Working with Youth

at Risk in the Balkans

A Case Study on Program Y+

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Table of Contents

Contents

Executive summary

The case study scrutinizes the process of development and piloting of the model for the prevention of youth radicalization and extremism (Program Y+) that was conducted within the project Young Men Initiative "Men and Boys as Partners in Promoting Gender Equality and the Prevention of Youth Extremism and Violence in the Balkans" implemented by CARE International Balkans and partner organizations in the period 2017-2020. Program Y+ is dedicated to the prevention of youth extremism and violence, as well as to increasing and strengthening community connections and addressing the multiple layers of exclusion often leading to extremism. It is being implemented by five partner organizations in five target countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo*, and Serbia. The main objective of this qualitative research was to capture the core elements of the impact of Program Y+ on youth, parents, teachers, and other relevant stakeholders/community members. The interviews were conducted with the help of partner organizations Perpetuum Mobile (Banja Luka), Center E8 (Belgrade), SIT (Pristina), Act for Society (Tirana), Status-M (Zagreb), the representatives of which also participated.

This case study relied on a specific methodology which consisted of a thorough desk analysis in order to gain insight into the basic concepts and operationalize concepts such as extremism and radicalism, both among young people and the general population. After the desk analysis, five group interviews were conducted with local partner organizations, teachers from schools that were part of the project, trainers who participated in the workshops, and beneficiaries of the program, in all project targeted countries.

The findings of this case study should serve as a starting point for the future development of the program as well as to document the progress in dealing with youth at risk in the Balkans. The piloted models achieved success by applying different approaches and methods, and the main findings show that participating partner organizations demonstrated creativity and dedication, and that their specific approaches were of high quality. Implemented activities were very beneficial for youth participants and Y+ proved itself as a promising prevention program in this area. Even though the piloting phase showed great results, there is space for further enhancement and standardization of the piloted approaches, which is why the implementation of Program Y+ needs to continue in the following period, in order to standardize the methodologies that partner organizations will utilize in the future. Only with continuous work and further improvements will the Y+ program reach its full potential of becoming the effective, well-rounded, comprehensive, and scalable program that ensures results in the prevention of youth extremism and radicalization.

This case study is intended for use by the YMI team (CARE and partners), as well as for all relevant stakeholders (school staffs, social workers, national and international NGOs, etc.) that might be interested in cooperating and joining YMI's future efforts to prevent radicalization and violent extremism.

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*   This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence. Applies to the whole document

CARE International in the Balkans

CARE International has over 25 years of experience in program implementation in the Balkan region. During the 1990s wars and conflicts, CARE responded to the destruction, traumatization, displacement, and inter-ethnic distrust with massive humanitarian and life-saving activities all over the Balkans. Since the year 2000, CARE's orientation has been shifting to developmental work. Today, its aim in the Balkans is to ensure that the social, economic and political rights of vulnerable and marginalized groups are recognized and fulfilled, contributing to sustainable peace in the region.

CARE's Program Strategy is based on two pillars: a) *socio-economic inclusion* of vulnerable minorities and other marginalized groups by contributing to stronger capacities and creating better opportunities for them, enabling them to integrate into society and fulfil their rights; b) *gender equality* among vulnerable and marginalized groups by promoting the values and practices of gender equality, diversity and non-violence, strengthening the capacities of local, national and regional human rights and social justice actors, as well as creating opportunities for innovation, participation, learning, cooperation and advocacy. CARE nourishes partnerships with the local civil society sector and governments dedicated to creating positive changes in societies.

About Young Men Initiative

1. About Young Men Initiative

The Young Men Initiative (YMI) is a follow-up to CARE´s comprehensive and programmatic effort to prevent interpersonal and gender-based violence (GBV), as well as to promote gender equality in the region. The YMI targets youth in order to build their knowledge and attitudes concerning gender equality and healthy lifestyles, and to reduce all types of violence. It tackles the issues of violence, gender inequality and discrimination, stereotypical and harmful gender norms, issues of drugs and alcohol abuse, as well as that of sexual and reproductive health – by introducing gender transformative programming into educational systems across the Balkans. Since its very beginning in 2006, the YMI has worked on developing healthy, non-violent and gender equitable attitudes and behaviors amongst boys and men as well as girls and women participating in the program. Beside youth, the YMI also engages teachers, parents, youth workers, decision-makers from ministries and local self-governments, social workers, media, civil society organizations, and others, thus gathering all these different stakeholders under the umbrella of the common vision – a vision of a violence-free and gender-equal society.

The YMI is implemented by CARE Balkans in close cooperation with 10 partner organizations from eight cities: Banja Luka, Belgrade, Mostar, North Mitrovica, Priština, Sarajevo, Tirana, and Zagreb. During the previous years, the YMI was not limited only to the aforementioned cities and its activities significantly scaled up, reaching more than 140 different cities/municipalities and over 720,000 direct participants through thousands of educational, advocacy and/or campaign activities. The total indirect reach and media reach are probably measured in millions of people.

YMI implementation by CARE Balkans

10 partner organizations from 8 cities:

Zagreb

Banja Luka

Belgrade

Sarajevo

North Mitrovica

Prishtina

Program reached

140 different

cities/municipalities

Over **720,000**

direct participants

Mostar

Tirana
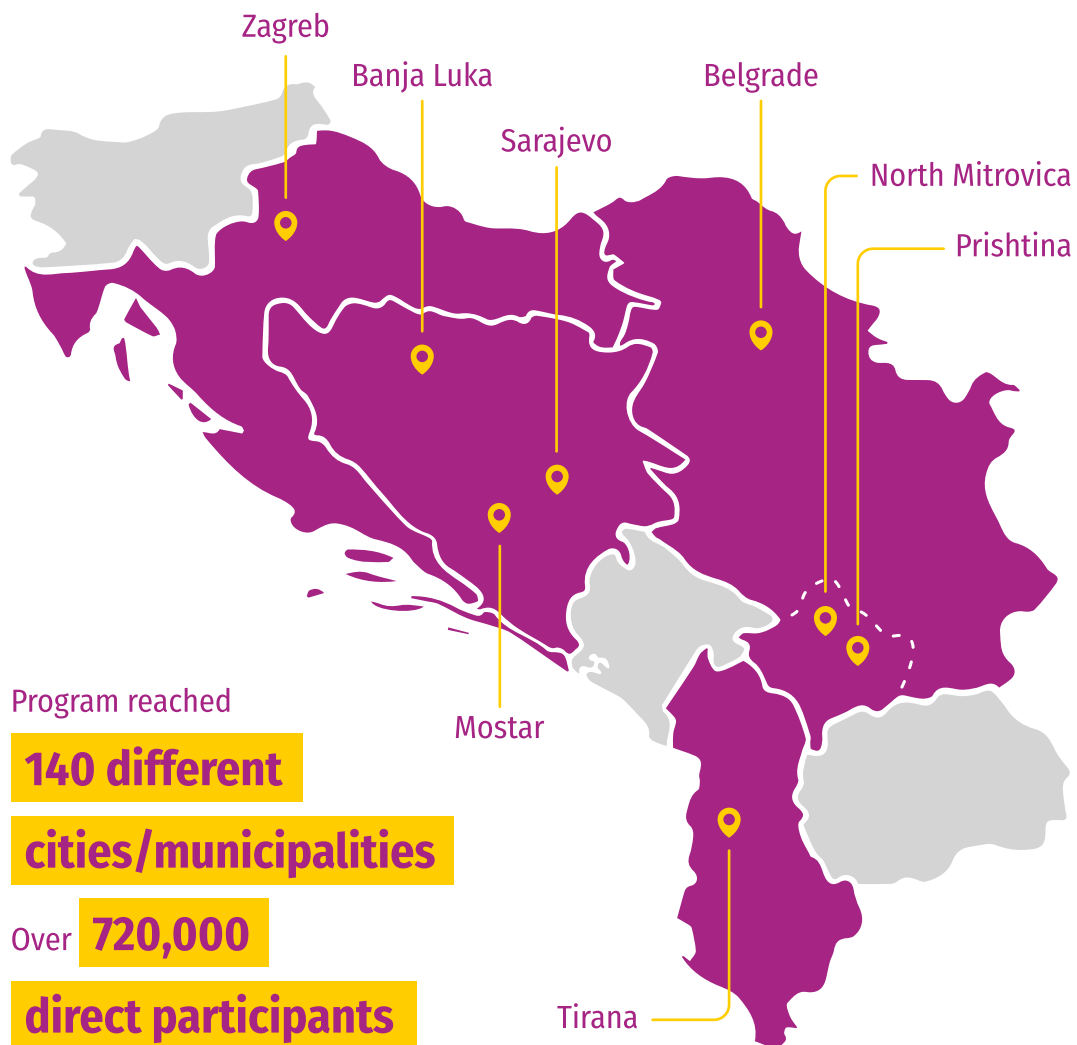
These numbers, as well as the YMI's longevity, bear testament to the scope and ambition of YMI's efforts. Furthermore, CARE, partner organizations' staff and beneficiaries note that YMI and "Be a Man" (its umbrella campaign and slogan) are not just projects but also a "way of life". A comprehensive research comparing baseline and endline researches in target locations showed a significant positive change in each of the four project phases (from 2006 to 2020). Moreover, numerous testimonials and interviews with beneficiaries prove that the YMI educational programs leave a significant impact that leads to positive changes in one's attitude and behavior.

Educational programs were always the basis of YMI's endeavors, since its very inception. It all started with Program M (a manual for working specifically with young men) based on Promundo's Program H and adapted to the Balkans context, relying on results of qualitative and quantitative researches in participating countries. Program Y was the next step, the further evolution of Program M, intended for mixed gender groups and thus for scaling up to a larger number of pupils. Besides continuous work with youth, a training for school staff (i.e. teachers, pedagogues, psychologists) was developed, accredited and implemented across the Balkans, enabling school staffs to implement workshops themselves and to support their students and peer educators. "Be a Man" clubs (BMC) are another specific strength of the program, as they are youth activist clubs with members who are students and peer educators involved in the program. BMC's are based on youth participation and youth engagement, and focused on devising, organizing and implementing various public actions within schools and communities, which further spread the messages and values of the program. Participative process was always one of the key features of YMI and young people were always engaged in the development of new programs and campaigns.

