



# PATHWAYS TO RESILIENCE:

## REGIONAL INSIGHTS FROM THE WESTERN BALKANS



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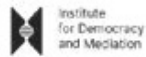
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### **Pathways to Resilience:**

Regional Insights from the Western Balkans

@ Tirana, 2025

The content of the document is the sole responsibility of the project implementers and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA) or SMART Balkans consortium.



## List of Abbreviations

- CAWI – Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing
- CVE – Countering Violent Extremism
- CSO – Civil Society Organization
- EU – European Union
- EUROSTAT – European Statistical Office
- FES – Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
- IDM – Institute for Democracy and Mediation
- IANS – Institute for the Advancement of National Security
- ILO – International Labour Organization
- NEET – Not in Education, Employment, or Training
- OSCE – Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
- P/CVE – Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism
- UNDP – United Nations Development Programme
- UNODC – United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
- WBCTI – Western Balkans Counter-Terrorism Initiative

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# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This empirical assessment investigates the resilience of youth in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo\*<sup>1</sup> through a mixed-method approach, incorporating both quantitative survey data and qualitative insights from focus groups and key informant interviews. The study aims to identify patterns in youth perceptions, behaviors, and vulnerabilities in relation to education, employment, civic engagement, social cohesion, and exposure to crime and violent extremism.

A structured online survey was conducted with over 80 youth respondents aged 14 to 29 across the three countries. The sample was designed to ensure representation across gender, urban-rural settings, and educational and employment status. Data collection was carried out using the CAWI method and was supplemented by focus group discussions and interviews with civil society actors, educators, and public officials involved in youth and counter-violence initiatives.

### Key Quantitative Findings:

- **78%** of respondents cited economic insecurity as a top concern, with youth unemployment rates ranging from **27%** (Albania) to over **40%** (Kosovo).

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<sup>1</sup> Note: The asterisk does not prejudice Kosovo's status and is in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1244/1999, as well as the International Court of Justice opinion on Kosovo's Declaration of independence.

- Over **50%** of participants expressed a desire to migrate, primarily due to lack of opportunities and political disenchantment.
- More than one-third of respondents reported exposure to hate speech, especially among youth aged 18–24 and those engaged in civic activities.
- Trust in institutions is consistently low across all three countries, particularly among youth in rural areas and ethnic minority communities.

### **Key Qualitative Insights:**

- Focus group participants highlighted informal employment, social exclusion, and lack of local government responsiveness as critical stressors.
- Many youth perceive radicalization risks as more economically and socially rooted than ideologically driven.
- Experiences of discrimination—based on gender, ethnicity, or political affiliation—remain widespread and underreported.

The study reveals that youth resilience is shaped by intersecting socio-economic and governance-related factors. While some country-specific variations exist, the overall trends point to regional challenges related to systemic exclusion, underemployment, and weak civic infrastructure.

The findings underscore the need for data-driven policy interventions aimed at increasing access to employment, improving the relevance of education, and enhancing youth participation in

democratic processes. The report concludes with policy recommendations tailored to governments, law enforcement, local authorities, and educational institutions to foster inclusive and sustainable youth development in the Western Balkans.

The **tragic case of a 14-year-old being fatally stabbed near a school in Tirana** underscores the critical need for effective school safety measures and the prevention of youth violence.

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, the **“Be a Man Club” in Tuzla** stands out as a positive example of youth-led initiatives addressing violence and promoting healthy masculinity.

In **Kosovo**, the country’s **high rates of femicide and gender-based violence** highlight the pressing need to address gender-based violence as part of youth resilience programming.

# **1. INTRODUCTION**

This report presents the findings of a multi-country empirical assessment examining youth resilience in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo. It is grounded in a regional framework that explores how young people navigate socio-economic vulnerabilities, engage with civic life, and respond to risks related to crime, violence, and extremism. The report combines quantitative and qualitative methods to generate evidence-based insights that can inform youth policies, programs, and institutional responses.

The assessment is motivated by growing concerns regarding youth exclusion, underemployment, migration pressures, and exposure to violence in the Western Balkans. While national governments have made commitments to improve youth outcomes—through education reform, employment initiatives, and civic engagement strategies—significant gaps remain in the understanding of youth needs, aspirations, and lived experiences at the local level.

As asserted in the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security (2015), youth can play a decisive role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and are a key aspect of the sustainability, inclusiveness and success of peace-building efforts. This report responds to that gap by collecting and analyzing data directly from young people. By doing so, it contributes to a growing body of evidence that links resilience not only to individual coping mechanisms, but also to systemic factors such as institutional trust, opportunity structures, and social cohesion.

