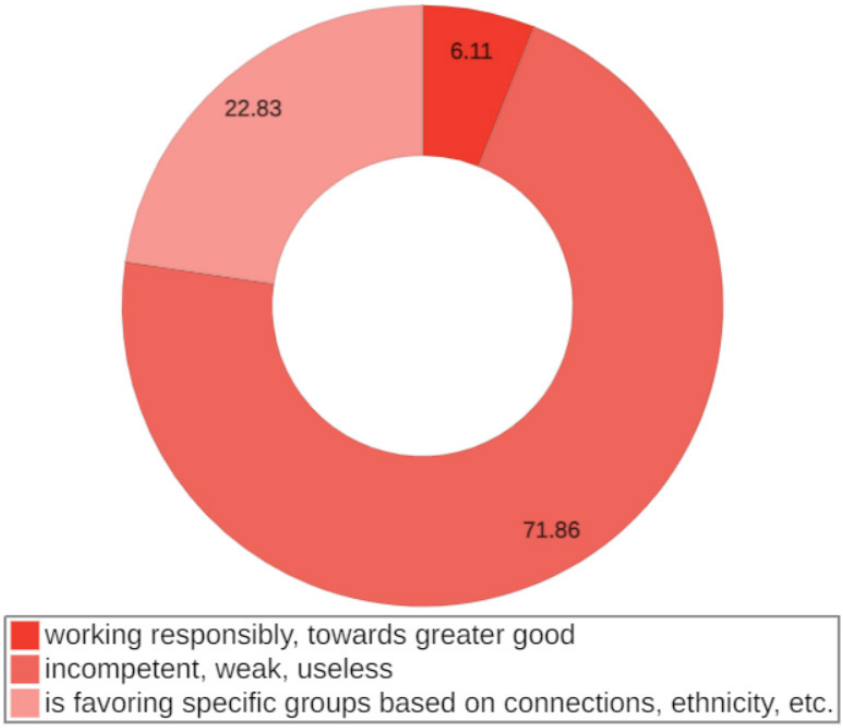
Slovakia



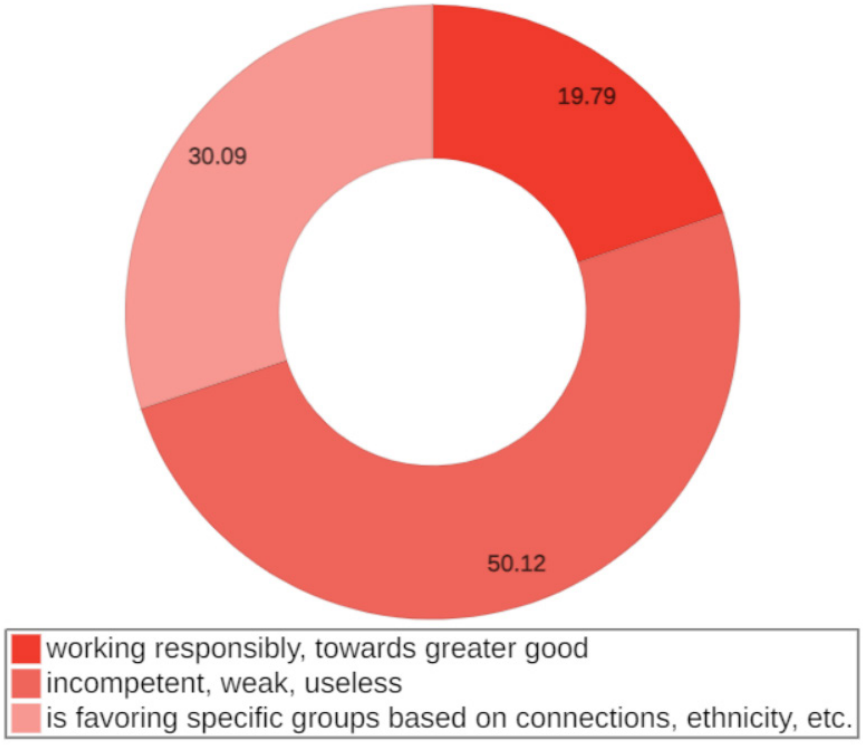
Bosnia and Herzegovina



Lebanon

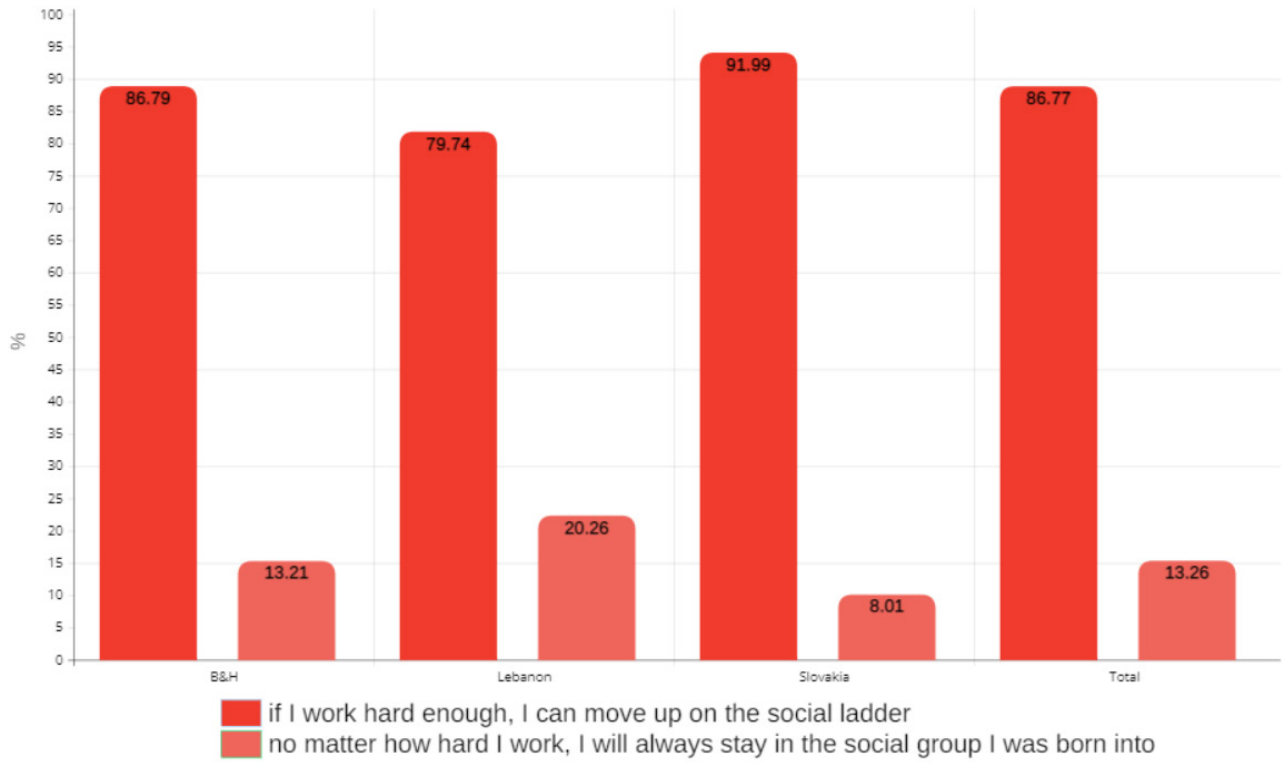


Total



The failing state capacity contributes to growing inequality, leaving the public space open for alternative non-state actors that can hinder violent extremism. Trust in governments in these countries is on decline for a significant time. The level of trust in the government was recorded quite low, as, during the COVID19 pandemics, the governments were criticized more than usual due to the often mismanagement or try-and-fail approach to the pandemics. Therefore, the trust in the government might have decreased more than usual. The proportion, however, reflects the long term trend – Slovakia, nearly one-third of surveyed young people considering the government weak, incompetent and useless, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, over half of the young people and in Lebanon, whopping two-thirds thinks the same. This trend reflects the developments in project countries during the implementation period. Especially in Lebanon, the situation deteriorated dramatically with the economic and financial crisis coupled with social crisis and serious security concerns.

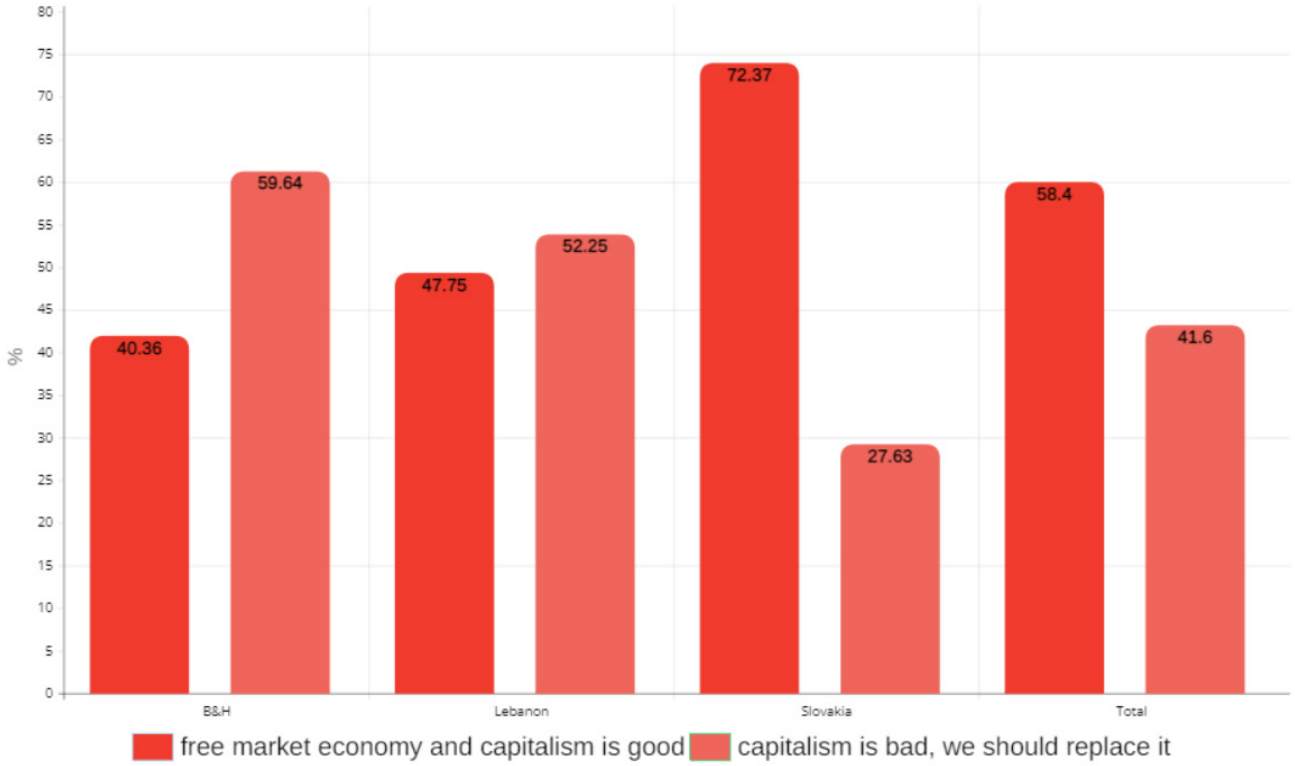
Q22: I believe that (choose one):



Economic inclusion is a very important factor that prevents radicalism leading to violent extremism since the lack of it leads to frustration, poverty, unemployment and systemic denial of opportunities. The opportunity for upward mobility on the social ladder if one works hard indicates a positive notion of the youth for the future.