One of the fresh approaches and ideas in youth program development was the creation of a new educational program specially tailored for youth at risk in the Balkans. The Program was based on CARE's gender transformative programming, its main focus being the prevention of youth extremism and radicalism. In early 2019, CARE and partner organizations began the development of a new plus model of Program Y(outh) as a response to the changing environment and demand for counter-radicalization of youth. The initial idea of the piloting was to address the issue of extremism and radicalization among youth at risk, out-of-school youth, juvenile delinquents, and unemployed youth.

Other significant YMI activities include various youth camps and residential trainings, expert and youth conferences, socially engaged theatre plays, movies and video clips, social media activations, etc. Latest and upcoming additions to this plethora of activities (e.g. development of online training for teachers, programs for elementary schools, movement building, etc.) look very promising and show that there is much more to look forward to from YMI.

Background and Methodology

2

2. Background and Methodolgy

2.1. Extremism and radicalization

Extremism. Although the term extremism has been in use since Ancient Greece, its original meanings has not changed that much. The de-politicization of this notion is certainly a modern age phenomenon, as well as its connection with other phenomena, such as violent radicalization, terrorism, masculinity, etc. The notion of political extremes is rooted in Ancient Greek ethics, and both Plato and Aristotle sought to define it. Plato's continuum of governmental form spanned the extremes of despoteia/tyrannis and anomia/lawless democracy, in which four types of governments were located between the extremes – oligarchy, kingdom, aristocracy, and legal democracy. The mean was supposed to be reached through the balance of constitutional elements which, taken by themselves, would be extreme. Afterwards, Aristotle "freed the Platonic terms from their theological, ontological framework, embedded them in a comprehensive scientific system and gave them a politically realistic calibre".[1] He suggested the "politeia" as the best possible form of government, which represents a mixture of both "oligarchic" and "democratic" elements. "The ontologically axiological two-dimensionality of the Platonic-Aristotelian mesotes and mixed constitutional doctrine offered logical possibilities for connection to the new political taxonomy which developed in the aftermath of the French Revolution".[2] The distinction between the two forms, "extreme" and "reasonable", was now connected with the new terms – "right" and "left".[3]

In contemporary literature, extremism is still closely related to politics, and represents something that is "far beyond the limits".[4] For example, Pressman define it as "any political theory that holds to uncompromising and rigid policies or ideology".[5] Having this in mind, an extremist is perceived as "someone who has extreme opinions, especially in politics; relating to, or favoring, extreme measures".[6]

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1   Backes, U. (2007). Meaning and Forms of Political Extremism in Past and Present. Central European Political Studies Review. 9(4), pp. 242-262, p. 243.

2   Ibid., p. 244.

3   Ibid.

4   Pressman, D.E. (2009). Risk Assessment Decisions for Violent Political Extremism 2009-02. Ottawa, Ont.: Public Safety Canada, Backes, U. (2007). Meaning and Forms of Political Extremism in Past and Present. Central European Political Studies Review. 9(4), pp. 242-262.

5   Pressman, D.E. (2009). Risk Assessment Decisions for Violent Political Extremism 2009-02. Ottawa, Ont.: Public Safety Canada, p. 5.

6   Centre for Prevention of Radicalisation Leading to Violence (CPRL), available at: https://info-radical.org/en/

Backes focuses on the "extreme" category, that together with "extremism" is "something which is the farthest out". He claims that "there is nothing beyond the extreme; extremes cannot be increased, they embody something which cannot be surpassed or exceeded".[7] The problem of extremism becomes more and more important in the age of global migration and regular travels, since the "feelings of 'belonging' and of identity are often fragmented and personal allegiances can cause confusion".[8]

There are several characteristics that can be used when describing the term "political extremism", by defining its opposite characteristics. Backes uses this way of shaping terms from different aspects in order to approximate its political and social distribution:

1. *Pluralism instead of monism.* The state unites a number of people whose interests and views are different, but at the same time legitimate.

2. *Orientation toward a common good instead of an egotistical execution of interests.* Under the condition of a "plurality of equals", different interests and worldviews needs to be taken into consideration.

3. *Rule of Law instead of arbitrary rule.* A political order must be comprised of rules which are to be adhered to by everyone, including those ruling at the moment.

4. *Self-determination instead of outside determination.* The vast majority of decisions are only acceptable when there exists a fair possibility for everyone to participate in the decision-making process.[9]

Having in mind that extremism is still very present in modern society, it is expected that it will reflect on the younger population. *One of the main factors that lead towards extremism among the young population is exposure to negative and destructive emotions. If this factor is connected and crossed with unemployment and marginalization, the individual has predispositions to foster extremist views.[10]*

7   Backes, U. (2007). Meaning and Forms of Political Extremism in Past and Present. Central European Political Studies Review. 9(4), pp. 242-262, p. 245.

8   European Union (2005). Addressing the factors contributing to violent radicalization. Brussels, Belgium: European Union Council Concerning Terrorist Recruitment and Commission, p. 14.

9   Backes, U. (2007). Meaning and Forms of Political Extremism in Past and Present. Central European Political Studies Review. 9(4), pp. 242-262, p. 247.

10 Trebješanin, Ž. (2007). Psihologija političkog ekstremizma. Beograd, Republika Srbija: Hereticus

Radicalization is often closely related to extremism. Radicalism refers to one who intends to overthrow the status quo, however not often necessarily in an illegal or violent way. This implicates that neither radicalism nor extremism automatically lead to security threats or terrorism, which is why it is important to make a difference "between radicalism and extremism as ways of thinking on the one hand, and violent behaviours on the other".[11] Having this in mind, radicalization can be perceived as a *"process whereby people adopt an extremist belief system – including the intent to use, encourage or facilitate violence – in order to promote an ideology, a political project or a cause as a means of social transformation"*. On the other hand, radicalization leading to violent extremism is a "process whereby a person accepts the use of violence to achieve political, ideological or religious goals, including violent extremism and terrorism".[12] Radicalization has also been analyzed by the New York Police Department, and four main phases of this process were recognized:

1. *a pre-radicalization phase*, or the point of origin;

2. *the self-identification phase* – individuals begin to explore the radical ideology and associate themselves with other like-minded individuals;

3. *the indoctrination stage* in which beliefs are intensified and reinforced;

4. *the attack or terrorist phase* – members accept that it is their duty to participate in a terrorist attack.[13]

Not all individuals who start the process of radicalization move through all phases and end up as terrorists.[14] The last two phases represent behavior that can be defined as "violent radicalization". This type of radicalization is "the process of adopting or promoting an extremist belief system for the purpose of facilitating ideologically based violence in order to advance political, religious, or social change".[15] Radicalization that leads to terrorism is a dynamic process in which an individual gradually accepts terrorist violence as a legitimate way of acting.[16]

11 Weert, A. & Eijkman, Quirine. (2018). Subjectivity in detection of radicalisation and violent extremism: a youth worker's perspective. Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression, pp. 1-24, p. 192.

12 Centre for Prevention of Radicalisation Leading to Violence (CPRL), available at: https://info-radical.org/en/

13 Pressman, D.E. (2009). Risk Assessment Decisions for Violent Political Extremism 2009-02. Ottawa, Ont.: Public Safety Canada, pp. 4-5

14 Silber, M. D., & Bhatt, A. (2007). Radicalization in the west: The homegrown threat. New York: New York Police Department Intelligence Division.

15 Pressman, D.E. (2009). Risk Assessment Decisions for Violent Political Extremism 2009-02. Ottawa, Ont.: Public Safety Canada, p. 5

16 OEBS (2018). The Role of Civil Society in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism. Wiena: Austria, p. 7

2.2. Drivers of (violent) extremism

To understand (violent) extremism, we must try to understand its drivers, or in other words: what are the causes or reasons that explain why groups or individuals might be attracted to supporting or engaging in (violent) extremism[17]. Needless to say, we are dealing with difficult and increasingly complex phenomena. We must note at the very beginning that current literature does not identify any clear single path to radicalization and violent extremism. Thus, there is no single profile of someone that will join a violent extremist group or become violently extreme, as there are cases across all demographics, from age, gender, socio-economic status, education level, etc. Neither one of the drivers is enough to explain why someone became radicalized, or to predict that someone will become radicalized, thus drivers should not be viewed individually or separately, but always as a complex combination and interplay between many factors.

For example, poverty and lack of education are often mentioned as factors, but they are not sufficient predictors. Explanations referring to "underlying conditions" are limited for the simple fact that "very large populations experience them and yet, typically, only a very small fraction of them turn to violence (…) most of those affected by the underlying conditions to which violent extremism often is ascribed – do not, in fact, resort to violence"[18]. There is no doubt that more quantitative and qualitative research is needed for more complete and nuanced explanations. Still, it seems that a "general theory" of violent extremism is not possible, but every extremist group or manifestation of violent extremism "must be viewed as the product of a particular combination of variables and dynamics, at work at a certain historical juncture, in a specific setting, and shaped by both local conditions and global dynamics."[19] Hence, violent extremism must be always analyzed in a particular context, because reasons and ways will vary from one setting to another.

The most widely used framework is the model of "push" and "pull" factors, developed by the US Agency for International Development (USAID)[20].

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17   Leuven, D.V. (2019). Countering Violent Extremism: An Introductory Guide to Concepts, Programming, and Best Practices, Search for Common Ground.

18   Denoeux, G. and Carter, L. (2009). Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism, US Agency for International Development (USAID).