The case studies, such as the **tragic school violence in Albania**, where a 14-year-old was fatally stabbed near a school in Tirana, underscore the critical need for effective school safety measures and the prevention of youth violence. Similarly, **the 'Be a Man Club' in Bosnia and Herzegovina** serves as a model of youth-led initiatives addressing violence and promoting healthy masculinity, offering concrete examples that illustrate the broader trends identified in the research. In **Kosovo**, the high rates of femicide and gender-based violence reflect the pressing need to address gender-based violence as part of youth resilience programming, a challenge that remains central to the region's social cohesion.

The report seeks to address the following research questions:

- What are the primary challenges and concerns facing youth in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo?
- How do young people perceive opportunities for participation, education, and employment?
- What are the regional trends in youth vulnerability to crime, violence, and radicalization?
- How do demographic, geographic, and social variables influence youth resilience?

Through this empirical lens, the report aims to provide a comprehensive and comparative overview of youth perspectives across three countries, highlighting both shared regional dynamics and country-specific contexts. It also identifies policy and programming gaps and proposes targeted interventions to strengthen youth resilience and social inclusion.

The assessment review itself provides an exhaustive analysis of the collected data; however, these data can be additionally cross-referenced to learn more about the youth profile and their view of the country's reality. Therefore, every careful reader of the interpreted data will surely uncover some other dimensions of the answers given, which may serve as a baseline for additional analyses and academic and professional research. The aim and purpose of this assessment review is not to provide conclusive answers regarding pathways to resilience, but to raise certain issues for further scientific and professional discussion and debate, as well as to encourage the taking of certain concrete steps and solutions for improving the standard of life (not only for young people) in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a mixed-methods research design to assess youth resilience across Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo. The methodology integrates quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques to ensure a comprehensive understanding of youth attitudes, behaviors, and vulnerabilities in diverse local contexts.

## 2.1 Research Design and Data Collection

The research involved three primary data collection methods:

### 1. Quantitative Survey:

- **Instrument:** A structured, self-administered online questionnaire.
- **Sample Size:** 80 respondents aged 14–29.
- **Countries Covered:** Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo.
- **Method:** Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI).
- **Period:** March – April 2025.

**2. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** Conducted with youth participants, community leaders, educators, and representatives from local safety and CVE (Countering Violent Extremism) councils.

**3. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs):** Conducted with policymakers, CSO leaders, research experts, and institutional stakeholders at the national and local levels.

## 2.2 Sampling and Participant Profile

Participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling techniques to ensure representation across:

- Urban and rural communities
- Age cohorts (14–18, 19–24, 25–29)
- Gender and socio-economic backgrounds
- Educational and employment status

The sample was balanced to reflect the diverse youth demographics within each country. Respondents included both participants in program activities and members of the wider community.

Table: Sampling and Participant Profile

Characteristic	Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo
Gender	50% Male, 50% Female	48% Male, 52% Female	49% Male, 51% Female
Age Groups	14-18: 25%, 19-24: 50%, 25-29: 25%	14-18: 30%, 19-24: 40%, 25-29: 30%	14-18: 20%, 19-24: 55%, 25-29: 25%
Urban vs Rural Distribution	60% Urban, 40% Rural	55% Urban, 45% Rural	65% Urban, 35% Rural
Educational Status	60% Secondary, 40% Higher Education	65% Secondary, 35% Higher Education	58% Secondary, 42% Higher Education
Employment Status	30% Employed, 50% Unemployed, 20% Student	25% Employed, 45% Unemployed, 30% Student	28% Employed, 45% Unemployed, 27% Student
Socio-Economic Background	70% Middle/Lower Income, 30% Higher Income	65% Middle/Lower Income, 35% Higher Income	75% Middle/Lower Income, 25% Higher Income

### 2.3 Survey Instrument and Themes

The questionnaire was designed to assess the following thematic areas:

- Education and Competencies
- Employment, Economic Participation, and Mobility
- Values, Identity, and Social Cohesion
- Civic Engagement and Political Participation
- Exposure to Crime, Violence, and Radicalization

Survey questions were adapted to local contexts and translated into Albanian, Bosnian, and English, ensuring both linguistic accessibility and conceptual clarity.

### 2.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including measures of central tendency and frequency distributions. Where appropriate, disaggregated analysis by gender, age group, and country was conducted to highlight comparative trends.