More than 86% of respondents believe that if they work hard, they could move up the social ladder. Results somewhat differentiated based on the standing of the project country – with the most surveyed agreeing with that in Slovakia, the EU country, with Bosnia and Herzegovina second, and Lebanon as the third with one-fifth of young people sceptical about the improvement of their social standing based on their merits.

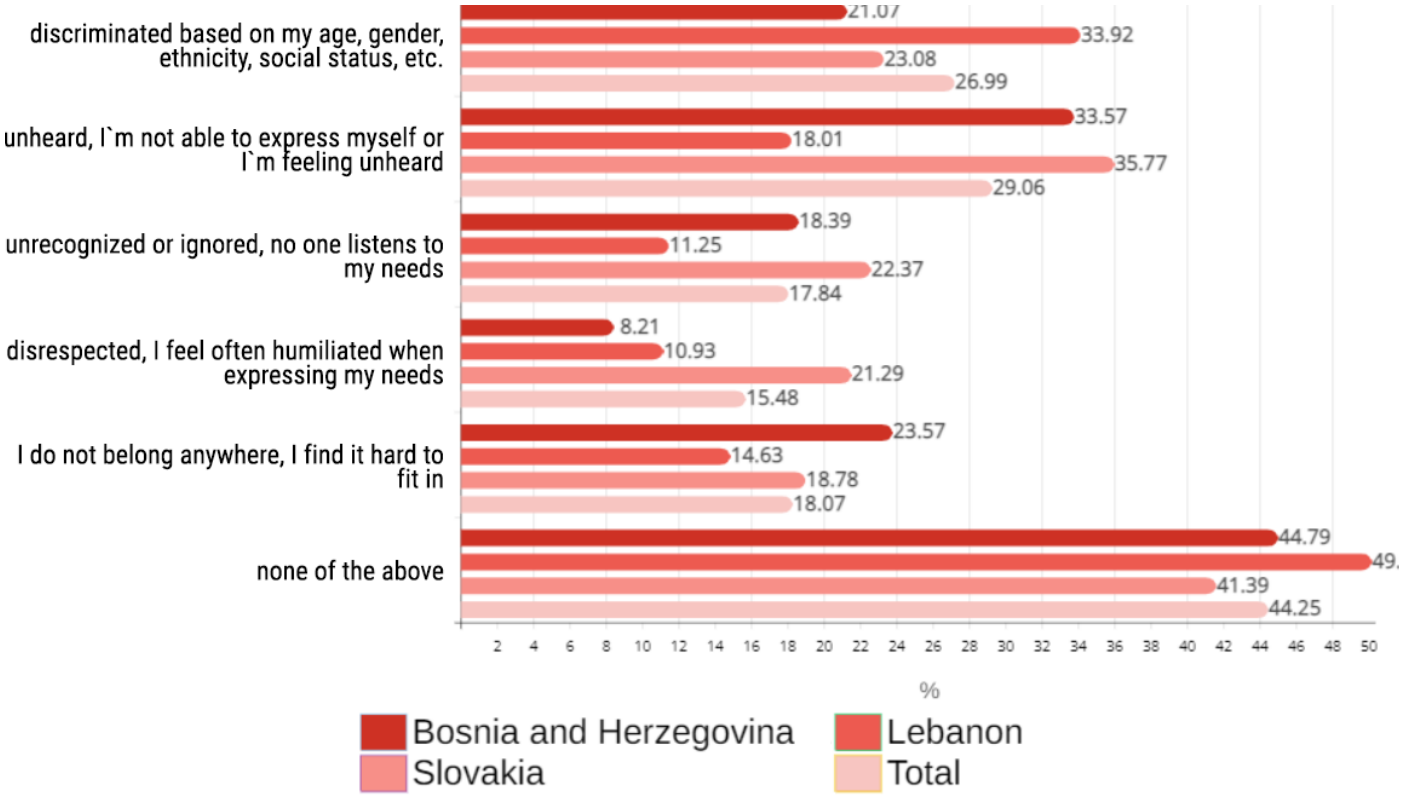
Q23: I believe that (choose one):



Surveyed young people were relatively undetermined when asked whether a free market economy and capitalism are good or bad things. While less than one-third of young people from Slovakia think capitalism and the free-market economy are bad things and should be replaced, more than half of surveyed young people from Lebanon, and well over half of the youngsters from Bosnia and Herzegovina, believed that they are bad things and should be changed. Although capitalism clearly has flaws, questioning the status quo of the existing economic system is indicating a possibility for a vacuum for non-state actors who offer an alternative to free markets, thus increasing the opportunity for extremist groups to work with this narrative.

Recommendation: increase economic and financial education among the youth

Q24: I often feel (choose multiple):

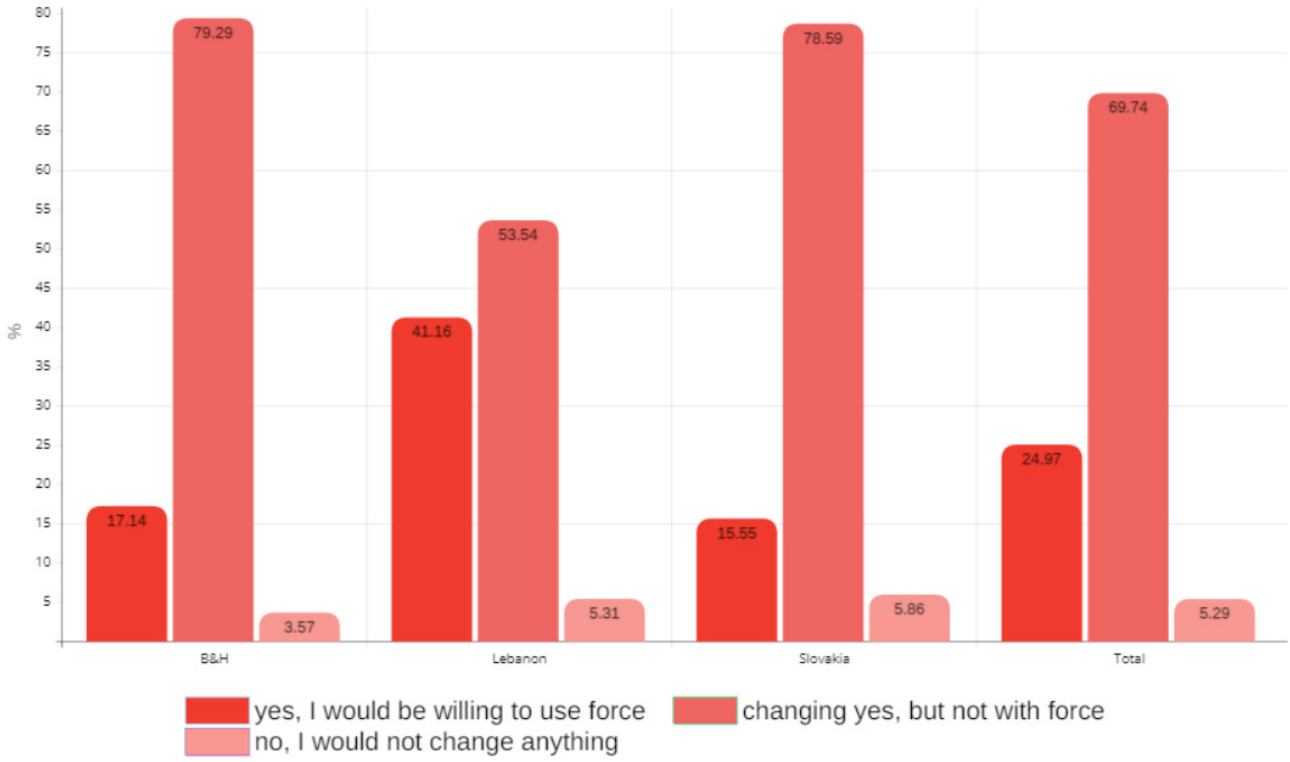


One of the factors for radicalization leading to violent extremism is the feeling of inability to express oneself, humiliation by others while expressing thoughts and feelings, and lack of feeling to be understood. Adolescence is a vulnerable age when these feelings occur more often than later in life, thus at this age one can adopt extremist ideas. However, these ideas can be grown out through constructive dialogue.

More than half of the respondents often felt discriminated against based on age, gender, ethnicity, social status, unheard, unrecognized, disrespected or felt that they do not belong anywhere.

Radical groups are attractive for the youth for numerous reasons. Usually the reason behind this is an urge to be accepted, and in case this cannot be achieved from the side of parents or peers, the youth turn to alternative groups often with a radical or extremist message. During the sensitive age of adolescence the youth question their belonging, they desire new experiences and certainty to navigate through the world. Questioning authorities and the existing social order is also natural in this age. Extremist and radical groups are benefiting from these desires and needs, and offer an alternative authority which rewards dedication and trust.