19   Ibid.

20   USAID (2011). The Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency. US Agency for International Development (USAID), available at: https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pdacs400.pdf

1. Push factors are structural factors that contribute to the conditions conducive to violent extremism – they are socio-economic, political, and cultural in nature, and they are perceived at the individual or community level. In the same document USAID lists the following examples (noting that it is not a complete list): 1. High levels of social marginalization and fragmentation; 2. Poorly governed or ungoverned areas; 3. Government repression and human rights violations; 4. Endemic corruption and elite impunity; 5. Cultural threat perceptions. These factors could be "any condition or grievance that creates a sense of frustration, marginalization, and disempowerment which encourage people to seek out remedies including, but not limited to, joining extremist groups"[21].

Push factors:

1. High levels of social marginalization and fragmentation;
2. Poorly governed or ungoverned areas;
3. Government repression and human rights violations;
4. Endemic corruption and elite impunity;
5. Cultural threat perceptions.

2. Pull factors are the conditions that have a direct impact on the individual and include psychosocial and/or personal rewards that attract individuals to join terrorism or violent extremism[22]. Some examples of these factors include: sense of identity or self-worth or kinship; money or economic incentives; support for the family provided by terrorist organization; sense of duty or honor or heroism; sense of power, adventure or desire to commit violence. USAID lists following examples: 1. Access to material resources, social status and respect from peers; 2. Sense of belonging, adventure, and self-esteem or personal empowerment that individuals and groups that have long viewed themselves as victimized and marginalized can derive from the feeling that they are making history; 3. The prospect of achieving glory and fame. Beside listed, USAID also notes the following as additional pull factors: the presence of radical institutions or venues, service provision by extremist groups, and extremist involvement in illegal economic activity.

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21   Slachmuijlder, L. (2017). Transforming Violent Extremism: A peacebuilder's guide, 1st ed. Washington DC: Search for Common Ground.

22   Mattei, C. and Zeiger, S. (2018). Evaluate your CVE results: Projecting your impact. Hedayah, 2018.

Pull factors:

1. Access to material resources, social status and respect from peers;

2. Sense of belonging, adventure, and self-esteem or personal empowerment that individuals and groups that have long viewed themselves as victimized and marginalized can derive from the feeling that they are making history;

3. The prospect of achieving glory and fame.

Promundo-US offers a gendered perspective, examining the connections between masculinity and violent extremism in one of their latest studies[23]. They consider the following factors: 1. individual level factors (harmful attitudes, history of intimate partner violence, gender socialization); 2. family and community level factors (the intergenerational transmission of violence, sense of inclusion and belonging); 3. structural level factors (poverty and the of lack of meaningful, achievable opportunities; perceived loss and sense of entitlement; lack of trust in public institutions; inability to voice dissent; masculine norms and militarization).

Within the YMI project and its Program Y+ component, the partner organization Perpetuum Mobile from Banja Luka, with Srđan Dušanić as the lead researcher, conducted a quantitative research with a sample of 1058 young people across Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the resulting study[24], Dušanić conducted an extensive and thorough review of numerous sources. Regarding determinants of extremism, he concludes that: "These factors can be roughly categorized into individual, group and social. Contrary to some initial expectations, stronger predictors are from the group and social domain, rather than certain personality disorders". Also strongly emphasized are experiences that the world is unjust, especially towards their religion, people, state or to some other social group, as well as certain negative events during adolescence and the influence of reference groups such as family or peers.

Results of the aforementioned quantitative research[25] show that around half of the young people surveyed are not satisfied with society in which they live, which might be a predisposition for the development of extremist tendencies. The author notes that about 15-20% of the surveyed young people expressed extremist attitudes, while 10-14% support some extremist group or have even participated in some actions. Also worrying is the fact that 45% of youth answered that they would support radical action as a means of changing the state of affairs in society, while one in

23 Sommers, M. (2019). Youth and the Field of Countering Violent Extremism. Washington, DC: Promundo-US, available at: https://promundoglobal.org/resources/youth-and-the-field-of-countering-violent-extremism/

24 Dušanić, S. (2020). Mladi i ekstremizam. Perpetuum mobile – Institut za razvoj mladih i zajednice, Banja Luka

25 Ibid.

five respondents considered some form of radical engagement. The study also shows that most respondents feel strong ethno-religious affiliations and that the basis of extremist ideas is mostly shaped around these social identities. Young people who are more inclined to extremism also had more pronounced authoritarianism, conservativism, alienation, antisocial and dark triad[26] personality traits. They are also more "tied" to their peer groups, and their socialization was generally more burdened by negative experiences.

Interviewees in each of the Western Balkan countries evaluated in the Extremism Research Forum's report[27] emphasized "the pressing need to address systemic factors such as economic deprivation, corruption, and political and institutional dysfunction." Furthermore, respondents of all types across the Western Balkans highlighted that the key potential driver of extremism is the personal and community-level crisis of identity, especially among youth, who face very high levels of unemployment and social disenfranchisement.

45%

Youth would support radical actions as a means of changing the state of affairs in society

1 in 5

Respondents considered some form of radical engagement

To conclude this section, we must highlight the importance of understanding the local threats of violent extremism and its causes, because extremism must be observed in a particular context. Its development and factors vary greatly from context to context, thus prevention programs (the main element of this case study) must be contextualized, based on evidence gathered from local communities. Simply, there is no "one-size fits all" solution.

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26   In psychology, the "dark triad" comprises the personality traits of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy.

27   Azinović, V. (2018). Extremism Research Forum, Regional Report – Understanding Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans, British Council.

2.3. Methodology

In order to achieve the project objectives and to analyze, summarize and highlight the successes, lessons, opportunities, different aspects and shortcomings in the implementation of Program Y+ in target countries, the consultancy team conducted research in two phases – desk research and qualitative research.

Desk research included a review of the relevant sources (studies and articles) dealing with extremism, radicalization and the tendency toward terrorism among the younger population. This research phase also focused on a review of the legislative framework related to main project issues. Laws, strategies and action plans were analyzed at the level of each individual state (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Croatia, and Serbia), from where the organizations involved in the project activities came from.

During the qualitative research phase, the research instrument *interview guide* was developed. This guide will be used to measure the effects of Program Y+ and the opportunities it offers for project team members, beneficiaries, and other relevant stakeholders that participated in project related activities.

Case studies

3

3. Case studies

Turopolje

Banja Luka

Belgrade

Podujevo

Cities/municipalities

where Program Y+ has been piloted

Bërzhitë

3.1. Community engagement in the process of prevention of youth radicalization

Act for Society (AFS) developed a specific model, based on the needs of the local Albanian community, the administrative unit of Bërzhitë, located about 30km from Tirana, that brings together youth (both in and out of school), parents and teachers in order to educate them on tolerance, gender equality and hate speech, as well as many other topics. AFS's approach to the Program Y+ pilot included numerous activities: 1. Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with parents, teachers and young men and women, community members. These FGD's were used to capture individual and group experiences in project related areas and participants proposed further activities, used for designing workshops; 2. Questionnaire with youth at risk and out-of-school youth. Through the questionnaire, the community members were asked about the factors that push students towards extremist/violent behaviors; 3. Ten workshops were conducted with school and out-of-school youth, community members and parents. All school and out-of-school participants were ages 17-22, and at the beginning, there were 76 participants from school and 32 out-of-school. By the end of project activities, about 15 of out-of-school youth left the country – illegally migrated or got married (mostly in the case of girls).

17-22
Age of participants

76
School participants

32
Out-of-school participants

The Y+ program implementation comprised the following activities: 1. Training modules, based on the needs assessed by the baseline study, that covered the following topics: "Strategic Communication and Problem Solving for a Tolerant Community" with youth at risk and "Psychosocial Skills - how teachers can use them in interaction with students" with teachers, also the activities included the "Power up community" training and the workshop about media literacy and hate speech; 2. Summer Camp, which included participants from Y+ program and regular school youth engaged in other

AFS programs. Four additional trainings with young men and women were also organized, covering specific topics – positive communication for tolerant problem solving, the importance of gender equality education, tournaments for a better community, tolerance for a healthier community, etc.; 3. Leisure activities, organized parties with animators, music, and the likes, during which they discussed human rights, youth rights, and the similar. These activities included finger painting relating to gender equality, as well as the international day of girl-youth and public actions.

The project coordinator explained that the administrative unit of Bërzhitë was selected because it was a very closed and traditional rural community, with residents of a low socio-economic status, and lacking opportunities for young people. First, the project team established a cooperation with their high school, which helped them in the process of recruiting participants. It was not hard to reach out-of-school participants, because the school provided a list of ex-students and their phone numbers, and contacted them to organize meetings. In this process, they faced some challenges, such as motivational issues – in the beginning, out-of-school youth were not very interested in taking part in project related activities.

> **"**
>
> *Their interest, their point of view is something that affected the most whether they would be participating. They had the attitude 'why would I be here, when it is not necessary, and I am going to leave' – all of them tried some type of illegal migration. The girls were trying to find something else, it was harder for them, their families didn't let them leave the house, unless it was for school or a family gathering.*
>
> **Eleni Nanaj**, Project Coordinator

They started gaining interest in these topics when they realized that it is "something different, something about their personal life… they saw it as something fun, and they started coming", she explained.

The challenges of the program were related to the workshop methodology, since the project team needed to make certain adjustments – "we had to use a totally different language and since it was a Muslim community, we had to use different terms, terms such as sex and gender could not be used … we had to be careful not to insult anyone".

As for the potential changes in attitudes and behaviors of the participants, the Project Coordinator stated that she noticed significant changes among both parents and youth; "Parents did not allow young girls to go out for a coffee in the evening with their girlfriends [at the beginning of this program], and by the end I had 13 participants in the summer camp, so now the same parents actually allowed them to go. That is a change in the mentality of the parents, they are less strict and

more open-minded." They discussed the importance of education, and some of them enrolled in vocational courses, such as courses for plumbers, electricians, and similar.