Qualitative data from focus groups and interviews were transcribed, coded, and thematically analyzed. Insights were triangulated with survey data to validate findings and enhance contextual understanding.

Additionally, the report includes **case studies of specific incidents and initiatives in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo**. These real-world examples help contextualize the survey findings and provide deeper insights into the challenges and resilience strategies faced by youth in these countries.

## 2.5 Ethical Considerations

All data collection adhered to ethical research standards, including informed consent, anonymity, and voluntary participation. The research team ensured that no personally identifiable information was collected or stored. Sensitive topics, such as experiences of discrimination or violence, were addressed with care and optionality.

**3. CONTEXTUALIZING  
YOUTH CHALLENGES:  
TRENDS IN THREE  
WESTERN BALKANS**

## Countries

This section provides a critical overview of the challenges faced by youth in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo, delving into socio-economic struggles, education systems, employment issues, migration pressures, and concerns around violence and extremism. It contextualizes these challenges within the region's historical, socio-political, and economic frameworks, which influence the lived realities of youth.

### Youth Distribution and Demographic Trends

Young people represent a significant portion of the population in the Western Balkans, particularly in Kosovo where nearly 50% of the population is under 25 years old. However, limited access to economic opportunities, exacerbated by high youth unemployment and lack of social mobility, makes youth empowerment a critical issue. For instance:

- In Kosovo, youth unemployment is over 40%, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, youth unemployment stands at 26.5%.
- The Youth Progress Index 2023 reveals that youth in the region still face stagnation in rights and freedoms, especially in terms of access to education, political freedoms, and adequate housing.

### Education and Employment Struggles

The disconnect between education systems and labor market demands results in high unemployment rates across the region, contributing to a **brain drain**:

- **Albania** has a youth unemployment rate of 27%, while **Bosnia and Herzegovina** sees 33% youth unemployment. **Kosovo** faces youth unemployment over 40%.
- Education quality remains inadequate to meet the needs of modern labor markets, with skills mismatch being a key driver for youth dissatisfaction. Many young people feel compelled to leave for better opportunities abroad.

Education in the region is often inadequately aligned with labor market demands, leading to high levels of skills mismatch and unemployment. The mismatch between educational attainment and available jobs is a significant problem especially amongst youngsters, leading to brain drain—the emigration of educated young individuals in search of better employment opportunities abroad. Reports from the European Commission (2022 and 2023) highlight that despite improvements in access to education, quality and relevance remain major concerns. Many young people that do not match labor market needs, leading to high unemployment rates—with youth unemployment reaching 27% in Albania, 33% in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and over 40% in Kosovo (World Bank, 2023). Most youths don't work in jobs they were educated to perform. Most believe that they need to know someone or to join a political party to secure employment, and at the same time, 'under the table' labour is prevalent in our country.

Limited job opportunities push many young people into the informal economy or migration, further weakening local economies. The UNDP Human Development Report (2022) indicates that many young professionals leave their home countries in search of better opportunities, contributing to the

region's brain drain. This migration trend reduces the availability of skilled labor and affects the long-term economic prospects of these countries.

In focus group discussions, young people frequently noted that jobs were handed out through connections rather than merit. This belief suggests that those in positions of responsibility throughout society are not necessarily perceived by youth as the best qualified but rather those with personal connections, which may further erode young people's trust in institutions and their leaders

### **Migration Pressures and Social Exclusion**

Youth migration is a significant challenge driven by economic insecurity and lack of career prospects. More than **50%** of youth in the region express a desire to migrate, particularly to EU countries such as **Germany, Italy, and Switzerland**. This migration trend, while offering temporary relief, places long-term strains on local economies and hinders the development of skilled labor. In addition to migration, social exclusion, especially among ethnic minorities and those in rural areas, remains a pressing issue, further eroding trust in state institutions and governance.

### **Civic Engagement and Political Disenfranchisement**

Civic engagement and trust in political institutions are low across the region, with many youth feeling excluded from decision-making processes. Polls have shown that **42%** of people in the Western Balkans do not engage in political discussions, with only **15%** actively participating in public events.

The engagement gap is even wider in marginalized communities, and youth councils often lack the capacity to effectively involve young people in governance processes.

## Safety and Security Concerns

Safety concerns, especially around crime and radicalization, are also pressing issues for youth. Organized crime<sup>2</sup> remains a top concern in **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, while youth in **Kosovo** and **Albania** often cite **internet safety** and the **illicit use of firearms** as major risks to their well-being.