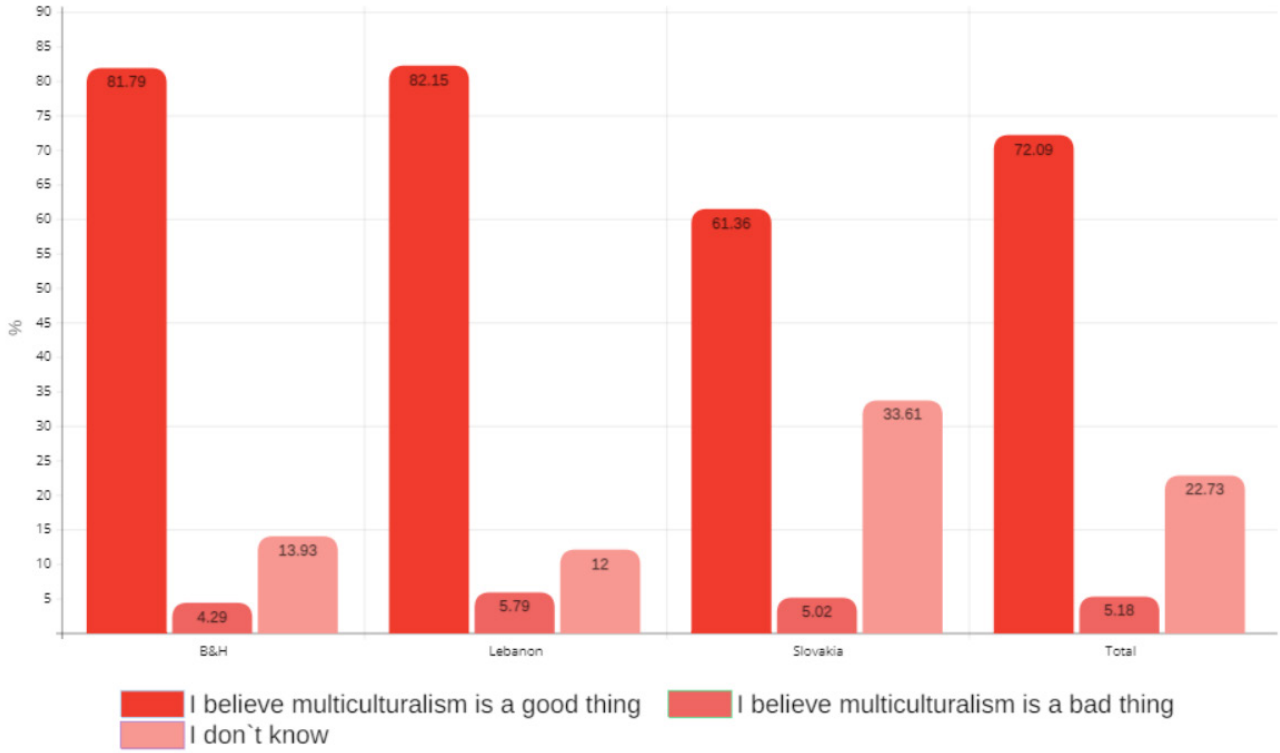
Q25: Would you like to change something dramatically in your country, by force if necessary (choose one)?



When asked about the willingness to change something dramatically in one's country, over 90% of all surveyed young people replied they would. Out of those, over 15% of young Slovaks would be willing to use force to achieve the change. Similarly, around 17% of young people from Bosnia and Herzegovina would also be willing to use force. While at the same time, over 40% of young people from Lebanon would be willing to use force to bring about change in their country. In Lebanon, other drastic changes happen while using the force. On the other hand, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, forceful change has created some nasty history.

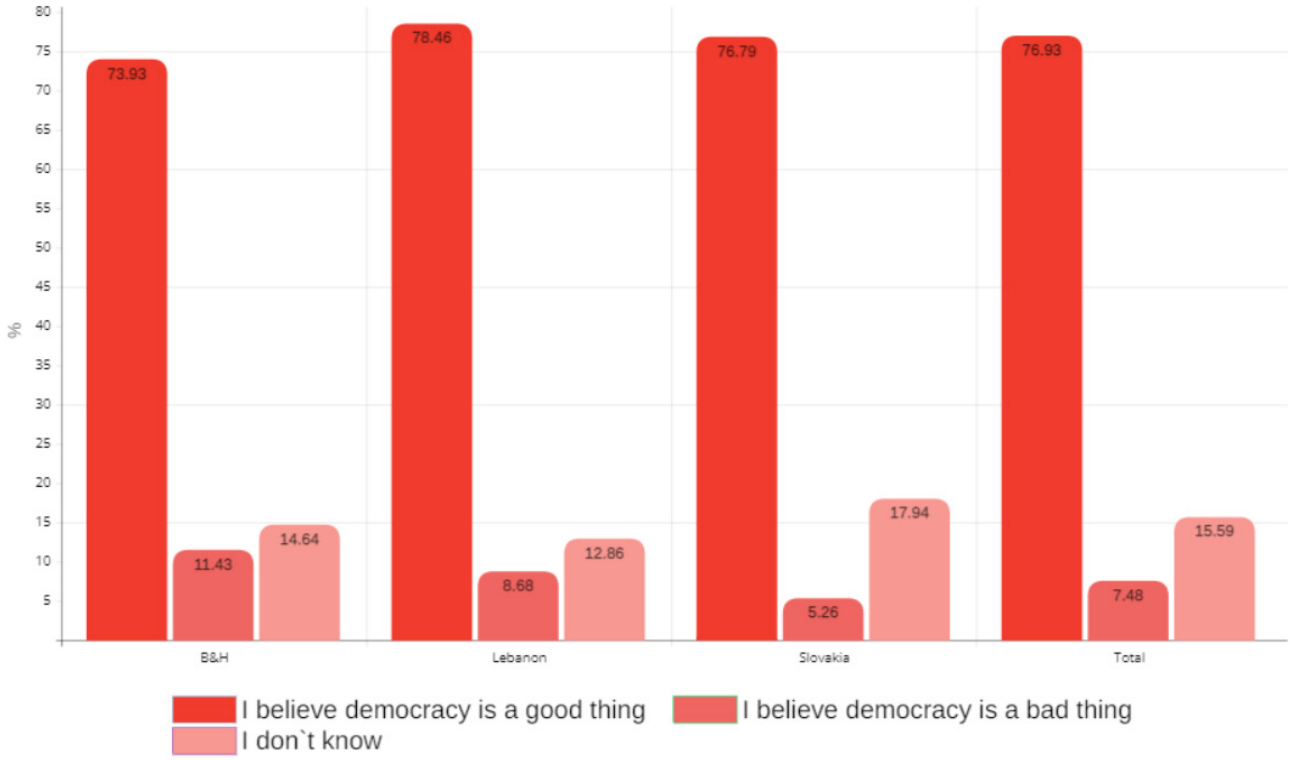
In Lebanon, drastic changes have happened while using force. People are used to changes that were performed by use of force. On the other hand, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, forceful change has created some nasty history, so the young people are more careful with using force or violence to enforce the change. In the case of Slovakia, the country does not have a history of changes by use of force, thus even youth denies it, as young people do not have any experience with such events.

Q26: Which of the following best describes you (choose one):



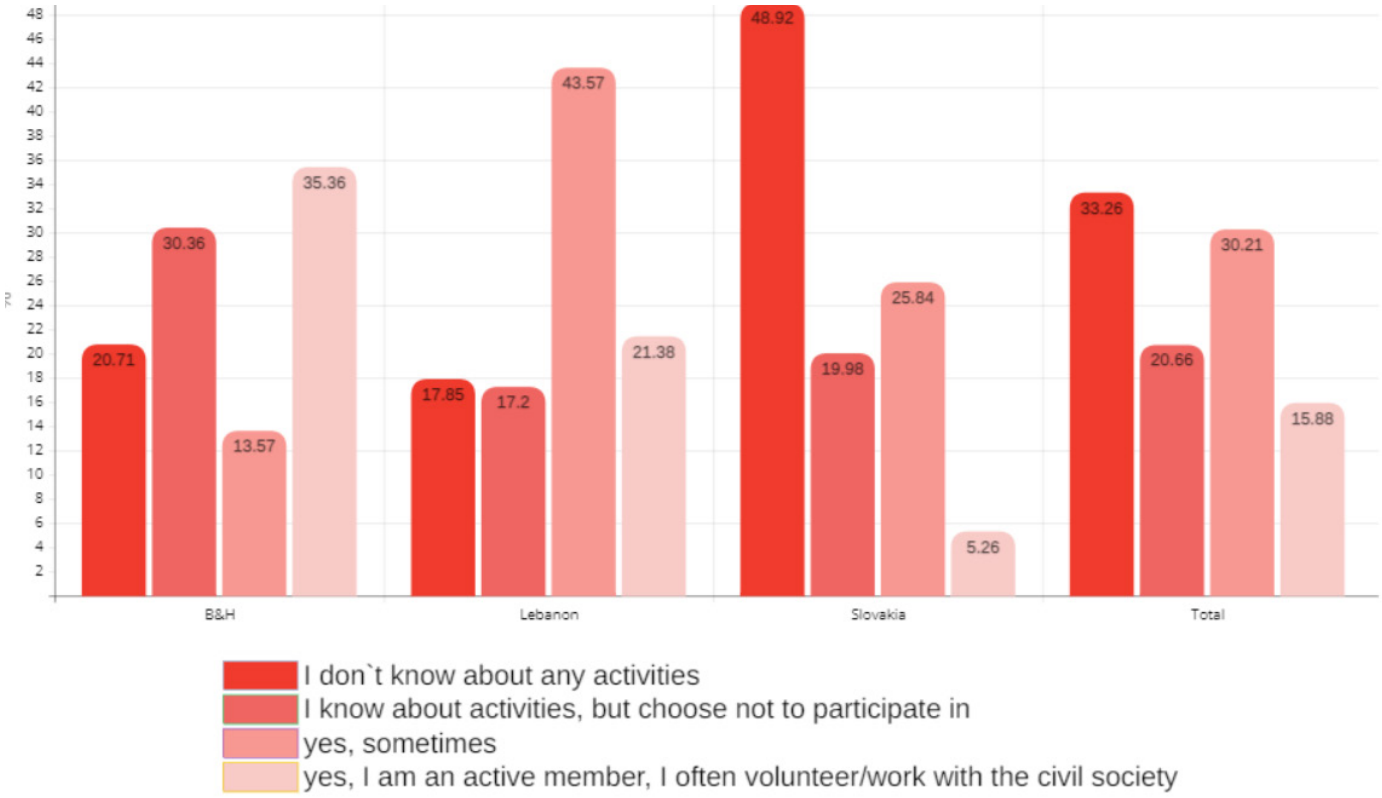
As stated in the Q3, almost half of the respondents believe that multiethnic societies are good and migration is beneficial. In addition, respondents probably believe in multiethnic societies because they have positive experience with other ethnicities and migrants in their country.