During the group interview, we also spoke with one of the parents involved in program activities. Her daughter (who also took part in the project) informed her about the project and motivated her to participate, since she wanted to join. She let her daughter join the activities, saying "yes, sure you can and you will tell me everything that is happening".

The most interesting for her was an open discussion about the mentality of their community. She stated that an open dialogue is beneficial for both parents and youth, since young men and women perceive parents as overprotective. Regarding this, she even noticed great changes in her communication with her daughter – they started talking more openly. On the other hand, she says that leisure activities were unnecessary and took too much time. She suggested that activities designed for parents could include youth.

One of the teachers that participated in the program said that she first heard about the project from the school principal and was highly motivated to participate, since this was "something new for all of them, this was the first time they were approached by some NGO". The workshops left a very positive impression on her, and she believed that the students along with everyone else really enjoyed them and were very keen on joining from the very beginning.

> *Topics discussed were important for the students because of the reality of the community and what is happening in the world in general… the energy of the students was amazing in the days when they [the project team] would come and have activities… the children waited for them, they were very sad when some activities were cancelled.*

However, teachers were not allowed to attend the workshop sessions with the students, since "that would stop the students from expressing themselves". She believed that it would be much better if teachers could be present during sessions, even though she talked to them about it after sessions. She claimed that important topics for their community were discussed, such as labelling, gender equality, tolerance, and solving violent situations – which she considered great.

Youth were recruited for Program Y+ by school representatives. The principal and the teachers contacted them individually, or through their parents, and they joined out of curiosity, as this was something they never saw before, therefore they wanted to try something new.

One young female participant stated in the interview that she enjoyed the "Power up community" workshops the most, when they went to the city center for a two-day training. There were a lot of other young men and women and they discussed the reconstruction of the kindergarten[28], tolerance, and so on. She stated that after the workshops she can have more open discussions with her mother, so better communication is of great importance to her. One young male participant, on the other hand, said that he preferred workshops that had role playing activities and involved solving violent situations. Also, role play activities on topics of gender equality and labelling was something they did not expect but highly enjoyed.

The Project Coordinator suggested that future activities should include more sports activities, since it can gather the attention of more people, potentially that of male parents. She stated that AFS's project team is willing to continue working with community members, since they established a good cooperation. As for the teacher, she suggested that it would be beneficial if teachers could attend youth workshops, because it would open up a dialogue between them. Young men and women proposed similar activities, such as organizing open dialogue sessions with teachers, like those with parents, and introducing more practical activities like, for example, sports competitions.

3.2. Centers for Social Work as local community hubs for the prevention of radicalization

Perpetuum Mobile (PM) implemented Program Y + in cooperation with the Center for Social Work (CSW) from Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H). The program consisted of numerous activities: 1. Workshops at the Day Center for youth/children at risk; 2. "Weekend Break program", which was a pilot program for the prevention of violent and anti-social behavior among young people at risk with CSW beneficiaries. The program had great results and PM continued the implementation of its different modalities, such as "Winter Break" and "Summer Break" during the period 2018-2020; 3. Organization of seminars for social workers from the Republic of Srpska entity in Doboj, "Peer Violence and the Promotion of Healthy Lifestyles", aiming to share experiences among experts and practitioners; 4. Quantitative research with 1,100 young people (18-19 years old), covering all administrative units in B&H, in order to explore attitudes and behaviors of youth regarding radicalization; 5. Promotion of research results on round tables in Banja Luka, Sarajevo, and Doboj to 54 stakeholders, mostly from the non-governmental sector dealing with this issue, as well as students and professors. 6. Organization of a conference in Derventa with war veterans representing B&H constitutive peoples, in order to discuss, address and find additional support for dealing with youth extremism; 7. Organization of round tables with diplomatic corps to discuss radicalization and extremism as a result of the return of fighters from abroad.

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28   When it comes to the reconstruction of the kindergarten, it is important to point out that a group of young people led this project and received funds for its implementation, and that they were directly involved in the reconstruction process.

The interview was conducted with the help of a coordinator from PM and two trainers/youth who participated in the project activities. Based on the findings from the interview, the coordinator concluded that cooperation has been established with the Day Care Center from CSW Banja Luka. The Day Care Center works with youth at risk, and the only possible way to reach them is by establishing cooperation with the CSW. The piloting was implemented with a group of 24 young boys and 19 young girls during three months in 2019 at the premises of the Day Center. In cooperation with the CSW, programs were developed in line with the needs of young people and based on the Program Y methodology[29] and BOUNCE methodology[30], as well as outputs from the Center for Social Work. The initial program included 24 workshops, three leisure activities, and three Weekend Break programs. The evaluation of the three months piloting states that: "[T]he program has been successfully implemented with great interest and inclusion of young people in educational workshops conducted in the Center." It recommends that piloted activities should be continuously implemented in the Day Center.

24 Young boys **19** Young girls
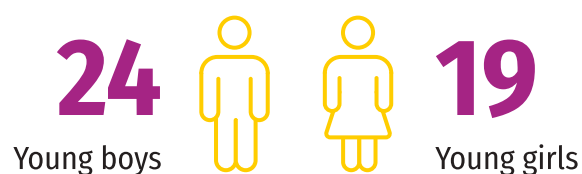
Pilot program participants

The Weekend Break program had a great reach in Banja Luka, thus PM decided to continue with the implementation of several variations of the program (Winter Break, Summer Break) to influence the attitudes and behaviors of young boys who showed signs of being in risk of violent behavior and radicalization. The program is based on an experiential approach and combination of leisure and workshop activities for young boys ages 14-18.
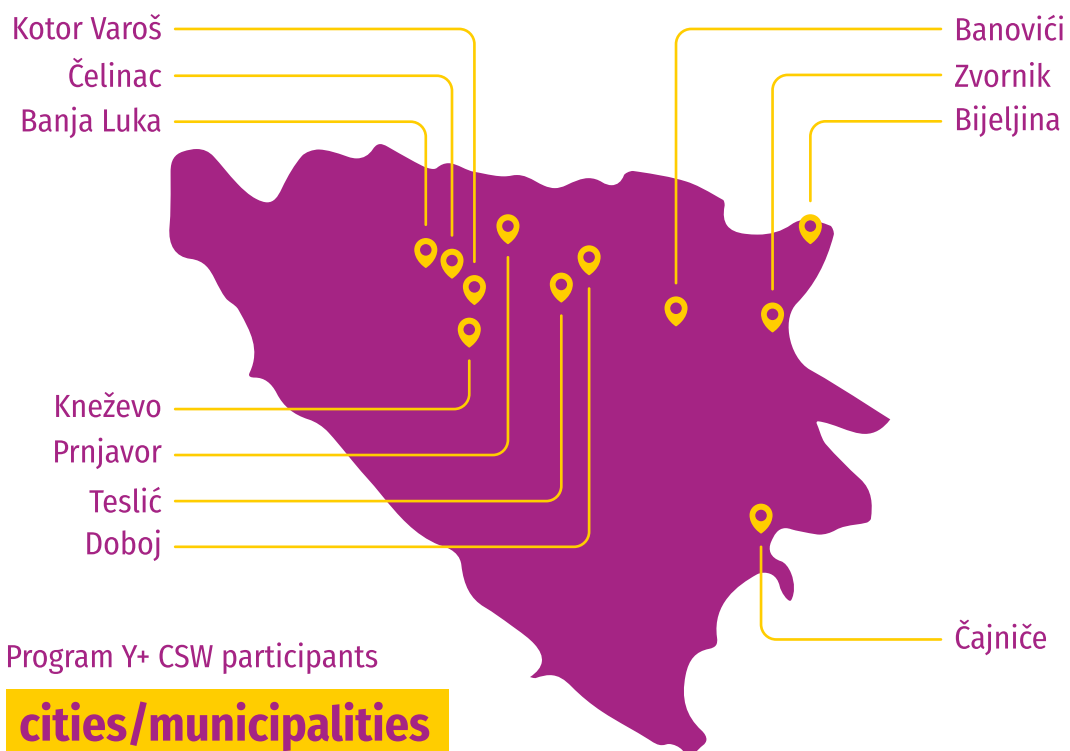
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29   https://youngmeninitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Y-TOOLKIT-ENG-WEB.pdf

30   https://www.bounce-resilience-tools.eu/home

Weekend Break thematic units:

1. Violence and conflict situations;
2. Alcohol and the problematic behavior it causes;
3. Understanding anger and rage and how to deal with it;
4. Negotiation skills and labelling of others;
5. Stress management and a sense of belonging in society;
6. Radicalization and radical behavior.

The approach of PM was not only to work with youth at risk at the Day Center, but also to offer contemporary tools for social workers and build their skills and knowledge by applying experiential learning in which young people are encouraged to examine and analyze their life experiences, seek for active engagement of participants and peer approach. Thus, in cooperation with CSW they organized a two-day seminar for social workers from the Banja Luka region, but also experts and students in the field of social work from Čajniče, Zvornik, Bijeljina, Teslić, Doboj, Kotor Varoš, Čelinac, Prnjavor, Kneževo, and Banovići.

Kotor Varoš
Čelinac
Banja Luka

Banovići
Zvornik
Bijeljina

Kneževo
Prnjavor
Teslić
Doboj

Čajniče

Program Y+ CSW participants

cities/municipalities

As a response to the COVID- 19 pandemic, in July 2020 the "Summer Break Program" was organized in cooperation with Banja Luka "Be a Man" club that brings together young people with challenging behavior, with the aim of redirecting them to community initiatives via peer support. Therefore, they came up with the idea that young people from the "Be a Man" club encourage their peers who have not had contact with this program before to join its activities, and about 23 new participants joined. "The program was attended by local young people from the neighborhood, who were in some way problematic or on their way to become problematic – they drew graffiti, were sports fans, and so on." The "Summer Break Program" lasted for three days and covered workshops related to labelling, pleasures and risks, as well as team building activities such as sports and rafting.

