



Civic Education Programs as Preventive Measures in Bosnia and Herzegovina

BiH/D10.1 Country Report
May 2023

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Reference: D.RAD D10.1

This research was conducted under the Horizon 2020 project 'De-Radicalisation in Europe and Beyond: Detect, Resolve, Re-integrate' (959198).

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Executive Summary

This report examines the ongoing ethnic tensions and radical political views in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It focuses on the vulnerability of the youth population to extremist and radical activities, with a significant percentage justifying radicalism under certain circumstances. The report highlights the mass demonstrations in 2014 as a manifestation of citizens' anger towards the political establishment, driven by institutional corruption and economic decline. In response to these challenges, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), funded by foreign donors, have implemented programs to address radicalism and extremism among young people. These organizations operate independently and aim to improve the status of young people in Bosnian society by focusing on topics such as peacebuilding, human rights, and social inclusion. The report presents three examples of NGO activities: the reintegration of returning foreign fighters and their families, youth initiatives countering violent extremism, and youth empowerment for positive change. These projects adopt a multidisciplinary approach, involving experts, institutions, and local authorities. They aim to rehabilitate and socialize returnees, provide counter-narratives to extremism, and raise awareness about radical organizations. By involving young people in planning and implementation, the projects empower them to become active members of society and address important issues. The report emphasizes the influence of media, particularly social networks, in the radicalization process and highlights the projects' efforts to spread counter-narratives online. It also underscores the importance of involving community institutions in combating radicalization. However, considering socio-economic factors and existing tensions, the potential for radicalization remains. The report concludes that while these projects contribute to knowledge sharing and awareness, the primary responsibility lies with governmental institutions.

1. Introduction

Ethno-nationalistic political discourse, segregated education, a high level of ethnic distance among the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and several other factors have contributed to the ongoing ethnic tensions and various forms of radical political views and actions in the country, even 26 years after the official end of the war.

According to Azinović (2018), the youth population is particularly vulnerable to being involved in extremist and radical activities (p.8). Pečković (2018) states that 4.5% of young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina justify radicalism and terrorism under certain circumstances, such as state occupation, targeted mistreatment of specific groups (religious, ethnic, national), or when state institutions fail to serve the greater good of the people (p.30-31). The citizens' anger towards the political establishment of Bosnia and Herzegovina was evident during the mass demonstrations that took place in several cities in 2014, where parts of the Bosnian presidency building and other institutions were burned down. Institutional corruption and economic decline were the motives for citizens to seek justice on the streets. While the protests initially began peacefully, some citizens eventually resorted to stone-throwing and burning of state institutions (Džidić, 2014).

To combat these phenomena, both foreign and domestic non-governmental organizations (NGOs), mostly funded by foreign donors since 1996, have endeavored to establish programs that focus on young people and provide alternative narratives to radicalism and extremism. NGOs, particularly youth organizations, in Bosnia and Herzegovina address a wide range of topics including peacebuilding, social justice, human rights, and social inclusion of young people. Despite their diverse areas of focus, their common goal is to improve the status of young people in Bosnian society. Importantly, these organizations operate independently of the state apparatus and strive to identify and respond to the needs of young people in the communities they serve. As previously mentioned, most of these organizations secure funding through project proposals, which are either approved or rejected. The duration of these projects can vary from a few months to several years. Given their reliance on foreign donors, it is challenging for local authorities to exert control over their work.

This report aims to contribute to the understanding of how the aforementioned organizations influence people's beliefs, commitments, capabilities, and actions as potential members of communities (Crittenden & Levine, 2018). Additionally, it seeks to foster critical thinking and promote civic engagement while supporting democratic and participatory governance (Rietbergen-McCracken, 2018). To accomplish this, the report will present three examples of NGO activities that work towards preventing radicalism and extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

- International Organization for Migration (IOM): Reintegration of returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters (RFTF) and their Families from Conflict Zones;
- PRONI Centre for Youth Development: Youth Countering Violent Extremism;
- PRONI Centre for Youth Development: YouVolution - Youth for Change.