Q27: Which of the following best describes you (choose one):



Even though youth is not the usual target group of the politicians in mentioned countries, they still follow politics, actively participate in elections and believe in democracy. In this part of the survey, we were interested to learn about some of the beliefs that the young people from the project countries hold. They mostly consider democracy being a good thing. The same would be their views of multiculturalism – mostly positive perception, with a slight exception of young people from Slovakia, where one third does not have a clear view on whether multiculturalism is good or bad.

Q28: Do you engage in activites of civil society (choose one)?



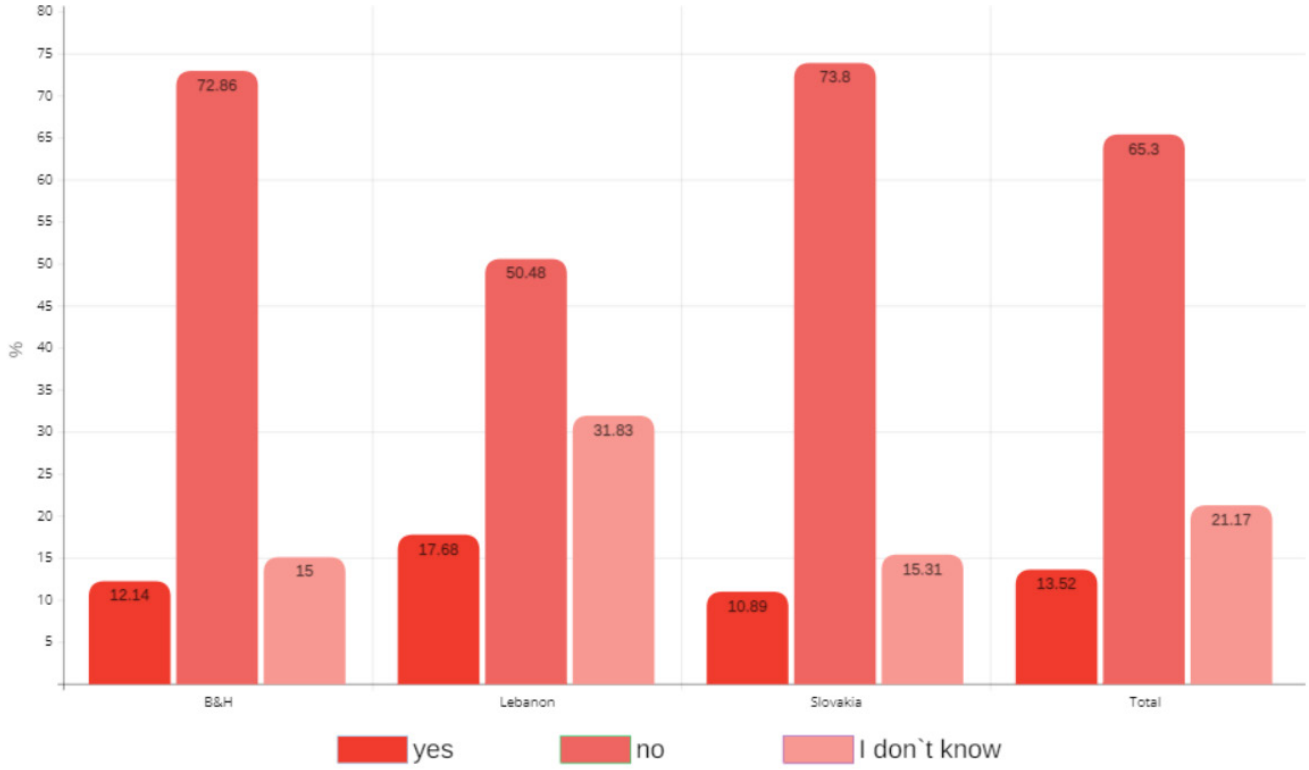
Finally, the young people were asked about their civic engagement in civil society. While in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Lebanon, around half of surveyed youngsters replied they are either sometimes or often involved in activities of civil society, nearly half of the surveyed Slovak youth responded that they don't even know any civil society activities and therefore are not involved either.

This is quite a surprising outcome that can be caused either by a shrinking civic space in Slovakia or an inefficiency of the NGO and CSOs in Slovakia to target the youth. NGOs and CSOs in Slovakia have to more than double their effort working with the young generation and explaining to them the role of civil society in a democratic state to avoid future political exclusion and limitations for civic engagement into public life.

Recommendation: NGOs and CSOs in Slovakia have to more than double their effort working with the young generation.

Beliefs

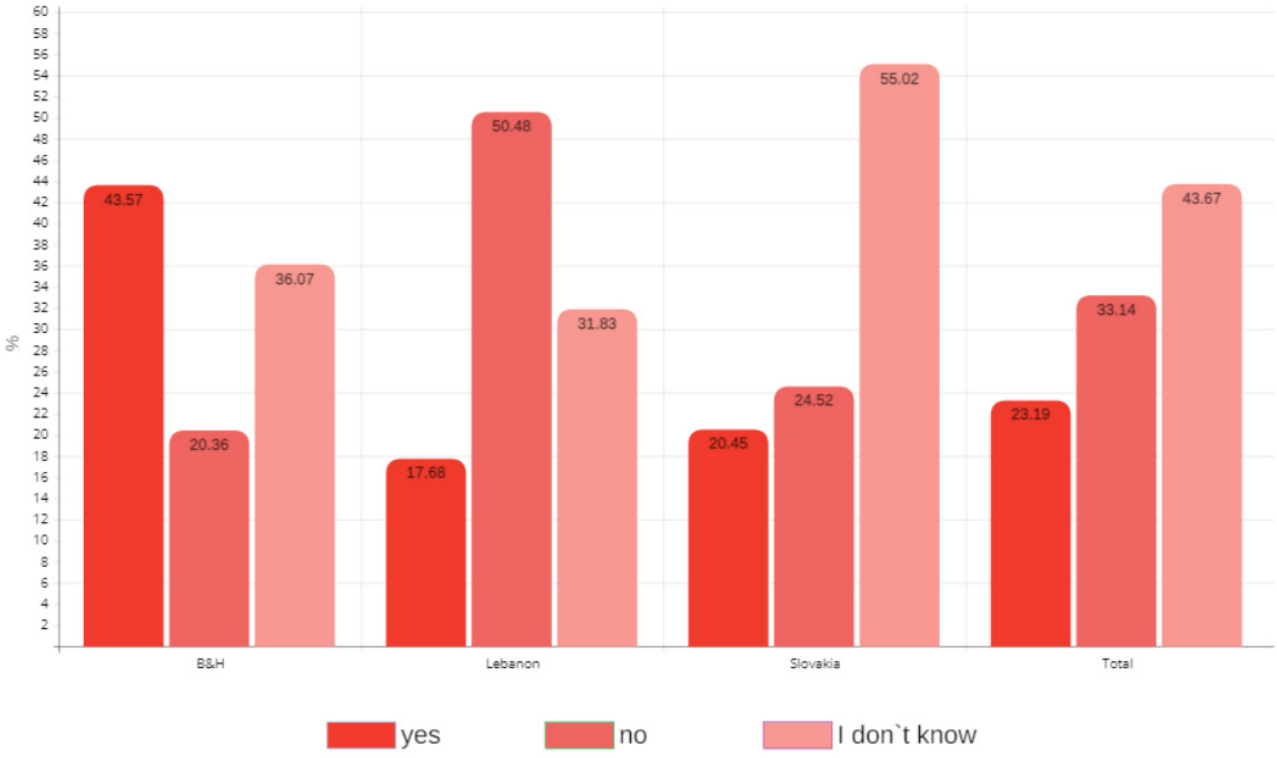
Q29: There is a group in the society that can be blamed for my hardships (Romas, Jews, migrants, other minorities...) (choose one):



One of the factors for radicalization leading to violent extremism is the perception of injustice and mistreatment of a certain group. There is a strong link between systemic discrimitation and political violence. In accordance with the findings from previous questions (see Q2, Q3, Q26), the youth in all project countries value multiculturalism and believe in its benefits.

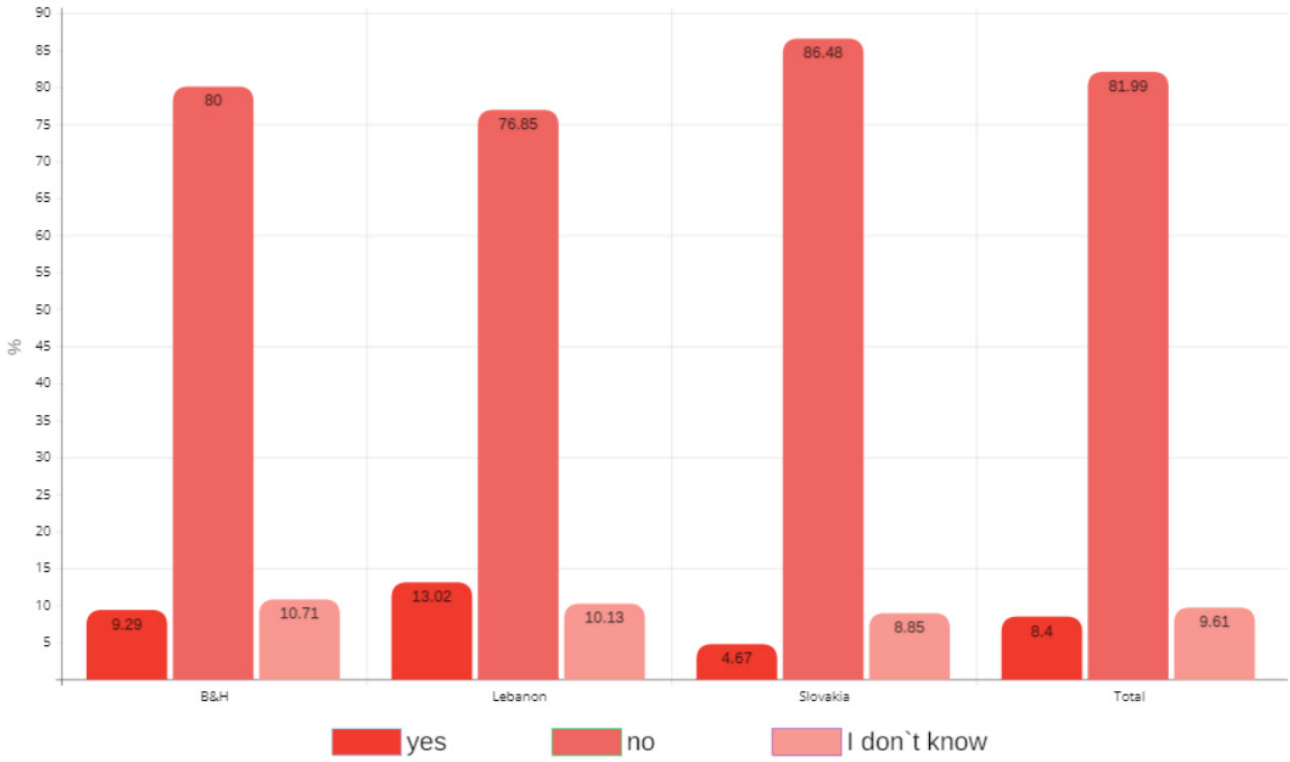
Overall the surveyed youth has a positive attitude towards multiethnic societies and do not consider any specific group to be the cause of their problems or failure. In Bosnia and Herzegovina and Slovakia this belief is shared by around 10% of the interviewed youth. In the case of Lebanon over 17% of surveyed people believe that there is a group that could be blamed for their hardship and nearly one-third of young people could not answer this question. This might be the result of the sectarian society in Lebanon, where different factions compete for power in the country and are exclusive based on ethnicity or religion.