As the coordinator stated, she would not change anything in the program. However, involving youth at risk from the Day Center was impossible in 2020 due to the pandemic which has influenced programming.

> *I would not change a thing, I think that the program went great for us, I think we did a great job, we heard personal stories from young people who survived violence. That is the best result because they opened up, became part of our club, and will be able to promote their experiences to other young people.*

Milica Jovičić, Project Coordinator

The interviewed trainers were initially participants in the program, who then went through training to become educators. Both of the trainers stated that they first encountered PM, the "Be a Man" club, and the whole program at school. They both joined about a year ago: "Since I had a lot of problems at school, when I heard that there is an organization that deals with the problems of young people and opposes violence, I was interested".

The topic that interested the highest number of participants was, according to educators, risks and pleasures, which was the first topic of the Summer Break Program and stimulated an active discussion. In addition, participants responded well to topics such as extremism, labelling, and the position of men in the modern age. Both educators claim that topics that deal with sexual relations are still the biggest taboo and that no one wants to talk about them.

The participants say that they have noticed changes in attitudes and beliefs both in themselves and in others. "The biggest change that has happened within the program is that the educators have made me think about some topics, to think about why something is the way it is, how we came to

this. That is the biggest change for me, I question everything more." Another participant stated that "they managed to get an answer from us to something that we didn't even know we knew; in that way they motivate you to actually voice your opinion".

The causes of socially extreme attitudes and behaviors among youth

To learn more about extreme and radicalized behavior, PM started exploring together with experts and practitioners. They firstly consulted the CSW, then gathered war veterans in Doboj to explore best approaches to dealing with extremism. PM also organized consultations with diplomatic corps to discuss the influence of the return of foreign fighters.

PM conducted a nationwide research aiming at exploring the propensity of youth towards socially extreme attitudes and behaviors, where "extremism" implies a readiness to use violent methods to implement certain changes in a society that are perceived as unjust or morally ruined. The average age of research participants was 19.5 and they came from all regions in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Some of the main findings show that that around 15-20% of youth exhibit certain extremist attitudes, while 7-14% on a behavioral level support some extremist groups or have even participated in some activities. The percentages are even higher for young men.

This research had been converted into the Monography "Youth and Extremism" and presents a valuable resource in dealing with this topic in the Balkans.

In general, during the implementation of project related activities, there were no major problems, except in the beginning when there were delays in administrative procedures to obtain permission and establish cooperation. However, these challenges were quickly resolved. Today, institutions (such as the CSW) recognize PM as partners and interested youth participants apply on their own accord.

Perpetuum Mobile's suggestion is to organize more lectures, delivered by experts, in the next project phase. They listened to a lecture by a professor from the Faculty of Political Sciences that covered project related topics and educated youth participants on them. The participants held that, in this way, everyone (involved in project activities) will be able to learn more about the topics being discussed. Since the interviewees are satisfied with the development of project activities, they plan to continue active cooperation with CSW and Summer/Winter Break Program activities, as they encourage youth to learn more about topics like extremism, labelling, and the similar.

3.3. The Juvenile Detention Center as a place for youth resocialization

In 2017, Status M from Zagreb, Croatia, started implementing Program Y while working with youth offenders in the Juvenile Detention Center in Turopolje. They covered topics such as violence prevention, gender equality, healthy lifestyles, and the likes, and their engagement there has shown to be a valuable asset in understanding how youth can join extremist and radical movements. Status M made an assessment report on this topic, the results of which served as a basis for the action plan for Program Y+ piloting. In 2017, the Juvenile Detention Center was selected for piloting the model for addressing youth extremism and has agreed to take part in the process.

The piloting of Program Y+ started in July 2019, following the proposed list of workshops and conducted by Status M trainers. They proposed a prevention program using some topics covered in the original Program Y, such as violence, labelling, negotiation skills, and the likes, but they also added new topics, such as media literacy, fake news, civil participation in politics, exercising civil and legal rights, and workshops about critical thinking. The prevention program included 11 workshops with 10 to 15 young men, ages 15-18. After that, they organized an evaluation meeting, which also included leisure activities. Half of the participants in the program were young Roma men. During activities, trainers estimated that the group needed a different approach to cover some of the topics (critical thinking, democracy) that were too abstract for them. Therefore, trainers opted for a more pragmatic approach – they modified workshops by adapting them to the specific needs of the participants and started playing carefully selected movies that cover topics of extremism, violence and totalitarian ideologies, but also create space for developing empathy and understanding. After the movie screening, they held reflection discussions to trigger critical thinking and empathy.

15-18
Years of age

10 to 15
Young men

50%
Roma people

Participants

Prevention program

The interview was conducted with the project coordinator from the Status M organization (Tamara Tokić) and the trainer who was engaged in the workshops at the Juvenile Detention Center (Tin Frančić).[31] As they stated, there is a long tradition of cooperation between non-governmental organizations and penal institutions in the Republic of Croatia, since "the judiciary is quite open to NGOs, so it is not such a problem to get inside". In other words, local NGOs are included in the rehabilitation and reintegration of inmates of such institutions. There is a treatment service within the institution that consists of social workers and psychologists, who suggest participants for workshops and similar activities.

The biggest obstacle during program activities (workshops) emerged due to the specific type of the group worked with. They stated that:

> **"**
>
> *In activities that we did not develop by ourselves [which they took over from secondary sources] there were difficulties, in fact this approach and these topics were designed for ordinary high school students… this youth group is often deprived in every possible way, developmental, material, and educational. They lack the basic things that most children have when growing up.*

Tin Frančić, Trainer

For that reason, they decided to choose more basic topics, for example the ones dealing with participants' emotions and healthy/unhealthy relationships. They tried to bring these essential topics closer to them and to educate them about these issues. The interviewees believe that these aforementioned topics were a precondition for discussing media literacy, democracy, and similar topics. The other relevant challenge was finding an interactive way to present topics during workshops. For example, the workshops about democracy (Democracy 101) were not the best choice, since the participants were not willing to actively discuss and participate in it. On the other hand, there were other topics that sparked more interest, like fake news and media literacy. Also, youth participants quite enjoyed the workshop on healthy and unhealthy intimate relationships. During this workshop, trainers gave examples of "what is good" and "what is not good" behavior in a relationship. They were quite interested in this, mostly because they were locked in an institution and hence unable to form this kind of relationship.

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31   Initially, it was planned to conduct interviews also with youth offenders from the Juvenile Detention Center in Turopolje, but project team needed consent from Ministry, which would take several months and prolong activities, given that it's vacation season.

> *On the other hand, topics such as media literacy were more successful. We went through these topics in a different way with them, through movies and structured discussions. It was clear that these topics were interesting to them, especially those related to the extremism, racism, neo-Nazism, and skinhead culture which were presented to them through movies, such as American History X.*

Tamara Tokić, Project Coordinator

Status M representatives believe that they managed to clarify to them the harmfulness of those behaviors and thoughts in an adequate way, mostly through movies, which the participants often preferred.

When it comes to this specific vulnerable group (youth offenders), the interviewees feel that they are much more motivated to actively participate in workshops and similar activities in comparison to regular high school students. As they said, it is much easier to motivate them. Regular high school students sometimes perceive them as professors and foster a "when will this bore be over" attitude. The life of an average high school student is much more dynamic than the life of a youth offender, who is in some type of Juvenile Detention Center, therefore it is easier to motivate him. They believe that this group is highly motivated to participate in activities precisely because someone is paying attention to them.

> *It is up to us to find provocative and interesting ways to include them in it [workshop activities], to ask them what it would be like to have a girl who earns more than they do, for example. They found it unusual that someone cared what they thought on something.*

Tin Frančić, Trainer

However, the trainers note that although the participants are still young, working with them can be very risky and dangerous; "with them things can escalate", leading to a very unpleasant and potentially dangerous situation. The interviewees note that only well-trained trainers should work with this population.

Potential effects of the workshops were visible; the trainers noticed changes in the participants' attitudes and behavior, and that the topics covered in the workshops have really affected them. Regarding this, it is important to mention that the Roma population is disproportionally present in the Juvenile Detention Center in Turopolje, more than half of its inmates are Roma. Their change in attitudes is visible in how they understand racism: for example, they learned that it is racism when you insult Roma people because of their ethnic origin. At the end of project activities, non-Roma and Roma young men started sitting together, they even started hugging and became close friends, while at the beginning they were completely distanced.

The most interesting story that our interviewees singled out is that workshop participants were very willing to openly show their emotions. For example, most of them actually prepared poetry, love songs, which they read out during workshops. They were not embarrassed, which was unusual for youth at their age. Also, there was a boy who had a really hard life, and even had a swastika tattooed on his neck, who in the end "turned out to be like a baby, he totally changed", as the Status M trainer told us.

Since NGOs in the Republic of Croatia have a long-lasting tradition of cooperation with Detention Centers and prisons, the Status M project team plans to continue working with vulnerable categories of youth, the ones that they have already reached at Juvenile Detention Center in Turopolje. They find it relevant to discuss topics such as violence, labelling, civil participation and civil rights with them, in order to contribute to the resocialization of the inmates in this center.

3.4. Engaging local youth and stakeholders in youth extremism prevention

The piloting of Program Y+ in Kosovo was implemented by the SIT organization in the municipality of Podujeva, located around 35 kilometers north of Pristina. The low socio-economic status of the majority of the predominantly rural population, lack of education, opportunities and activities for youth, as well as a complete absence of similar educational programs, were the reasons why SIT selected Podujeva as a target location. The program consisted of: 1. Baseline research with recommendations that served as a basis for program intervention; 2. Training and continuous workshops with the youth group consisting of high school students and out-of-school youth, aiming at enhancing the resilience of the youth, thus preventing radicalization and extreme attitudes and behavior. Educational activities were firstly done in-person and later via the Zoom platform, due to the COVID-19 crisis; 3. Training for high school teachers on issues of violence, extremism, and radicalization; 4. Additional meetings with the same youth participants, also first in-person and later online, with the goal of further discussing these topics in a more informal manner, talking about their lives, challenges, and the issues that they faced.