2. International Organization for Migration (IOM): Reintegration of returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters (RFTF) and their Families from Conflict Zones

2.1. General info

Government estimates and independent research suggests that between 2012 and 2017 approximately 1,000 citizens from the region travelled from the Western Balkan (WB) region to Syria and Iraq, many with the suspected the intention of joining the Islamic State (ISIL) and participating in the conflict in combat and non-combat roles., Smaller numbers of Western Balkan citizens have also been recorded participating in the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. With ISIL strongholds defeated in mid-2019, large number of (Foreign Terrorist fighters) FTFs and their associated family members were imprisoned or detained. Many of these fighters remain imprisoned awaiting return to their countries of origin, including to the Western Balkans region. The first returns occurred as early as 2014, however, a large number of FTFs remain in Syria, and awaiting government administered voluntary return. Countries of the WB region have made legal, logistical, and service oriented preparations for their repatriation but more work remains to ensure adequate legal, policy and operational infrastructure is in place to facilitate the effective return of FTF and their families.

In order to respond to the fact that foreign terrorist fighters and their families are returning to the countries of origins, the International Organization for Migration has started the project “Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Resocialization of Returnees from the Conflict Zones” in 2019 with the aim to help returnees to reintegrate into Bosnian society and become active members of society.

The project includes several components:

- Trainings for relevant institutions on local level in order to provide them with skills needed to work with people returning from foreign war zones (Centers for Social work and Centers for Mental Health);
- Adjustment of legal frame work relevant for providing help for people returning from foreign war zones;
- Establishing a fund for in-kind support to returnees and their families (cloths, medication, medical help, machines for work, cattle, and other).

At this stage project includes seven families of returnees from war zones who have not been prosecuted from Bosnian or other legal institutions. Persons who are under trial or actively serving a sentence cannot be part of this project. It is important to mention that at this stage all the returnees that are involved in this program are returnees from Syria and Iraq, however, project can support work with returnees from any other conflict zone, subject to coordination with the government authorities.

What International Organization for Migration did in order to achieve the goals of the project is conducting research on existing legal and institutional capacities of governments, capacities, strengths and weaknesses of host communities, and vulnerability profiles of returnees, institutional capacity building of state and civil society actors and assistance to RFTF and capacity building of host communities.

2.2 Description and analysis

The IOM has piloted research on the reintegration needs of the families of returning foreign fighters. The research included desk studies as well as structured interviews with stakeholders (mandated institutions), to identify and outline the vulnerability profiles of families of foreign terrorist fighters, their specific vulnerabilities, and immediate, medium and longer-term reintegration needs, including medical and psychosocial support, legal aid, financial assistance, and other re-socialisation assistance. The research represented the first serious effort to investigate the living conditions of family members of foreign fighters in the WB (Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia), their attitudes and reintegration needs, and the state-level and community responses to-date. These findings informed the IOM WB returning FTFs intervention and WB governments' initiatives.

The IOM first began to support WB authorities to create reintegration strategies and action plans. These strategies and plans defined the necessary steps and the minimum assistance provision standards required to facilitate secure, gender and children sensitive, reintegration support to FTFs and their families. IOM supported the process engaging necessary international and local technical expertise in areas such as, mental health and psychosocial support, health, education, child protection, reconciliation, direct financial/in kind assistance, and other areas of expertise critical to the provision of a holistic approach to reintegration and resocialization. Note that reintegration assistance will be provided to returning individuals – primarily women and children – who pass the necessary security screenings and vetting procedures by the relevant security and judicial state institutions, as the IOM is working directly only with returnees who are not under investigation, tried, or actively serving a sentence.

The IOM assisted governments and National Coordinators for P/CVE (the coordinating state body for prevention of violent extremism, and key actors in reintegration of RFTFs) to form centrally managed multi-disciplinary core groups. These multi-disciplinary groups consist of representatives of the sectors identified in the aforementioned strategies and operational plans for the reintegration of returning/released FTF and their families. These groups gather professionals with specialized expertise within specific areas, including mental health and psychosocial support, child protection related issues, health care and income generation assistance, and are conceptualized to be able to deploy trained staff to directly engage and provide assistance to FTF and their families, or to work as an expert resource to support existing structures at the local level supporting and coordinating with centres for mental health, centres for social welfare, citizens security councils, employment bureaus, or religious communities.

The IOM supports mandated authorities in the development of individual reintegration plans for returnees recognising that each returnee has different needs. This is a crucial tool to facilitate successful reintegration and to allow returnees to sever ties with violent extremist groups. Closely related to the system of individual plans, the IOM also advocates and supports a community-based case management system for returnees, which has the advantage over centralized case management in that it can more easily track and adapt to individual needs.