Q30: The elites are secretive group that leads our society for their own profit? (choose one):



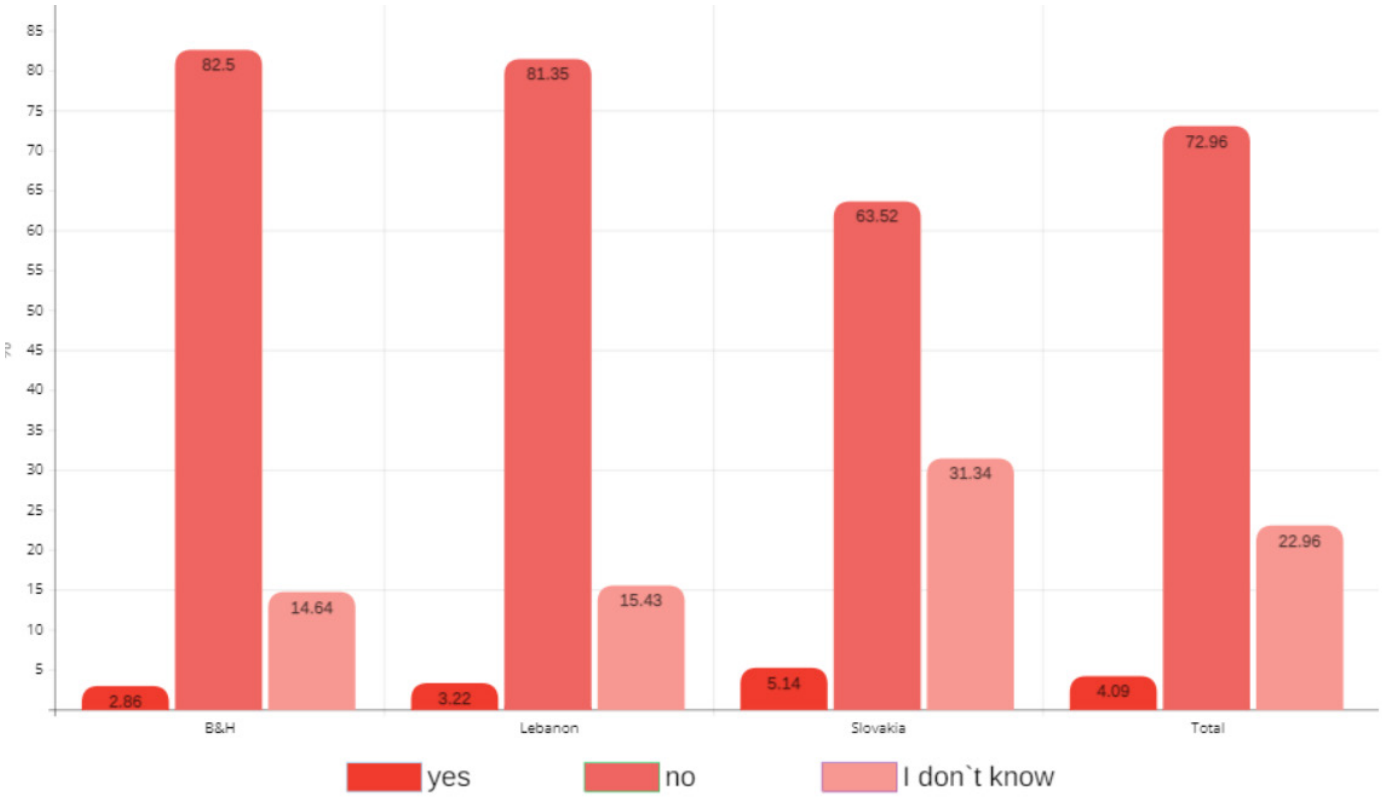
The young interviewed participants recognize the corruption and clientelism in politics that occurs in their countries. Especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where under the elites respondents understood the political elites, they perceived them negatively as having their own agendas (over 43%) not necessarily in line with the general good of the country. In the case of Slovakia, there is an interesting over 55% of young respondents that did not know the response to this question. That could mean that they have doubts about the motives of the current elites but are yet to see if those motives are positive or negative. It is consistent with the current development in the country when the elites tied with the previous political representation are being prosecuted for corruption and attempt at state capture through security and judiciary institutions. In general, conspiracy theories that are present on the internet might also play the role in understanding and perceiving politics as the “dirty business”.

Q32: Damaging public goods or private property as a sign of protest is acceptable (choose one):



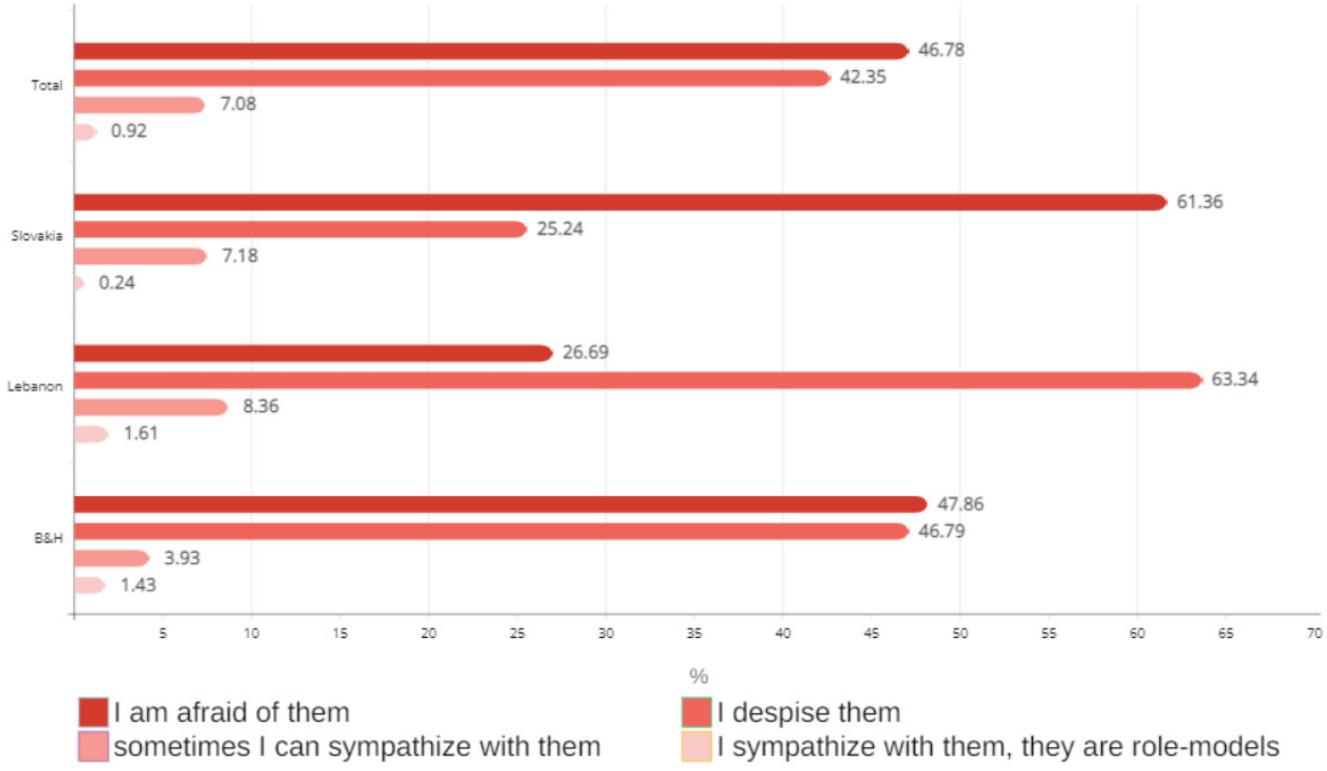
According to surveyed young people damaging public goods or private property as a sign of a protest is not acceptable. Respondents in all countries refused destroying of public or private property during protests, with Slovakia only bellow 5% of young people would justify such actions, Lebanon the highest number of young people - over 13%, would justify such actions and Bosnia and Herzegovina standing somewhere in the middle with over 9% approving such actions. Don't knows were quite low and very consistent among the project countries. This indicates that the willingness to use violence to resolve political challenges is quite low among the youth and that they are aware of the consequences of their actions.