The program started with the baseline research conducted in Podujeva, consisting of five focus groups (FGs) with various local stakeholders – social workers, judges, prosecutors, religious representatives,

local police, media, high school teachers, students, and parents. The lack of communication and cooperation within the pupil-teacher-parent triangle was identified by most participants as a significant factor for the development of extreme and violent behavior. This is especially the problem in cases of students who were expelled from high schools due to delinquent behavior – they cannot communicate this with their parents, they are left behind, and thus considered to be at risk for radicalization. Also, teachers expressed that they do not feel competent enough to deal with cases of problematic behavior among their students. High school students especially noted that they engage in conflicts because of their incapability to control impulsive emotions.

After establishing cooperation with the local self-government and high school "Isa Boletini", the piloting of the program started with selected students (25 in total), teachers (17), and out-of-school youth (6). Establishing cooperation with the Department for Social Work, the high school, parents, as well as with the police, proved to be very useful for reaching out-of-school youth. Still, in the beginning the biggest challenge was to engage and motivate out-of-school youth. They did not want to participate at first, but after a couple of days they heard some good things about the program, and willingly approached the SIT staff to join the workshops. The educational program consisted of adapted workshops from the Program Y manual[32] ("Expressing emotions", "What do I do when I'm angry?", "What is violence?", "Male honor", "Understanding the cycle of violence", "Labelling", "Power and relationships", "Negotiation skills", etc.) with additional sessions that put special emphasis on positive ways of dealing with and controlling harmful emotions and behaviors (which influences positive mental health), as well as learning good communication skills. During the implementation, out-of-school youth were integrated with high school students into one group, which alleviated the sense of segregation and fostered fellowship and unity among youth.
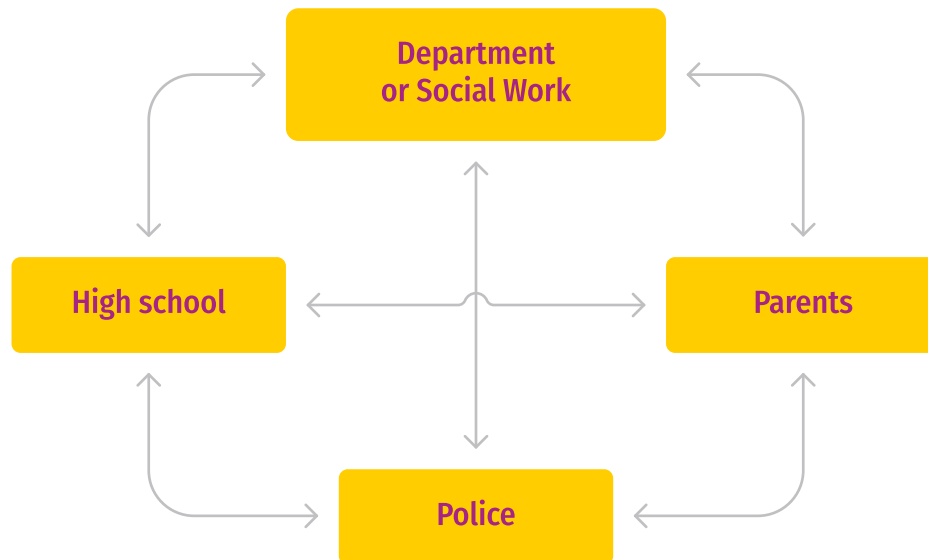
25 Students

17 Teachers

6 Out-of-school youth

Profile of participants

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32   Available on YMI website: https://beta.youngmeninitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Program-Y-ENG.pdf

Established cooperation proved to be very useful for reaching out-of-school youth

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              ┌────►│   Department     │◄────┐
              │     │  or Social Work  │     │
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In a group interview, all of the youth participants expressed great satisfaction with the program, and said that they were very interested in topics related to expressing one's own emotions, discrimination on various bases, especially in gender relations, as well as those related to gender (in)equality. "Role play" type of activities within workshops were clearly a favorite of the youth. Participants also stated that they felt safe and supported in this environment, and that they were glad that the mixed group worked well together. All of the interviewees said that this was the first time they encountered a program that covers these sort of topics in their municipality, and felt it was something completely new and interesting, which made them appreciate it even more.

"
I have changed many attitudes and the behavior I had held before joining this program, mostly regarding the discrimination of others, especially girls and women. It is practically considered normal to discriminate in my closer surroundings, and most of the discrimination comes from boys and men. The program has challenged these attitudes and made me rethink and change, and reach a much better understanding.

Rron Rama, young male participant

The promotion of general openness, honesty, and respect for everybody, which are the values that represent the pillars of this program, seem to affect some participants, enhancing their communication skills and self-confidence, and making them more open-minded in the process.

> *I learned a lot about expressing emotions, also on themes about discrimination and gender equality. I became more open towards other people and I regard everyone as equal. Now it is easier for me to speak in front of others, in front of a group of people, I have more self-esteem and self-confidence.*

Erisa Azemi, female student participant

Teacher Agron Hyseni, another interviewee, expressed satisfaction that he participated in the training for teachers, as well as satisfaction with the program being implemented in his high school, as there were no similar programs anywhere in Podujeva before. The change in the attitude of program participants is visible, as the behavior of youth has turned for the better, noting the example of students who are now thinking more critically on why and how they behave. He and the project coordinator Kadri Gashi both agree that the whole community could benefit from this program, and that it should include more students and teachers in this school, but also in other schools and communities, with other stakeholders.

The implementation of Program Y+ was unfortunately cut short because the COVID-19 pandemic interfered with SIT's plans to organize trainings for stakeholders (prosecutors, judges, social workers, police, and media), activities with parents, meetings for reflection and evaluation. Nevertheless, the educational program with youth continued successfully online via the Zoom platform. If the time and the pandemic situation allow, SIT will conduct the remaining activities by the end of the project, or try to implement an online approach with aforementioned stakeholders. The project coordinator also noted that the program can be further expanded in future endeavors to ensure sustainability. Another recommendation was to allow a longer implementation time frame, especially considering the sensitivity of topics such as radicalization and extremism.

3.5. Theatre based education as a response to emerging issues of extremism

Center E8, a youth organization from Belgrade, Serbia, used educational theatre as a tool for tackling issues of extremism, violence and radicalization among youth. Theatre based education and development of socially engaged theater plays is one of E8's major strengths, as they have almost a decade of experience in using such methods, with many successes and positive results. Center E8's work on Program Y+ can be differentiated, chronologically and programmatically, into two parts. The first part consisted of: 1. The development of a new educational program for the prevention of radicalization and extremism, piloted during three-day training sessions in three cities in Serbia – Novi Pazar, Vranje, and Kruševac; 2. "Be a Man" clubs formed by training participants who afterwards organized public actions in their local communities. The second part consisted of: 1. Baseline qualitative research; 2. The development of a theatre play addressing issues of radicalization and extremism; 3. Theatre play performances targeting youth across Serbia; 4. Conferences and events targeting stakeholders.

In the aforementioned "first part", Center E8 took a more conventional approach. Around half of the educational program consisted of updated workshops from Program Y, while the other half had workshops that explored new topics such as: identity, belonging to groups, communication types and skills, digital violence (with an emphasis on dangers of online recruitment by extremist groups). These trainings were followed by the already tried and proven "Be a Man club" method, in which youth members organized public actions aimed at expanding the reach of their positive messages and values. Most notable was the creation of two large murals with direct and clear messages against violence, discrimination and extremism, both made on the walls of high schools, ensuring their visibility for all students and many other citizens.

Regarding the "second part", we must note that one of the major strengths of Center E8 is its theatre program and great experience in developing socially engaged theatre plays, ever since the creation of "Macho Men" in 2012 as part of the YMI. Thus, within the current project, for E8 it seemed logical, but also creative, to use the methods of theatre in education to tackle the complex issues of radicalization and extremism. The development process started with an audition for actors/ actresses, where two young men and two young women were selected. These young people soon became not just actors but also co-authors, as their personal stories were of extreme importance for the development of the play.

Soon to follow was the Participatory learning and action (PLA) workshop in Novi Sad, with students from different high schools. PLA is a type of qualitative research where, through workshops and various methods, the researcher gains in-depth insight into the problem. This PLA served as the baseline research, as well as the method for gathering experiences and attitudes of youth, directly infusing the development process.

In December 2018, the play "EXTREMISM: How to explain this to my son?" premiered in Novi Sad, which was soon followed by another premiere in Belgrade, both with a full auditorium at almost all of the 12 performances in eight cities thus far. Outside of Serbia, the play was performed in Banja Luka, in cooperation with YMI's partner Perpetuum Mobile. The play targets youth but resounds with adults as well. Arrangements were made with several high schools and a faculty for organized viewings.

The play generally garnered very positive reactions from both the critics and the audience, who mostly described it as very moving, intense, and thought-provoking. It seems kind of fitting that a theatre play on extremism is kind of extreme. It is provocative, uncompromising, sometimes amusing, sometimes terrifying, but ultimately very emotional. There is no doubt that everyone who sees it leaves the theatre with a strong impression and emotional reaction. As for the impact of the play, it seems clear – if someone can be moved by the play, that person can be changed or influenced by the play, which works both on the emotional and cognitive level.

As for negative reactions, we heard that during the performance in Novi Sad some people left the audience and that some heckled during the part when the 1990s Bosnian War was referenced, again showing that some "wounds are still fresh", since these people were refugees from B&H, according to actor Dejan Maksimović. However, there were no similar reactions to the performance in Banja Luka and the actor we interviewed considers it his favorite performance. Besides the actor, we also spoke to the theatre/Center E8's director Vojislav Arsić and two young participants about their impressions and thoughts.