The IOM continues to work with governments to support those returning from conflict zones, including men, women, boys and girls, to reintegrate successfully into their communities, and ensures that they have access to tailored humanitarian assistance upon return to the

country and during their transition to the receiving local community. In Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), the IOM worked closely with the government ministries of interior/security to provide humanitarian assistance packages for families of returning FTFs upon their return. Following security screening, the government assesses the returnees' needs while the IOM directly procures goods (food and non-food items) and services, and mandated local institutions deliver the required assistance.

A Reintegration Fund for returnees was also established to distribute tailored support to returnees based on identified needs, as determined by the individual reintegration plans. This support includes inter alia, aa) Livelihoods support; and b) Skills training, education or employability support. The primary purpose of the fund is to cover gaps in government assistance – e.g., in some host communities, the medical or economic assistance needed is not available (due to the distance of facilities, temporary gaps in local budgets, etc.). In such cases, the fund can act as a stopgap until resources are made available or a more permanent solution is found by the authorities.

Building upon the findings of the research, the IOM shared its knowledge and experience with the governments receiving returnees, while implementing a regional transfer of best practices models, to expand proven models from individual countries to the wider Western Balkans region. The IOM recognises the need to continue to expand its work with authorities on regional knowledge exchange at the EU-WB level, bilaterally, and intra-regionally.

2.3 Lessons

Through interviews with key local representatives, the assessments looked at the capacities and needs of the communities where families are returning, capturing the perceptions, knowledge, capacity and needs of receiving communities. The assessments mapped the capacities and gaps of government authorities and service providers to meet the needs, facilitate the provision of immediate assistance, and ensure longer-term reintegration support to those returning. Using the knowledge and information from these assessments, IOM's research culminated in a set of concrete policy recommendations that will feed directly into strategies and operational plans of state authorities for the provision of reintegration assistance. The phenomenon of FTFs is fairly novel to many legal and institutional systems, and research is the key first step for any RFTF programming.

In terms of institutions willingness to cooperate in this project, most of the institutions have participated, but there are local institutions that have not shown interest to participate. The reason that they have not shown willingness to participate is that they do not consider it to be their mandate. The institution responsible for the repatriation program is the Ministry for Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The procedure for repatriation starts “with a pre-arrival phase, involving responsible bodies at national and local levels. The reception phase was completed with the 10-day risk and needs assessment that included health and psychological evaluations, initial interviews and temporary accommodation. Following the reception, the process continued with the establishment of a mobile mentorship team helping returned women to find psychological services in their communities” (Erinda Bilaca Ndroqi, 2021).

The same report defines opportunities and gaps and needs for women returnees that are not prosecuted by the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina (p 7):

As opportunities the report mentions good processes in place to identify and contact families of origin, no convictions of returned women as it is believed that this makes it easier to implement reintegration programmes and proactive engagement of local and women-led civil society organisations in R&R.

As gaps and recognized needs the report has identified lack of screening for potential threats of further radicalisation upon return to families of origin, lack of incentives for stable employability, lack of preparedness of local government authorities, need for more engagement with local communities towards re-socialisation and community acceptance.

As benefits, the IOM mentions the changing of perception of institutions about the work with returnees in the sense that they are more confident in doing this job. They are more confident because they have gained necessary skills and tools during the training they attended. The curriculum for the training was prepared by OSCE while IOM worked with different types of specialists (social workers, psychologists and other) working on prejudices, stress, ideological issues among the returnees and their families.

What is seen as challenge is that the number of children had been born in Syria and Iraq and they have no legal status in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They do not own an ID number or other kind of Bosnian documents, so they cannot fulfil their right to health insurance or attend school. At this stage children are in the process of receiving their birth certificates after which they can consummate all the rights as any citizen of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Another challenge is the attitude of certain categories of vulnerable population in Bosnia and Herzegovina toward funds and recourses being spent on this issue and not on, for example, victims of war or other persons in need in the Bosnian society. This clearly indicates that the general population is not aware of importance of these kinds of project or re-socializing the returnees and their families into the Bosnian society.