Q33: The so-called eco-terrorism is acceptable:



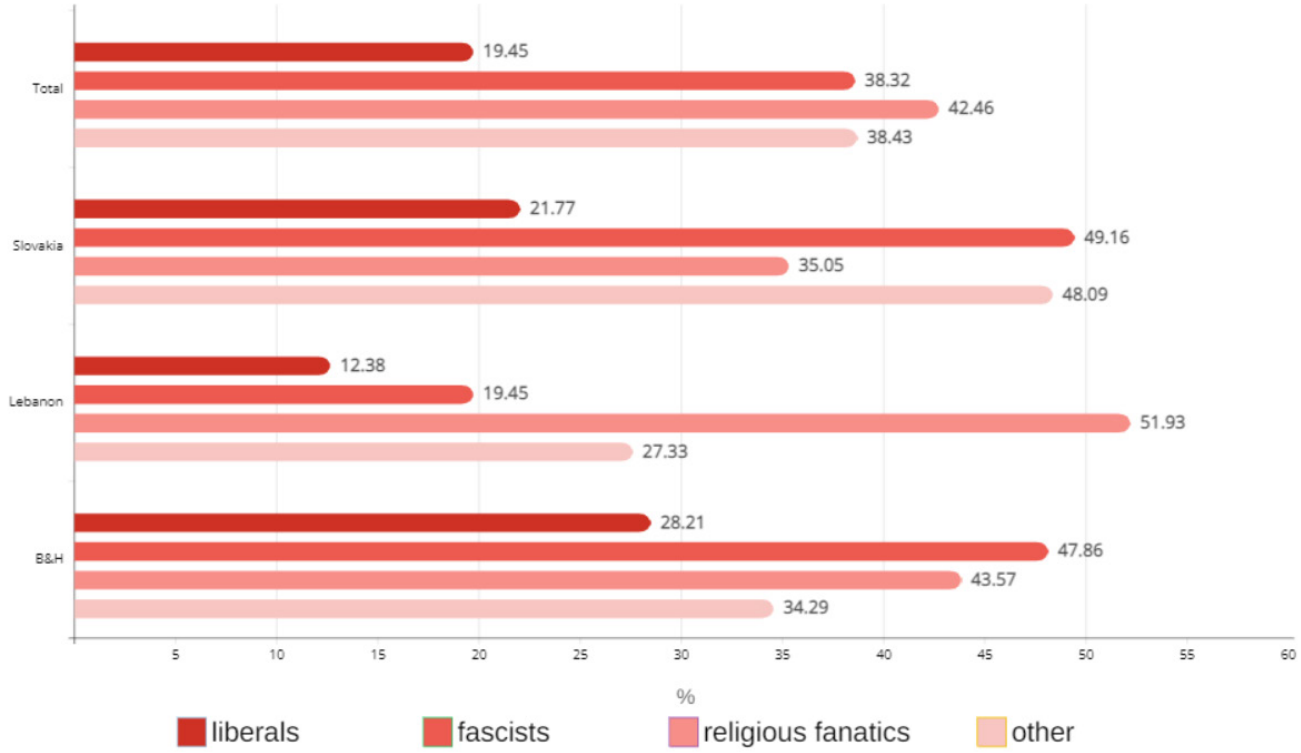
According to the majority of interviewed young people, not even ecoterrorism is acceptable, but use of violence to achieve particular goals is not a solution according to the respondents. This view was quite consistent within all three project countries.

Q34: Terrorists are (choose one):



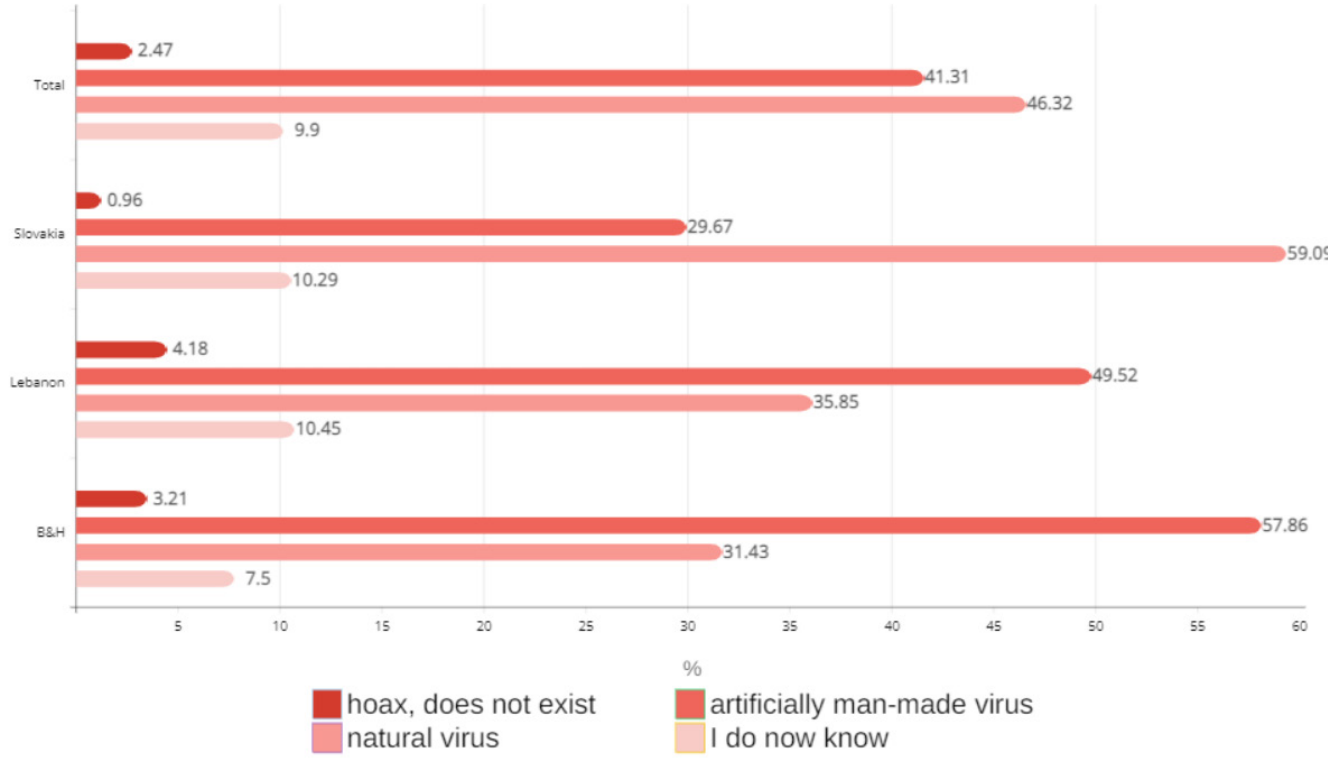
Concerning the terrorists and their activities, the results show that respondents might understand what terrorist groups explain as their goal. However, the respondents do not agree with violent tools that terrorists use to achieve their goals. Overall attitude towards terrorism was very negative - young people either are afraid of terrorism - mostly the young Slovaks over 61%, the least young Lebanese with little less than 27%. On the other hand young people from Lebanon have very strong feelings about terrorists - over 63% despise terrorists. The sympathising with terrorists was quite low around 7% on average of young people replied that they could sympathise with terrorists and their cause. However, only a very negligible percentage would consider terrorists as role-models.

Q35: Radicals are (choose multiple):



While extremism always has a negative connotation, radicals can have positive connotations as well-- in example, women suffragette movements were considered as radical at the time. The majority of the respondents understood radicalism as an open concept, which can be positive and negative at the same time. They used the multiple choice options and were trying to explain who the radical is for them. That would represent the quite high selection of the "Other" option. From the pre-selected options, the young respondents generally agreed that fascists or religious fanatics could be understood as radicals. With nearly half of young respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Slovakia believing fascists are radicals, but only over 19% of young Lebanese. With the religious fanatics the tables turned a bit, nearly 52% of young Lebanese consider religious fanatics radicals, while only around 35% of young Slovaks. This is consistent with the history and present experience of young people in the project countries. Slovakia and Bosnia and Herzegovina had a tragic history with fascism/nacism, while Lebanon has long suffered from sectarian (mostly religion-based) tensions and even violence.

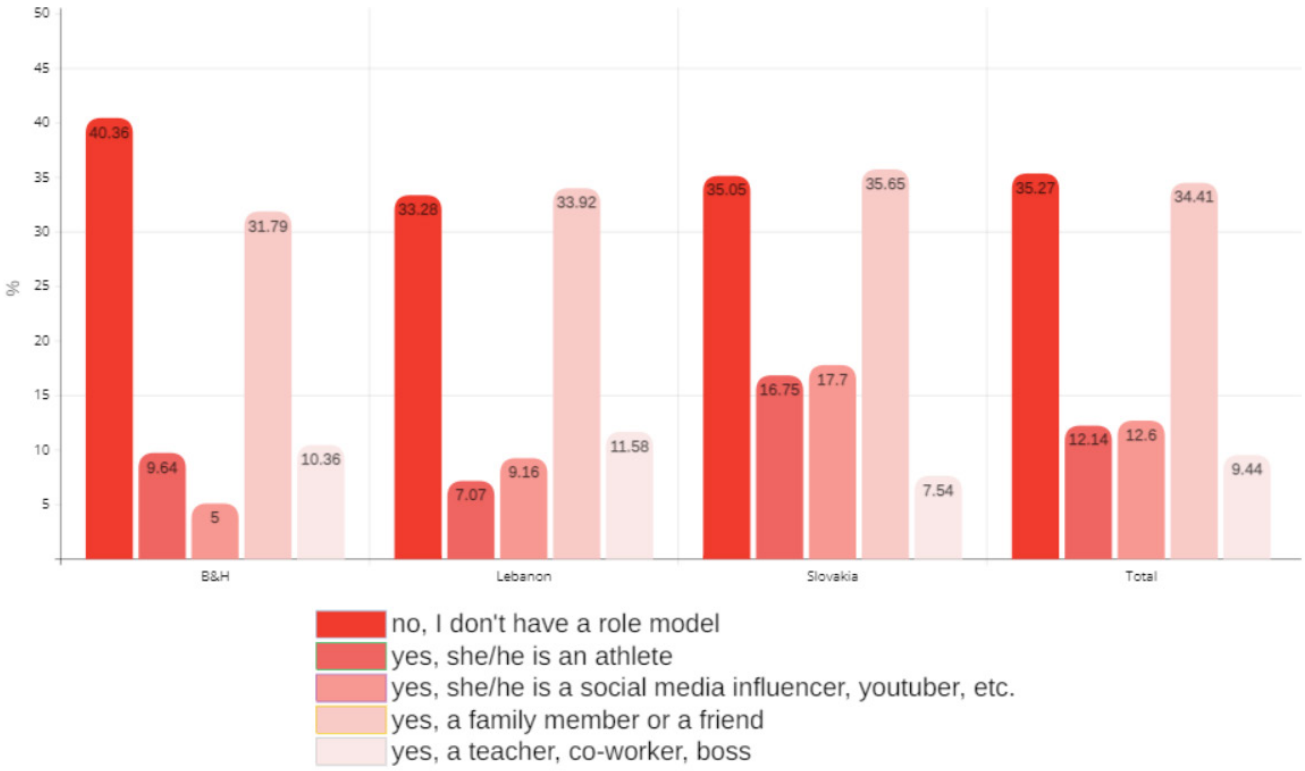
Q36: COVID-19 is (choose one):



The COVID-19 pandemics is influencing everyday life for all of us. The data were collected during the pandemics. The young respondents were quite consistent in all three project countries that COVID-19 is real and it is not a hoax. As for the origins of the virus, their views were divided - while nearly half of young respondents from Lebanon and over 57% from Bosnia and Herzegovina believe that it is a man-made virus, only around 30% of young Slovaks believe so. Nearly 60% of young Slovaks believe the COVID-19 is of natural origin. These beliefs could reflect the level of misinformation and disinformation about the COVID-19 that is being spread in various project countries as opposed to the accessible scientific materials about the virus and its potential origins.