> *This play definitely leaves an impression and moves you. It seems that it makes everyone think after it ends and everyone has something to say, so a discussion should be organized. The part of the play that shook me the most was the part when actors give examples from their own lives, from the past when they had prejudices, about moments during which they were some sort of 'mini-extremists' and weren't really fair to people in their surroundings [Roma, homeless persons, etc.]*

Jana Šarić, young female participant

> *I liked the play, it talks about things that we can't hear anywhere, definitely not in conversations with friends and peers, things that need to be presented in a theatre play or movie. It helped me to better understand extremism and gave me more ways to explain it to others. I think discussions after the play would be good, to tackle the issues more, as some people may still have grievances, for example young people I know whose parents and families were refugees from Croatia.*

Nikola Vasić, young male participant

Generally, the interviewees recommend organizing discussions with the audience right after the play. One of the actors noted that he enjoys such conversations with a regular youth audience as much as he enjoys them during the preparation phase. One young participant also recommends developing video clips that show examples of extremism, which could be used to start discussions during workshops. The director recommends to further develop Y+ and use theatre methods in the new project, e.g. to create forum theatre sessions, as a sort of a spin-off of this play. The coronavirus pandemic hindered many plans for the play's performance this year, but at the moment of writing this, one performance is scheduled for September 2020. The director told us that the play will continue to be performed well after this project is completed. Also, if the epidemic situation continues, the team is ready to conceive and develop some alternative ways to reach an audience, via online platforms.

Regarding the involvement of stakeholders, especially significant was Center E8's MAN2019 conference, which was completely devoted to themes of youth extremism and its prevention. The theatre play was performed during the conference opening, together with keynotes and panel discussion with international experts. Also, one panel discussion at the MAN2020 conference dealt with themes of extremism. Center E8 has also presented their Program Y+ work as an example of good practice at a conference dedicated to this theme, organized by the Office for Cooperation with Civil Society, which gathered representatives of all government ministries involved in the prevention of extremism.

Final considerations and recommendations

4. Final considerations and recommendations

This chapter briefly discusses some reflections on the Program Y+ piloting and offers some recommendations for the future implementation of this program within the regional YMI project.

1. Program Y+ as a unique regional program for youth

Having the knowledge and the "institutional memory of YMI" about the development process and many stellar accomplishments of Programs M and Y, one has to wonder – could the Program Y+ follow the similar development path, to some extent? In other words, when considering what would be beneficial for the future of Program Y+ within the YMI framework, we recommend the development of a semi-standardized Y+ program and its manual that will be used in all countries with scalability potential. We use the prefix "semi" to denote that complete standardization would not be a good idea, and in actuality it would not even be possible. Here we have to consider that:

a. The standardization provides: more reliable quality assurance, more focused efforts, more reliable indicators and results, easier planning and delivery, and of course a valuable tool for practitioners;

b. It would be good if the program was contextualized, adapted to specific local communities and their relevant characteristics, while considering interplays between factors on various levels. This can be accomplished by dividing the program (and manual) into two parts – the first part would be more universal, and the second part would be more specific.

Partner organizations had a significant level of freedom and worked independently in conceiving and developing their Y+ programs in this phase. When observing what was done and what they have included in their work, common themes can be noticed. Practically all of the partners worked on: enhancing critical thinking among participants; eliminating prejudices and stereotypes, preventing labelling and discrimination; teaching participants how to deal with emotions, fostering empathy and improving their mental health hygiene; improving their communication skills and helping them find ways to negotiate and resolve problems peacefully; educating them on fake news and the influence of media and social media networks (as they are contemporary channels of indoctrination and tools for recruitment); promoting human rights and activism based on human rights; challenging gender norms and stereotypes; etc.

These, as well as other common themes, should be the cornerstone of the new program, its first and universal part, as it is not a coincidence that partners chose these particular themes. In the future, the YMI team could organize a sort of a working group that would meet during several days. This could be the beginning of a development process, so they can see what they have in common, what works, what needs to be done, etc. External experts could join the group and/or facilitate the process in which all of the partners (their coordinators, trainers, and youth participants) would discuss and agree on the topics that should be covered in the future by everyone, and how this should be done – what workshops, methods, activities. Through concentrated, productive and creative work, this group could devise excellent workshops and activities, using their valuable experience gained during the Y+ implementation.

The group would also work on the second part of the program/manual, the more specific one. With regard to this, they would discuss and point out the specificities of various youth groups in their country, decide on the specific workshops/activities (that work in their context but not necessarily in some other), thus creating specific sessions that would not be "mandatory" for all of the partners. It would be good if the specific sessions were nevertheless included in the manual, as an option for others (also for others outside of the YMI). This part of the program/manual would obviously be less uniform, and besides educational workshops it could also include recommendations, ideas and descriptions of additional activities that are fun and educational; for example, outdoor games and activities, excursions, visits, theater plays, movie screenings, public actions if appropriate for particular groups, ideas for discussions on youth club meetings, etc. This would make the program and manual more motivational and engaging, and more comprehensive. It would be a tool for practitioners to continue the work after the series of workshops, providing more opportunities for youth to learn in a more informal manner (of course, in a safe and controlled environment), to socialize and have fun, which would be beneficial, especially in case of vulnerable groups. The development of this program and manual would be a lengthy, laborious, and probably costly effort, but the results would be great and would open more options for future endeavors.

Furthermore, a standardized Y+ training course for professionals (working in centers for social work, institutions for children without parental care, juvenile detention centers, schools, etc.) could be developed and accredited for professional use in some of YMI's future projects. Accreditation should be sought from responsible Ministries (for social affairs, or justice). This could result in a greater reach among professionals, as well a certain level of sustainability.

Besides the implementation, the processes of measuring, monitoring and evaluating the program implementation also need to undergo standardization. Namely, it would be beneficial if one were to use the evaluation model similar to the rigorous baseline and endline researches conducted within Programs M and Y, which have generated a large evidence base over time, further propelling YMI's success and recognition. Standardization in this aspect would also enable comparison not just between baselines and endlines, but also between project locations. For common educational activities such as workshops and trainings, methods are obvious – questionnaires for quantitative research, and focus groups, group interviews and in-depth interviews for qualitative research. On the other hand, if you have for example theatre plays as the project activity, there is no accurate way to measure impact, mostly due to practical problems relating to how one should survey a large audience. One needs to come up with creative ideas on how to gather data on this, some of the options being to obtain a database with contacts/emails of members of the audience, create

short online surveys, or maybe grant some small reward to people in the audience who would write their review. Of course, when one has already formed a target group of youth to work with, then conducting a questionnaire/focus group after the performance should not present a problem. Also, noting the Most Significant Change (MSC) is a great qualitative method already used by the YMI team, and should be utilized more in Program Y+ in the future, besides in Program Y. In addition, MSC interviews and stories should not amount to singling out a couple of quotes – it should be a systematic interview with participants and stakeholders from which one can later extract quotes if needed.

2. Youth extremism and radicalization as insufficiently analyzed phenomena

When talking about research, like in the previous point, another recommendation comes to mind – more options for large-scale research could be explored within the Y+ program and YMI framework. Themes of extremism and radicalization have still not been studied enough in the Western Balkans region. CARE and the YMI team could consider and discuss if they want to take this route and organize more large-scale researches on these themes, in these particular countries. We already have an example within YMI, the research conducted by Perpetuum Mobile in B&H, which exceeded the project's expectations with a sample of over 1100 youth for the quantitative research. Their methodology and instruments could be further developed, a qualitative part could be added and a common methodology created for its implementation in all of the countries involved. This would enable comparison of results, while also adapting some part of the questionnaire to the local context. We also have example of IMAGES research being previously implemented in the region (in Croatia, B&H, Serbia and Kosovo) which gave valuable results to partner organizations. The organization Promundo-US, YMI's oldest and most prominent partner, the initiator of IMAGES (and of Program M, for that matter), could also be consulted on all of these matters, as they too are engaged in themes of youth, masculinity, and extremism.[33,34]

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33   Sommers, M. (2019). Youth and the Field of Countering Violent Extremism. Washington, DC: Promundo-US

34   Fried, A. with Lauro, G., & Barker, G. (2020). Masculinities and Preventing Violent Extremism: Making the Connections. Washington, DC: Promundo-US

3. Working with young men as a cornerstone in the prevention of youth radicalization and violence

"We know that male identity and masculine norms are linked with various forms of violence, including sexual violence, homicide, bullying, suicide, and conflict-related violence. Men and boys are disproportionately both the perpetrators of these forms of violence and the victims of certain forms such as homicide and suicide (...) rather than largely ignoring the influence of gender norms on attitudes and behaviors, approaches must gain and incorporate an understanding, not only of how these norms influence men's and boys' actions and shape their vulnerabilities with regard to violent extremism, but also of the ways in which programmatic action can tackle gender inequality and prevent violent extremism at the same time, for long-lasting impact."[35]

The aforementioned work of Promundo emphasizes masculinity and its connection with violent extremism. While there is a growing participation of women in extremist groups and working with women is essential, there is no doubt that "men and boys continue to represent the overwhelming majority of those recruited into extremist groups and carrying out extremist violence."[36] During the Y+ piloting phase, most of the partners worked with youth groups that had around a half, and sometimes more than a half, of young women participants. This is disproportionate having in mind what we have previously stated, that the vast majority of extremists are men and boys. We recommend that in future activities related to the prevention of extremism, the YMI team re-focuses it's targeting in a way that entails a clear majority of young men when forming groups, or even having exclusively young men groups. Similarly to how it was done in Program M ("Be a Man"), with all of its methodological rationale, this program should challenge harmful gender norms and increase the uptake of more gender equal and non-violent attitudes and behavior among young men. To gather, engage and motivate young men at-risk is definitely more challenging, thus this represents the harder way, but it would bring more concentrated efforts and more valid targeting for this particular project theme. Status M's work with an exclusively young men group in Juvenile Detention Center, where they are basically in prison, deprived and faced with circumstances that foster joining extremist groups (like fascists, neo-Nazis), is an example of a perfect target group for tackling these particular issues.