Main lessons of this project would be as follows:

- Importance of community engagement

During the project it was noted that it is highly important that the institutions involved engage with communities in order to combat stigmatization of returnees, especially women and children. Institutions, especially on the local level, such as local authorities, schools, centres for social work and other, play crucial role in reintegration of the returnees to Bosnian society as they are in direct contact with the population. Training them to do so is also a high level of priority.

- Importance of interdisciplinary approach

Approach coordinated by experts from different relevant fields (psychologists, pedagogues, sociologists and other) will help analyse the possibilities for resocialisation of returnees from different aspects and possibly find the best possible approach to deal with the resocialization of returnees and their families into Bosnian society in order to affect their believes and help produce prospective members of society.

3. PRONI Centre for Youth Development: YouVolution – Youth for Change

3.1 General info

The project aimed to increase the capacities of youth to establish, manage, network and ensure the sustainability of youth clubs, BRHI supported the PRONI Academy of Youth Work to implement training at three levels of youth work: PAOR A, PAOR B and PAOR B+. PAOR A (Basics of Youth Work) is intended for youth workers, PAOR B (Training for Trainer in the field of Youth Work) for youth trainers and PAOR B+ (Training for Managers of Youth Clubs) for youth club managers. Project was funded by the International Organisation for migration and it started in 2019 and ended in 2022. A total of 73 youth from 20 communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina participated in the academy, including young people from Stolac, Trebinje, Bileća, Višegrad, Vlasenica, Milići, Zvornik, Kalesija, Foča, Bratunac, Brčko, Cazin, Bihać, VelikaKladuša, Sanski Most, BosanskiPetrovac, Prijedor, Prnjavor, Zenica and Busovača. Fifty-two of them attended PAOR A, 13 attended PAOR B, and 22 attended PAOR B+. Each level consisted of six training modules. Due to COVID-19, four of them were held online. The fifth and sixth modules were held in Sarajevo, with the option for participants to attend online instead.

The curriculum of the PAOR A training focused on the basics of youth work, working with groups, management and organization of work in a youth club, non-violent communication and conflict resolution, prevention of violent extremism and radicalization, and youth work in practice. The curriculum of the PAOR B training focused on the promotion of tolerance, accepting difference, public communication skills, individual work with youth, protection and safety of children and youth, conflict transformation and training skills. By completing level PAOR B, participants become qualified to facilitate trainings for youth. The curriculum of the PAOR B+ training focused on development of interpersonal skills, project management (including Erasmus+ youth), management of social networks, counselling skills in youth work, lobbying and advocacy methods, and management of skills and human resources in youth clubs.

Upon completion of the training, the youth had the opportunity to test their knowledge and put their skills into practice by conducting peer-to-peer workshops and research in their communities while under the supervision and mentorship of PRONI trainers. Youth from the PAOR A training conducted a total of 17 peer-to-peer workshops in pairs, while youth from PAOR B conducted a total of six workshops. Topics of the workshops were: prejudices, business training for youth, freedom, tolerance, photography, youth rights and responsibilities, youth activism, violence, volunteerism, and rights of persons with disabilities, among others. Youth from PAOR B+ conducted four focus group discussions and two surveys to research the needs of youth in their communities. Through these activities, the participants in the Academy were able to mobilize around 200 peers.

3.2. Description and analysis

Throughout the activity, the participants also received coaching for liaising with local administrations and stakeholders for their support in opening youth clubs in their local communities. The mayors in five communities, i.e., Bihać, Trebinje, Prijedor, Bosanski

Petrovac and Cazin identified a public space that these youth can use for free. They also committed to paying for all maintenance and utility costs. The official opening ceremonies for these youth clubs will be organized once COVID-19 conditions allow for these to take place.

With the aim to network all youth clubs throughout BiH and inform the public on the overall activities of youth clubs and youth work across BiH, the Youth Clubs web platform (omladinskiklubovi.ba) was established. In addition to the five youth clubs established within this Activity, seven previously established youth clubs have their own pages on this platform, so youth from each community can promote their activities. A total of 121 posts were published on this platform to announce and promote the training and peer-to-peer workshops that were organized within this activity.