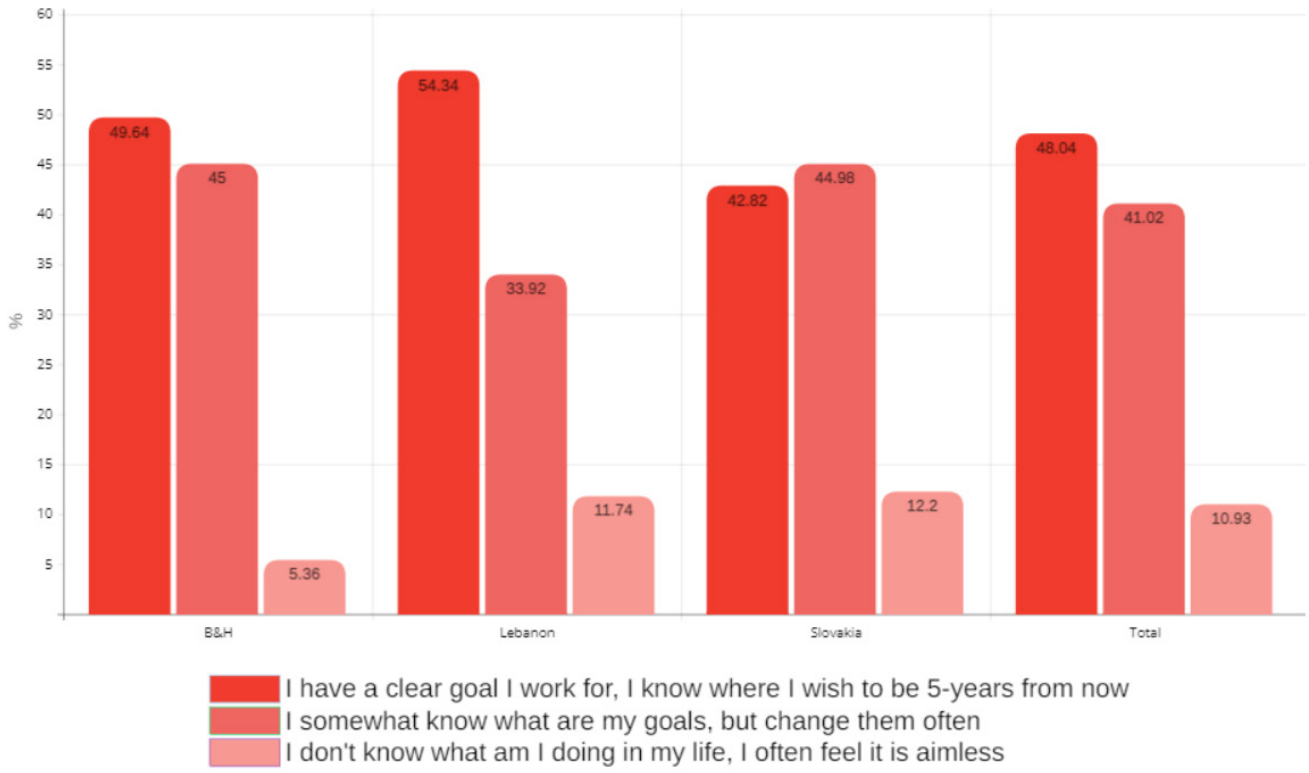
Attitudes

Q37: Do you have a role model (choose multiple)?



Young people tend to choose role models from their environment. According to the surveyed youth, on average one-third of them don't have any role-model, if they have a role-model, then it is somebody from their family or a close friend (also approximately one-third of surveyed). The option “other” was frequently used by the respondents, listing religious and deceased political figures, writers, business magnates among many others. The amount of active political leaders among the role-models was quite insignificant.

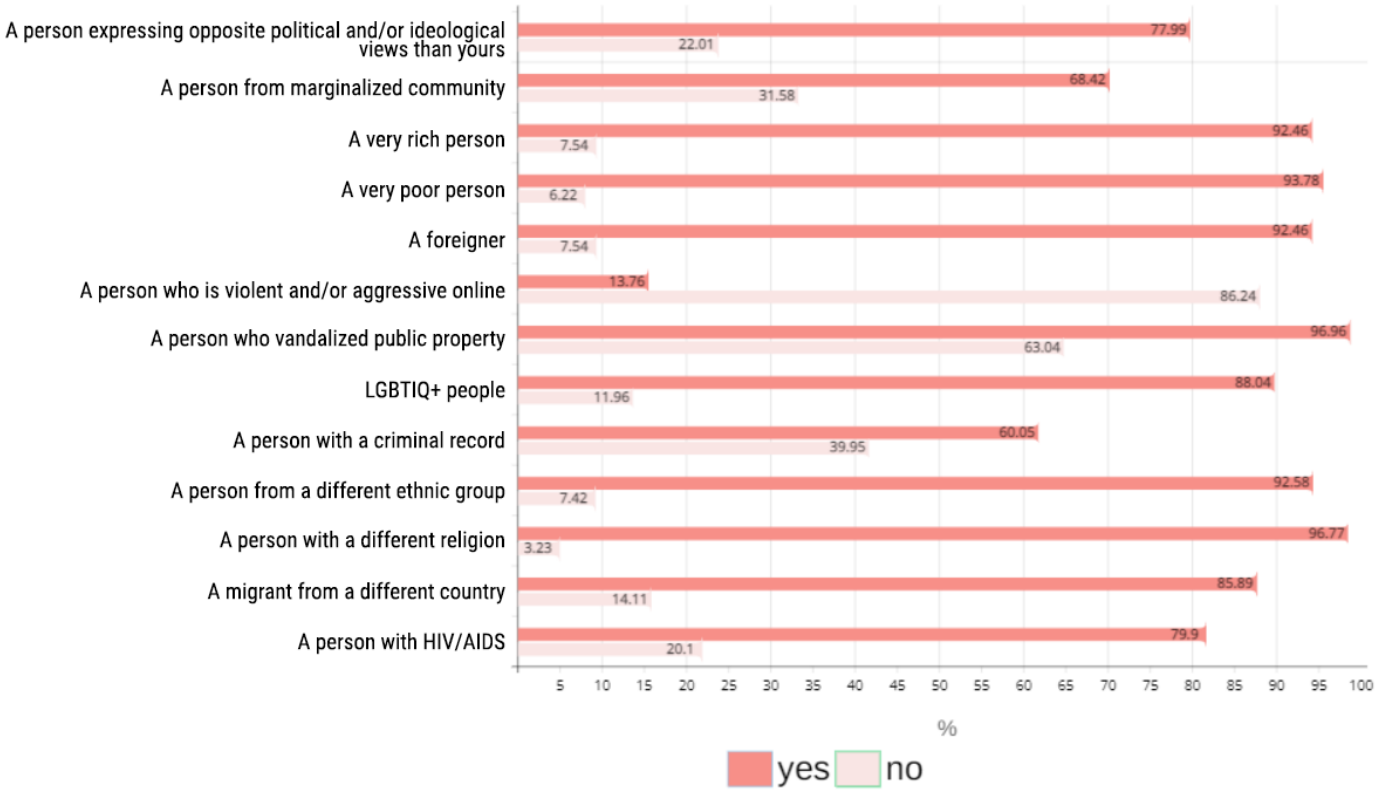
Q38: I believe in my life (choose one):



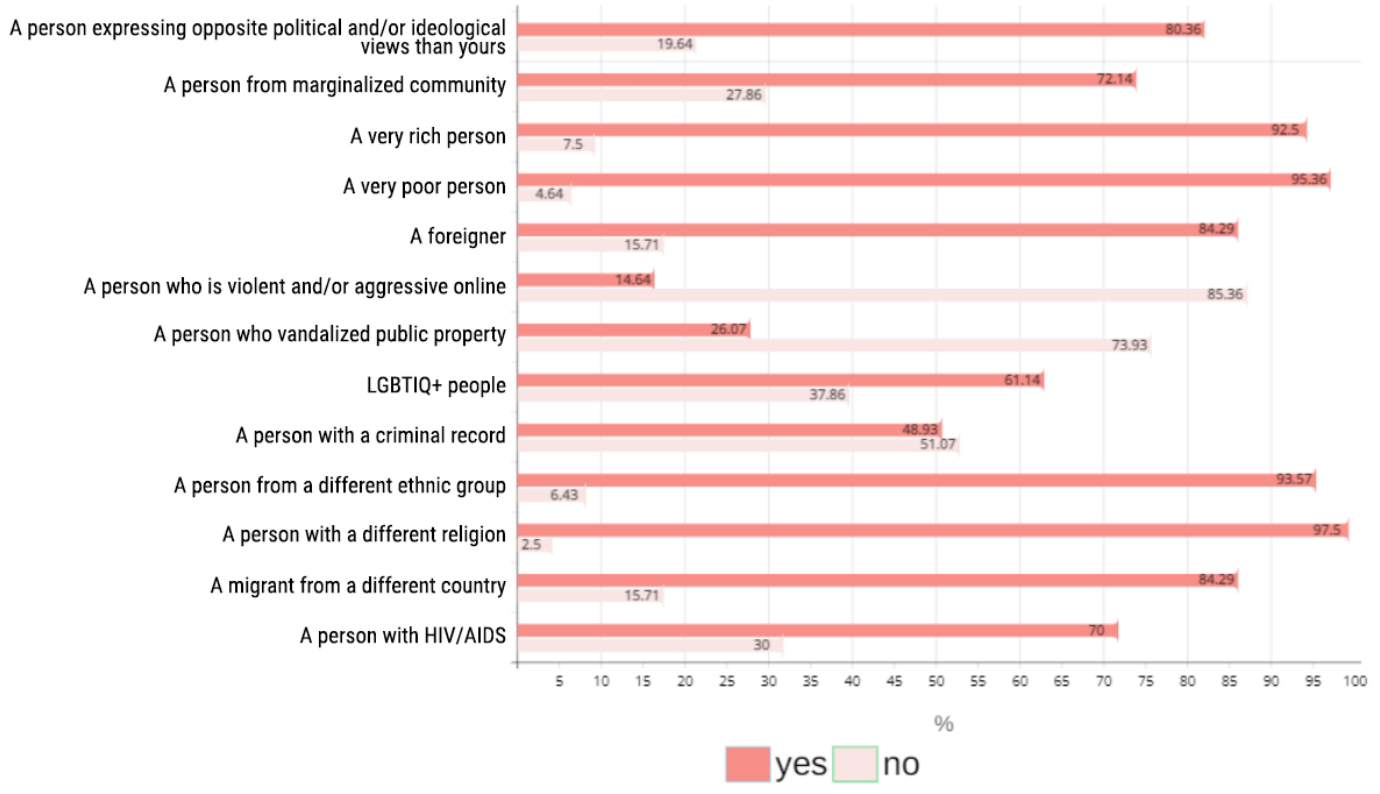
This graph shows that young people have plans for what to do in their life. Only around 11% of surveyed young people across the project countries feel aimless or not knowing what to do with their lives.Those already decided are less vulnerable to become radicalised, as they usually do not feel lost or useless.