4. Reaching out to youth in rural areas

During the Program Y+ implementation, some partner organizations in the YMI team chose to work with groups in rural areas, outside of the cities they are based in. This is a very good choice because

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35   Ibid.

36   Ibid.

this part of the population is more in need of the program, considering they come from rural, more traditional area, with a lower income rate, and generally with less options and opportunities and no similar trainings or programs, sometimes even without civil society organizations, etc. Having to travel frequently outside of the city is not convenient, which is why the groups in urban areas usually have more activities. If the YMI team wants to scale up and spread its reach to more communities in more locations in the future, we would recommend organizing a training session for new local trainers/youth workers and establishing direct cooperation with the new local partner organizations/institutions, where this is possible. Engaging local trainers and youth workers would be highly beneficial for the program, having in mind their knowledge of the local context, and thus their work would be more relevant, focused, and efficient.

5. Regional exchanges are making youth less prone to radicalization

Regional cooperation and exchanges are beneficial for peacebuilding efforts, providing safe spaces for youth to meet, discuss, work together, break barriers, socialize, etc. The YMI has a history of organizing camps where youth from all over the region would meet in this way, and these camps have had great results in previous years. So, the recommendation is obvious – to organize joint camps, trainings, youth exchanges or similar activities where the youth from all these different countries and different backgrounds would meet, which would facilitate the elimination of prejudices, stereotypes, hate and would increase not just tolerance, but also acceptance and friendships.
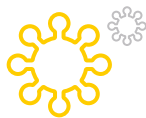
6. Learning from the COVID -19 experience

Amidst the COVID-19 crisis, the majority of people got used to using online platforms much more than they did before, for communication but also education. The YMI team has responded in the same way to the pandemic and has implemented numerous online workshops in all project countries. We recommend the continuous development of educational methods via online platforms, maybe even a Program Y+ online course could be developed in future endeavors. Online work could also be done using a mixed method, e.g. some sessions to be recorded and available for people to watch (with accompanying materials like literature and tests also available), and some sessions focused more on discussions, in the form of an interactive webinar. And, of course, some sessions could be done in person. The development of an online course in the future, and a possible accreditation of it, could potentially reach much more participants, and also ensure a certain degree of sustainability.

7. Capacity building of trainers/educators

For working on these themes, and especially for working with more vulnerable groups, increasing the capacities of the team of trainers is strongly advised. Trainers should be more sensitized to particular groups and group needs, should have more skills for handling escalations of possible conflicts (for example, in a juvenile detention center). If trainers/educators have only worked in regular high schools, they are not prepared for a more intensive form of work with youth in detention centers, centers for social work, and other rehabilitation institutions, especially if participants have a history of violent behavior. If needed, another option is outsourcing, engaging already experienced trainers in this field, specifically for this role. For further enhancement of the Program Y+ in social institutions, we strongly advise further trainings of trainers and peer educators.

8. Theatre based education as a model for prevention of youth radicalization

Theatre play within Y+ was a major success, but there is still space for enrichment in the future. Basically, all of the group's interviewees recommended, and we agree, that moderated discussions with the audience should be organized, right after the performance ends. This would enable more in-depth discussions, explanations, questions from audience, sharing impressions and suggestions, and of course this would strengthen the play's main points and its impact. Another suggestion from the group, with which we completely agree, is that theatre-based education methods need to be further developed – a forum theatre program could be developed based on the existing play, as a spin-off of the play. A forum theater method would be beneficial, because the conceived problematic situations would first be acted out on stage, and then participants would get a chance to enter the scene and do something that would in their opinion solve the problem. This enhances critical thinking and engagement of the audience through interactive methods.

9. Counter-narratives as powerful campaign tools

The campaign for the prevention of extremism developed in YMI started in the spring of 2020, with limited capacity due to the coronavirus pandemic, only with online activities (social media posts and activations, online quizzes, etc.). Obviously, the "offline" activities that were planned, public actions with clear messaging, should be implemented in the future, and in that way reach people in offline and online spaces. Another idea that can be further elaborated is the use of counter-narratives in this campaign, for example the development and promotion of video clips

that use counter narratives. To give a simple example, in some country an extremist organization "represents the interests" (obviously falsely) of the majority of population A and promotes hate and violence towards group B. Then, the YMI team identifies this issue and decides to address particular problems in a particular country or local community. Then, the "counter" video is developed where people from group A and group B are presented as cooperating, being friends, having meaningful relations, etc. Scripts for these videos would obviously depend on the identified issues, and videos should be carefully developed, always having in mind the sensitivity of the issue involved.

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To conclude, we can confidently say that this program was a successful piloting of different approaches and methods for the prevention of extremism and radicalization among youth. It demonstrated the creativity and dedication of participating partner organizations, and the high quality of their specific approaches. There is no doubt that the implemented activities were very beneficial for youth participants, and Y+ definitely proved itself as a promising prevention program (or sets of programs). Still, there is more work to come. Since this was essentially test of different methods, and a sort of work in progress, it gave the YMI team plenty of options and valuable evidence and insights for future efforts in dealing with these complex issues. Furthermore, the Program Y+ needs to continue development in the following period, and needs to be finalized having in mind the identified need for standardization, in line with other recommendations provided here. Only with continuous work and further improvements will the Y+ program reach its full potential and become the effective, well-rounded, comprehensive and scalable program that ensures results in the prevention of youth extremism and radicalization, across the Western Balkans and beyond.

Participating partners

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5. Participating partners

Act for Society
Tirana, Albania

www.actforsocietycenter.org

Center E8
Belgrade, Serbia

www.e8.org.rs

Perpetuum Mobile
Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina

www.pm.rs.ba

SIT - Center for Counselling, Social Services and Research
Prishtina, Kosovo*

www.sit-ks.org

Status M
Zagreb, Croatia

www.status-m.hr

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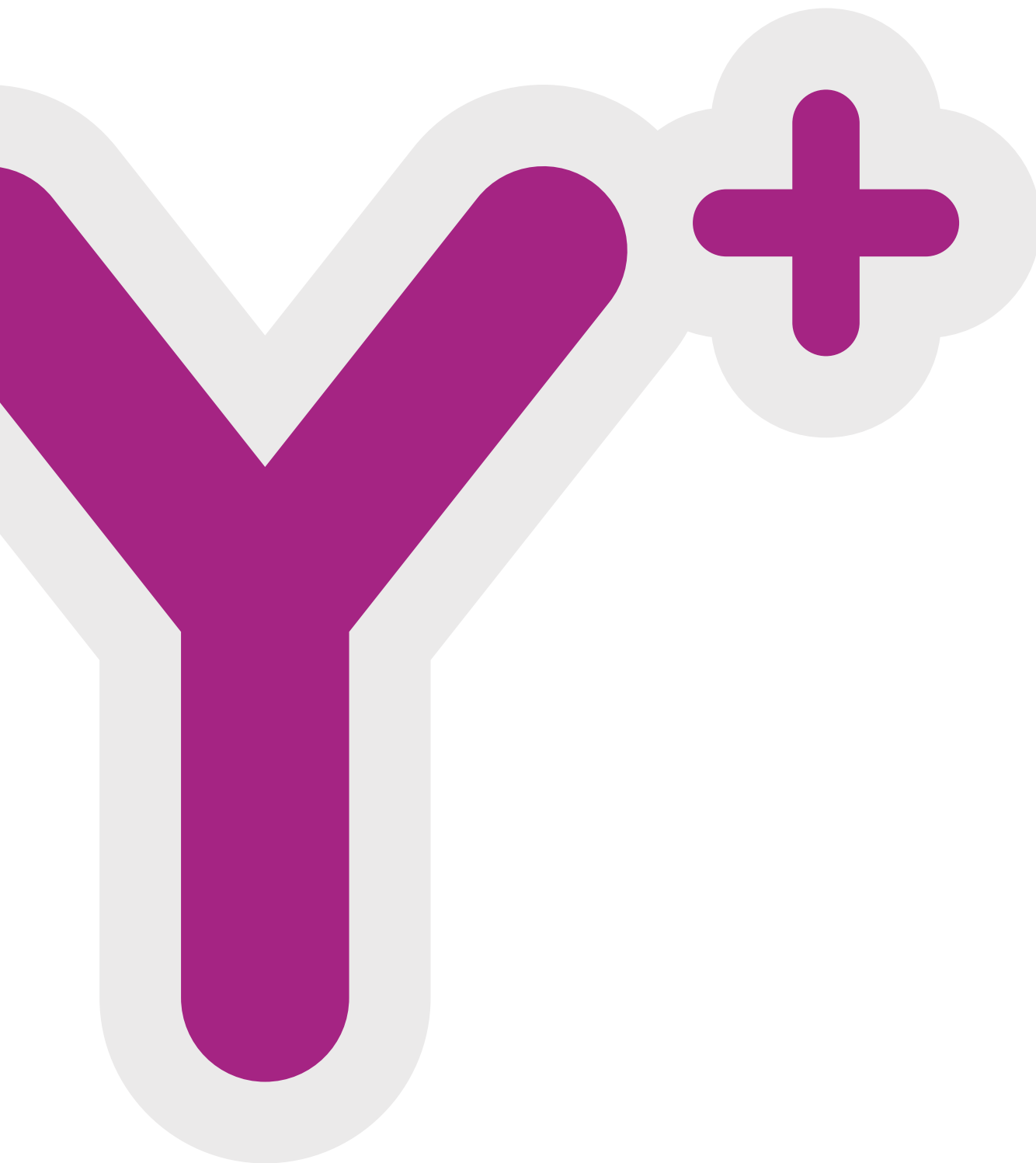
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Working with Youth at Risk in the Balkans

A Case Study on Progrem Y+