If youth are trained on the Youth Work methodology and proactive participation in local decision-making processes, then their capacities to establish and manage youth clubs in their communities will be increased, because: (-) Training modules are participatory, with a high level of reflection on personal experience; (-) Youth are interested to implement different initiatives that foster exchange between and bind youth from different communities; (-) Mapping and partnering with other youth workers positively influences youth's motivation to work in their communities; (-) Youth workers' role is appealing to youth; (-) Non-formal groups attract youth to join and engage them in their activities; (-) Youth have a long-term interest to manage youth clubs in the future; (-) Establishing web platform about activities of youth clubs throughout the country amplifies positive stories about youth engagement and impact of youth workers in local communities; (-) Youth clubs can attract support by the local community to become self-sustainable in the future.

Although this activity aimed to achieve transformation of individuals, collected data indicates that it promoted changes that fall under the dimensions of Transforming Relationships and Transforming Structures and Processes as well. As reported in the outcome section, youth experienced personal level changes (reduced anxiety, reduced fear of expressing their opinion, etc.), and changes in their knowledge, attitudes, behaviour and skills relevant to different domains of youth work. In terms of structures and processes, the most significant change is the contribution of local authorities in providing spaces and supporting costs for the five youth clubs. By ensuring their support, this activity contributed to creating a solid foundation for ensuring sustainability of youth clubs. Moreover, it was successful in creating bonds among youth from twenty communities across the country.

The project idea was led by the following principles:

- Training modules are participatory, with a high level of reflection on personal experience;
- Youth are interested to implement different initiatives that foster exchange between and bind youth from different communities;
- Mapping and partnering with other youth workers positively influences youth's motivation to work in their communities;
- Youth workers' role is appealing to youth;
- Non-formal groups attract youth to join and engage them in their activities;
- Youth have a long-term interest to manage youth clubs in the future;
- Establishing web platform about activities of youth clubs throughout the country amplifies positive stories about youth engagement and impact of youth workers in local communities;

- Youth clubs can attract support by the local community to become self-sustainable in the future.

We can see that most of project activities are based on creating opportunities for young people to become active agents in their communities and give the voice in order to improve the status of young people. In order to do so, young people needed to be educated and given the proper experiences. Other aspect of this project is giving young people alternative narratives to radicalism or extremism by providing them with opportunity to affect lives in their community.

3.3 Lessons

As PRONI Centre for Youth Development staff claims these are the learned lessons from this project:

- PRONI proven ability to mobilize youth can be used to further improve the capacities of existing youth clubs, support the establishment of new youth clubs and strengthen the network of youth clubs.
- The presence of at least four PRONI representatives performing different roles during the online training contributed to successful implementation of the activity. This could be replicated in other similar activities as well, as the capacities among BHRI awardees to conduct online trainings and using online platforms vary. It is also recommended that PRONI shares all the benefits of Zoom and Manimeter features with other awardees.
- To overcome the challenges with the low attendance rate, more time should be ensured between the two training sessions and opportunities to meet in-person increased. The involvement of youth from the same communities will ensure also higher attendance rates, as youth can motivate their friends to attend. Special attention should be paid to participants in different BHRI activities.
- Offering youth the opportunity to listen recorded training sessions can address some challenges related to attendance. Consent for recording the sessions was obtained from all online participants.
- As part of this activity, the trainer has slightly modified (added topics or curriculum content that is more suitable to the specific group in order to the training content and the topic itself to be more understandable for the participants) the training curriculum in order to meet the needs of PAOR B+ level training participants who lacked skills in the area of project proposals, while at the same time these skills were vital skills for youth to be able to successfully develop and implement projects. This has proven to be a great practice.
- Participants who were active beyond this activity showed more willingness to share opinions, thoughts and concerns without fear of encountering a bad reaction and seek clarification of certain tasks. This should be considered when selecting participants in similar activities. By “active beyond this activity” we consider participants who already have experience in youth work working on other project that aim to contribute to improving lives of young people in their communities.
- While PRONI training includes both theoretical and practical components, the trainer at the PAOR B level focused primarily on acquiring set of skills and knowledge in the

field of training for trainers in the field of youth work, promotion of tolerance and acceptance of diversity, communication with the public and other. Teaching approaches towards skills acquisition need to be ensured in similar activities in the future.