Q39: Would you befriend someone who is:

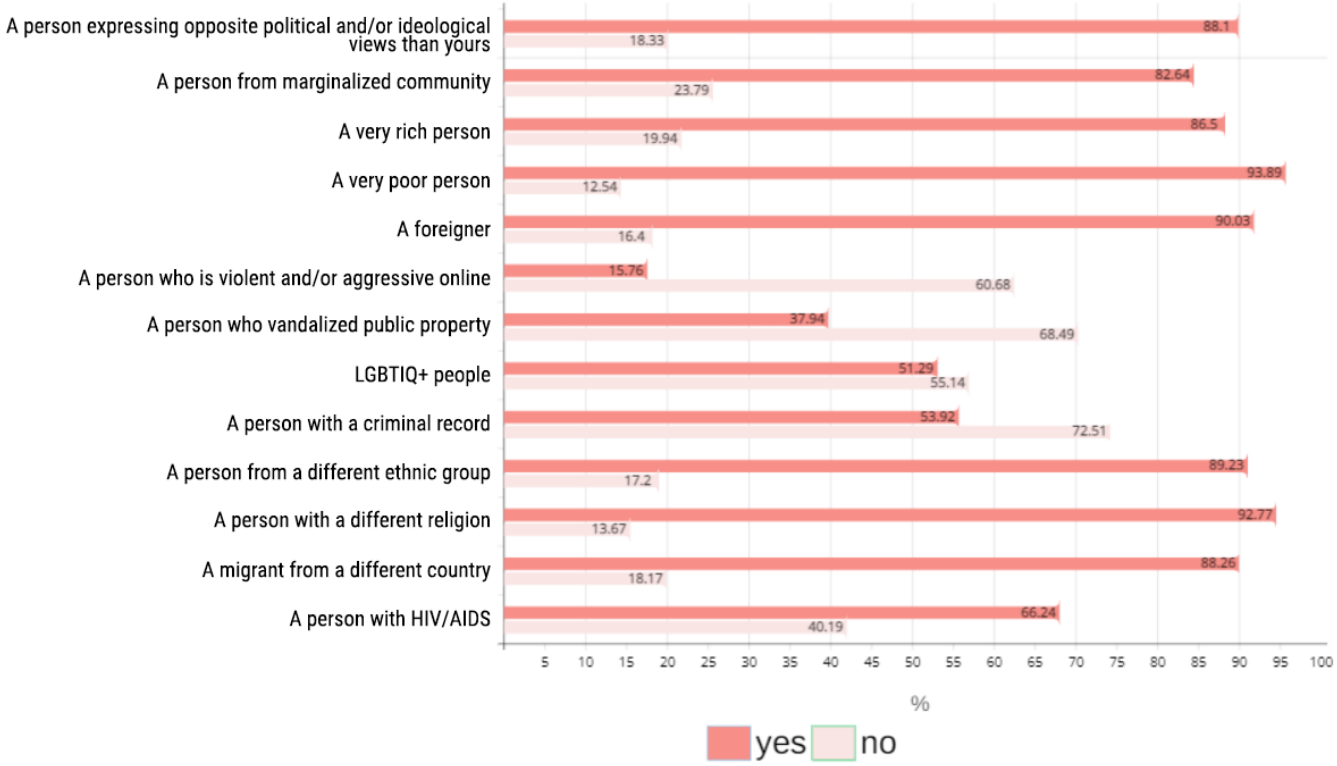
Slovakia



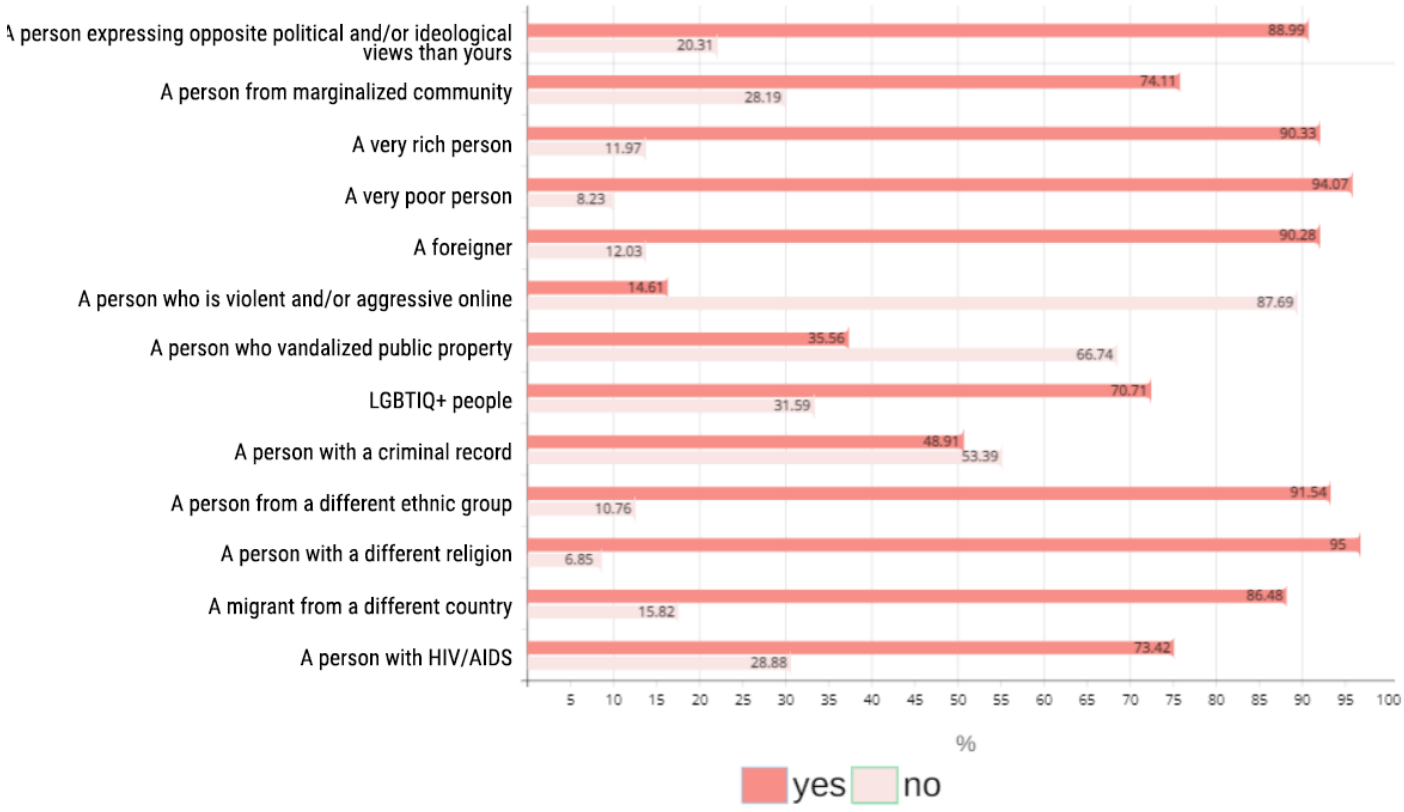
Bosnia and Herzegovina



Lebanon



Total



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Conclusion:

The study aims to contribute to the research in the domain of hate speech and radicalization leading to violent extremism in the online sphere in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lebanon and Slovakia. Within the seven sections, the authors examined data on the content on the internet accessed by the youth, their perception of the society and their values, access of the internet and how the youth spends time while being online, their perception of threats and safety online, democratic processes and their participation in it, beliefs and attitudes that guide their lives.

Based on our findings, the majority of the youth reflects the overall trends in the society: the value of democracy and multiethnic societies. When it comes to election, the majority of respondents claim to engage in elections. In-born equality among people was valued by respondents from all three project countries. This is applicable to gender equality as well. The youth has a positive attitude towards multiethnic societies and do not consider any specific group to be the cause of their problems or failure.

The majority of the respondents have unlimited access to the internet, either on their smartphone or at home and they use it for hours (3-5h). While some rules are discussed by their parents or guardians, the vast majority of the online activities of the youth is not controlled by anyone. Verification of the information shared by friends is not a common practice among the youth, indicating their lack of critical thinking.

While online, the youth spends most of its time on social media sites. However, their critical thinking is lacking since the majority of the respondents do not question content shared by friends.

Interestingly, the content youth access in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Lebanon tend to be more violent or questionable compared to Slovakia, showing a quite different online social bubble among the peers. In general the surveyed young people were quite open-minded and willing to befriend people from marginalised or excluded communities on one hand, and stay away from violent people on the other hand.

From the threats, identity theft, breaking into one’s account, and outing are the biggest concerns by the majority of respondents. Almost one-third of the respondents claimed that they were approached by a sexual predator or a pedophile. According to the surveyed young people, the first authority to turn to and discuss in case of a threat identified on the internet are friends.

The authors of the study based on the findings recommend the following:

- Strengthen social media monitoring efforts by the police to filter out bullying online, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Lebanon where this phenomenon is the most visible from the project countries.

- Strengthen awareness on trolling.

- Increase critical thinking by training: Train the youth how to interpret the content, avoid disinformation threats, further stress the need for verification of information.

- Train the young people about internet security and what not to share online (once it's online, it stays online). Educate young people about the threats of grooming with that connected outing or blackmailing.

- Increase economic and financial education among the youth to diminish the appeal of non-state actors offering an alternative to capitalism

- NGOs and CSOs in Slovakia have to more than double their effort working with the young generation.

Implemented with the support of Anna Lindh Foundation and
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HUMANITY IN ACTION
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SERVE

STRATEGIC ANALYSIS

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