On average, 26 percent of respondents, across urban and rural areas, expressed feeling threatened by the illegal possession and misuse of weapons in their neighbourhoods – in instances of crime, domestic violence and celebratory shooting, for example.

School safety has emerged as a critical concern in Albania, as well as across the region. High-profile incidents involving youth violence—including murders committed within or near school premises—have sparked public outcry and exposed serious weaknesses in implementation of existing safety measures. Despite the introduction of the School Security Package by the government, concerns remain about its effectiveness in preventing violence, abuse, and the worst-case outcomes, such as homicide.

**School violence** has become a growing issue, as highlighted by the **2023 stabbing incident in Tirana**, where a 14-year-old was fatally attacked near a school, highlighting the need for stronger security infrastructures and comprehensive

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<sup>2</sup> Defined as transnational, national or local groupings of enterprises run by criminals engaging in illegal activity such as financial crimes, violence, drug, arms and human trafficking

safety programs in schools. Reports of hate speech and discrimination remain common, particularly among marginalized groups, and contribute to an environment where radicalization and extremism can thrive.

Discrimination based on age, political affiliation or ethnicity were also frequently reported, although in some societies much more than in others. When it comes to gender discrimination, in all locations, young women reported gender discrimination much more often than did men, by a factor of up to ten. In most locations, women experienced significantly more sexual harassment than men, while in Albania and Kosovo, young women said they experienced more bullying and intimidation both at work and online. By contrast, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, notable percentages of men reported being victims of violence or threat of violence outside the home. There was no significant difference found in the experiences of young women and young men. Out of those who had experienced violence or discrimination, only 17 percent reported this to anyone. It is important to note that although respondents were given the privacy to answer the questions about experiences of discrimination and violence, they may have been hesitant to disclose such sensitive experiences, even anonymously.

### Radicalization and Violent Extremism

Radicalization and violent extremism continue to be critical concerns in the region, particularly among marginalized youth. Socio-economic factors like **unemployment**, **political instability**, and **social exclusion** serve as significant drivers of extremism, pushing some youth toward illegal or violent activities. Efforts to counter these threats include educational

programs focusing on **critical thinking** and **media literacy**, alongside efforts to provide **vocational training** and **job opportunities**.

Beyond education and employment, community engagement and trust-building are crucial in preventing radicalization. When young people feel disconnected from decision-making processes and distrust state institutions, they may turn to alternative networks, including extremist groups (OSCE, 2023). In Bosnia and Herzegovina, returning foreign fighters and their families face stigma and marginalization, which can further alienate them from society (UNDP Prevention of Violent Extremism Report, 2022). In Kosovo, radical religious narratives have gained traction in isolated communities where state institutions have limited presence. Meanwhile, in Albania, lack of youth participation in governance has contributed to their political disenfranchisement (EU Enlargement Report, 2023).

Youth are a heterogeneous group, meaning that even among youths, needs and lifestyles vary. In particular, we are referring to youths who live in urban areas and their peers living in smaller communities in any of three countries. This is why mechanisms that will enable youth participation at the local level are crucial. Almost 50% of local self-government units lack local youth councils, and those that do have them, have councils that are often dysfunctional and non-inclusive bodies. To summarise, just as there is a national youth council, we also need functional participation mechanisms locally, such as youth councils, youth offices, local action plans, the financing of local youth policies and youth spaces.

## **4. KEY FINDINGS: ALBANIA**

This section presents the main findings from Albania, based on quantitative survey responses, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. The analysis highlights challenges related to youth unemployment, migration, education, crime vulnerability, and exposure to radicalization, with a focus on socio-economic and institutional drivers of youth discontent. Providing a socially and emotionally safe and supportive environment for young people in order to prevent the involvement of youth in any kind of crime is of paramount importance.

#### **4.1 Employment and Economic Insecurity**

Youth unemployment remains a critical concern in Albania, with 27% of youth respondents reporting that they are unemployed. The mismatch between education and labor market needs continues to be a major factor, with survey responses indicating that:

- 68% of respondents believe their education does not align with job opportunities available in the market.
- 61% stated that employment depends more on personal connections or political affiliation than merit.

Additionally, internal migration is an emerging trend, particularly among youth from smaller municipalities. Respondents cited cost of living and lack of affordable housing as major barriers to successful transition to urban labor markets.

## 4.2 Migration Intentions

The survey reveals a strong desire to emigrate:

- 52% of youth respondents expressed a clear intention to migrate abroad for economic reasons.
- Preferred destinations include Germany, Italy, and Switzerland, consistent with EU migration patterns reported by EUROSTAT.