This project involved long term goal of PRONI Centre for Youth Development's recognized goal to educate youth workers in Bosnia and Herzegovina and by doing so standardize youth work in order to respond to youth needs in a professional manner. By giving young people agency such activities youth organizations mitigate several different push factors that concern radicalism and extremism, such as: marginalization and discrimination (by providing equal opportunity and a safe place to express themselves), lack of socio-economic opportunities (by providing opportunity for non-formal education that can be used also outside youth work) and other.

What this project has shown, like others before, is that young people, although under constant pressure of ethno-nationalistic political narratives, segregated education, war trauma and other, are willing to cooperate and overcome these issues for the greater good. Although several research has shown (Puhalo, 2013) that the ethnic distance among young people is still on a high level this project and its participants have shown that the foundations of rebuilding the trust among people in Bosnia and Herzegovina are existing.

4. PRONI Centre for Youth Development: Youth Countering Violent Activism

4.1. General info

The main objective of this project is to support and enhance young women's and young men's participation in activities aimed at preventing violent extremism by prioritizing meaningful engagement mechanisms at the local and national level, as laid out in UN resolutions 2178 and 2250; and provide a physically, socially and emotionally safe and supportive environment for the participation of young women and men in preventing violent extremism. The project was funded by Facebook through their adventure partners campaign.

The project included 4 main different activities:

- Organized National conference and advocacy campaign for changes in laws that regulate Hate speech online in BiH (April-July 2018)

PRONI Center for youth development in cooperation with the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, organized conference "Youth Countering the Violent Extremism" held on June 12, 2018. in the premises of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH. The conference was attended by a large number of representatives of local, regional and international civil society organizations, BiH ministries, representatives of local self-governments, embassies, media, police, students, representatives of the academic community and practitioners in the prevention of violent extremism among young people. Participation in the conference took 75, up listed, representatives.

- Organized series of meetings (live and online) with youth from both BiH entities and Brcko District in order to create National youth body for No-hate speech (April - September 2018)

We also organized more than ten meetings with youth councils from Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Srpska, with youth organizations that are members of new youth council of Brcko district B&H, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of FB&H, Ministry of Family, Youth and Sport of Republic of Srpska, Department of professional and administrative affairs of Brcko district Brcko district B&H and Department for EU Integration in Brcko.

PRONI was initiator and the most responsible organization that carried the most activities resulting with the creation of Brcko District Youth Council. We needed to implement this activity as presumption for start of National youth councils in BiH inclusion in this project, and it could be done because of Youth Law in Brcko that was accepted thanks to PRONI passed projects and initiatives.

- Organized advanced human rights and advocacy trainings from 30 youth representatives for Federation BiH and Republic Srpska youth councils and 10 organizations from both entities (September 2018 - Jun 2019)

Representatives of Youth Council of Republic of Srpska and members of the Youth Council of FBiH from all over Bosnia and Herzegovina participated in a two-day training in the area of advocacy, which was implemented by PRONI Center for Youth Development in Brčko (Bosnia and Herzegovina). All participants had the opportunity to hear and learn more about advocacy, techniques, advocacy models, and ways of advocacy realization from practical examples.

- Conducted qualitative and quantitative research on youth radicalism in BiH (March - May 2018)

Research: “Contemporary young people in Bosnian society: Challenges and attitudes of young people regarding radicalization and extremism” collected 551 youth answers, age 15-30 from 60 municipalities from Bosnia aiming to examine the attitudes of young people toward extremism and radicalism.

4.2 Description and analysis

The specific goals of the project are:

- Identify existing and create new tools and mechanisms in working with young people in order to prevent the radicalization of young people (especially on online social networks),
- Create a network/coalition of youth organizations and youth workers in Bosnia and Herzegovina who will be ready and able to engage in intra-ethnic and religious dialogue and prevention of youth radicalization,
- Increase the level of knowledge exchange between youth workers in the network/coalition and their capacities for advocacy, lobbying and independent work to prevent the radicalization of young people,
- Increase the visibility of youth organizations and promote their recognition as important partners (according to public institutions) in preventing youth radicalization,

- Raising the awareness of citizens, especially young people, of the risks of radicalization and the role of young people in prevention of radicalism and extremism.

Youth Workers Countering the Violent Extremism aimed to strengthen and support the existing skills and abilities of youth workers and give them new tools to notice, act on and report radical behaviour of young people in the digital and real world. The "classic" approach of youth work is to work with groups of young people who come to any organized activity that uses non-formal education as a method. To change this approach and reach young people who are at risk of radical ideologies that can lead to violent extremism, youth workers need to change their approach and create new tools and use new methods.

This project focused on the following activities: Advanced training for 30 youth workers on the topics: Coping with conflicts and violent behaviour, Working with individuals - counselling skills, Working with young people in the field and "Digital work with young people"; Creation of an online platform on which information on research on youth radicalization, violent extremism, positive examples of work with youth and other relevant information was collected, published and translated.

Project activities took place in three municipalities/cities in North-Eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina: Bijeljina, Brčko and Tuzla. The beneficiaries of the project will be the youth workers of the PRONI Center for Youth Development Brčko and Bijeljina, the Local Volunteer Service of Bijeljina and Brčko and the Youth Resource Center Tuzla. The project involved 10 youth workers from each city and more than 1000 young people will be involved in project activities.

Important aspect of this project is the campaign Citizens Against Terrorism. CAT- Citizens Against Terrorism is a joint initiative of the united students of Bosnia and Herzegovina within the peer global digital challenge in the fight against extremism (<https://edventurepartners.com/peer-to-peer-facebook-global-digital-challenge/>) led by PRONI Center for Youth Development during 2017-2019. Students from all over the world develop and implement social media campaigns and actions against extremism that are credible, original, interesting and convincing to their peers. In partnership with Facebook, this campaign will resonate with the wider community. Last year (2016), the University of Sarajevo had a team competing in the same challenge. This year (2017) CAT is the only representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina gathers students from all parts of the country, all nations and religions who are united around the same goal under the slogan Let's go **RADICALLY FOR PEACE!**

The project Youth Countering Violent Extremism falls under the sphere of creating resilience of young people toward radical ideologies and extremism. It is project that serves as a awareness raising and preventive measure that aims to raise awareness about concepts of radicalism and extremism and awaken the wider public about the existence of radical organizations and behavior in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

It is important to mention that this project was implemented while ISIS and similar organizations were active in Syria and Iraq and that this was time when citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina were still leaving to join these extremist groups.

4.3 Lessons

Since the activities that were implemented during this project were diverse in the sense that they had the goal to raise awareness among young people and wider public and influence their beliefs, capabilities and actions, it offered plenty of opportunity for different kinds of lessons.

Lessons that participants and PRONI staff finds most important are as follows:

- It is necessary to work on building a "civic identity" among young people, which should become a key tool for combating extremism and radicalism among young people.
- More intensive engagement and cooperation of all key actors in the fight against violent extremism is necessary in view of the phenomenon that young people globally are increasingly attracted by extreme ideologies.
- Further efforts need to be made to raise awareness of the "fight against hate speech on the Internet" and "media literacy of young people" through education and training of staff and through multisectoral cooperation and involvement of as many key actors as in the formal and informal education sector in BiH.
- In the long run, against violent extremism and radicalism among young people, we can fight the most efficiently through the further democratization of society, by promoting fundamental democratic values and human rights.
- It is necessary, at local and national level, to generate projects that will include inclusive processes for young people (young change generators, not observers).
- Local approach - to form and / or support existing structures at the level of municipalities and cities for the fight against hate speech and violent extremism in the youth that would act or act through a form of civic activism that acts and react proactively to the observed cases of hate speech and violent extremism in youth at the local level.
- Legislation needs to be improved in terms of enacting new laws or amending existing laws and regulations that regulate the field of hate speech on the Internet and especially on social networks, in order to reduce the number of cases - through the introduction of stimulated measures in the fight against hate on the Internet and the sharpening of repressive measure for perpetrators.
- Assigning the authority of a regulatory body against hate speech on social networks to one of the regulatory media agencies in BiH, which would be responsible for monitoring the application of laws in this field.
- Create and implement activities in the field of combating hate speech on the Internet, influencing the awareness raising in children, youth and other categories of population in BiH, and working on the exchange of good experiences and practices.
- Work and encourage donor organizations to plan and allocate funds to support youth activities that are working to prevent violent extremism and radicalization of young people.
- Incorporate media campaigns into the fight against hate speech on the Internet and to combat violent extremism among young people in order to sensitize the public and work on self-regulation of the media that would contribute to the recognition and condemnation of the media that spread the hate speech via the Internet.

We see that the multisectoral approach is of the crucial significance. Strong cooperation of different governmental and nongovernmental organization can lead to providing the organizations with significant tools to combat radicalism and extremism among young people. Working on adjusting and creating new legislation is another factor that can contribute to combating these phenomena in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Significance has also been given to hate speech as a phenomenon that is indicative of radicalism and extremism, especially hate speech on the internet which is widely used by extremist organization for spreading their ideology.

This project included wide range of different activities, such as research as a tool to find out how young people view radicalism, extremism and terrorism, campaigning as a tool to raise awareness on radicalism, extremism and terrorism among young people and wider public in Bosnia and Herzegovina, workshops and conferences in order to bring different experts together to discuss the current situation regarding radicalism and offer possible solutions.

It is also important to mention that this project brought together young people from different parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and young people of different ethnic background and took a role of a peace building project as well.

5. General conclusions

This report has provided insight into three projects that represent civic education measures that are meant to prevent radicalism among young people, but also the general population in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The first project presented in this report is the Reintegration of returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters (RFTF) and their Families from Conflict Zones, implemented by the International Organization for Migration. This project directly deals with the rehabilitation and socialization of returnees from foreign war zones in Syria and Iraq and their families into Bosnian society. It takes a multidisciplinary approach by involving various experts, governmental and nongovernmental organizations, and institutions like Centers for Social Work, schools, and associations. As the project is still ongoing, it is difficult to discuss its results at this stage. However, it aligns with several research findings that advocate for a multidisciplinary approach to addressing radicalization. The Radicalism Awareness Network has issued a manual of responses to returnees as a tool for practitioners working with returnees, emphasizing the importance of informing and involving local authorities in their reintegration and rehabilitation.

The second project described in this report is YouVolution – Youth for Change, implemented by the PRONI Centre for Youth Development. This project aims to provide young people with counter-narratives to extremism and radicalism, empowering them to affect positive change in their communities. Participants in the PRONI Academy of Youth Work receive the necessary knowledge and skills to plan and implement various activities, negotiate with local authorities, and manage youth clubs and organizations. In addition to these aspects, the project facilitates cooperation with local authorities, enabling young people to become active members of society and agents of change. Furthermore, it equips them to plan and implement projects at the state level.

The third project presented in this report is Youth Countering Violent Activism, which directly raises awareness about the existence of radical and extremist organizations in Bosnia and

Herzegovina. It involves conducting research to understand the current attitudes and perceptions of young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina towards radicalism, extremism, and terrorism. The project also includes an international experts conference to identify the current types and state of radicalism in the country, as well as workshops for youth workers on mitigating radicalism, extremism, and terrorism. As part of the project, an online platform was created to spread awareness about these phenomena and provide tools for mitigating them.

All three projects presented in this report aim to help communities cope with radicalism and extremism, and they are all multidisciplinary in nature. To give young people a voice and agency over their lives and communities, all three projects, especially the latter two, have included young people in the process of planning and implementing them. This approach provides young people with an opportunity to participate in the lives of their communities and address issues they perceive as important.

The media, particularly social networks and internet portals, play a significant role in the radicalization of young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Pečković, 2018). They serve as tools for recruiting young individuals into radical movements, creating a homogeneous radical indigenous community and perpetuating hate speech, often targeted at minority and marginalized groups. The sense of security provided by belonging to a particular group is evident among members of fan groups. Hate speech directed at a specific community can lead to stigmatization and social marginalization.

Recognizing the influence of different media types on the radicalization of young people, the projects have responded by establishing their own online platforms to spread counter-narratives to extremism. This enables the wider public in Bosnia and Herzegovina to learn about radicalism, extremism, and their impact on society.

The projects have also involved various community institutions mandated to mitigate radicalism and extremism, including police bodies, political institutions, and schools. This demonstrates the organizations' recognition of the necessity for a multidisciplinary approach to prevention and combating radicalization.

However, considering factors such as youth unemployment, poverty, corruption, segregated education, feelings of marginalization among young people, animosity towards political elites, ethno-national tensions, and other factors, it is evident that the potential for radicalization exists. If the existing socio-economic situation persists, the radicalization of young people will likely increase, necessitating further action. While these projects contribute to knowledge and skills sharing and raise awareness, the primary responsibility lies with governmental institutions.

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