Focus group participants described migration as a “default solution” due to lack of institutional support and absence of long-term career prospects. This contributes to Albania’s persistent youth brain drain. Internal migration is a key feature for Albania. Internal migrants in Albania often struggle with limited job opportunities in their hometowns, prompting them to look for work in urban areas. Many young people from smaller municipalities work often as seasonal workers during the summer months due to limited job opportunities available in their hometowns.

## 4.3 Education and Vocational Gaps

Survey and interview data emphasize a shortage of practical, job-oriented education:

- 58% of youth expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of public education.
- 72% of respondents indicated they had never participated in any vocational training.

A key informant from the Faculty of Social Sciences stated: “Despite rising enrollment, our system does not equip students with marketable skills. The disconnect is systemic.”

#### 4.4 Vulnerability to Crime and Delinquency

Albanian youth are vulnerable to involvement in the informal economy, petty crime, and, in some cases, organized crime. According to national crime data:

- Juveniles account for 5% of all reported crimes.
- Young people in economically marginalized communities are more likely to engage in or be targeted by criminal networks, particularly related to drug trafficking and smuggling.

Survey responses indicate:

- 24% of respondents personally know peers involved in informal or illicit activities due to financial pressures.

##### **Albania: The Murder of a 14-Year-Old in Tirana.**

In Albania, the tragic murder of a 14-year-old in November 2023 near the “Fan Noli” school in Tirana, where a minor attacker fatally stabbed the victim after an ongoing conflict, starkly highlighted the rising youth violence concerns. This incident shook the society, prompting heightened discussions about the safety of children and the role of institutions in ensuring a secure educational environment. It brought to the forefront the issues of school violence, social and economic pressures, and the need for robust preventive measures to address underlying causes of youth aggression.

## 4.5 Exposure to Radicalization

Radicalisation and extremism, which can lead to violent extremism, represent a persisting security threat to the Western Balkans. In the past few decades, the Western Balkan countries have been broadly viewed as a breeding ground for religious radicals and violent extremism. Tackling violent extremism was traditionally a task for security sector agencies exclusively.

Although Albania has seen a decline in radicalization-related incidents, concerns persist regarding online extremist content targeting disenfranchised youth. Stakeholders highlighted that:

- Digital platforms remain an active vector for radical narratives.
- Rural and low-income communities are most vulnerable due to weak institutional presence and lack of counter-narrative programs. Survey insights reveal:
- 43% of respondents believe that economic exclusion is a stronger driver of radicalization than ideological belief.

## 4.6 Institutional Gaps and Local Governance

Local governments face significant challenges in addressing youth needs:

- Incomplete decentralization of youth-related services limits municipal responsiveness.
- Lack of systematic youth data hampers planning and policy implementation. Participants highlighted that youth strategies often remain “paper policies” with limited implementation. Local youth councils, where they exist, are underfunded and often inactive.

# **4. KEY FINDINGS: BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**

This section presents findings from Bosnia and Herzegovina, drawn from youth survey data, focus group discussions, and expert interviews. The data highlight major trends in unemployment, educational mismatches, civic disengagement, migration, and socio-economic drivers of vulnerability.

#### 4.1 Youth Unemployment and Labor Market Disconnect

Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to face some of the highest youth unemployment rates in Europe:

- **26.5%** of youth were unemployed as of 2023, with limited improvement from previous years.
- **15.98%** of youth aged 15–24 are classified as NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training).

Survey results further reveal:

- Only **15.2%** of employed youth hold full-time, permanent jobs.
- **63%** of respondents believe that temporary, insecure work is their only short-term option.

#### 4.2 Education and Skills Mismatch

There is a clear disconnect between educational outcomes and labor market requirements:

- **65%** of respondents reported they have not participated in training or non-formal education.
- **62%** of youth surveyed believe their formal education does not prepare them adequately for employment.

In addition, key informants and FGDs emphasized the fragmented nature of the education system—particularly its ethnic segregation and outdated curricula—as a core barrier to integration and opportunity.

### 4.3 Migration Pressures and Brain Drain

Survey data and qualitative findings confirm that **migration is seen as the most viable path** to success:

- Over **70%** of youth respondents reported a desire to migrate for work or study.
- Common destinations include **Germany, Austria, and Croatia**, following established diaspora networks.

Participants often cited frustration with political instability and lack of institutional trust as push factors. One respondent remarked:

“Even with a degree, I would rather work a basic job abroad than stay here and wait for change that never comes.”

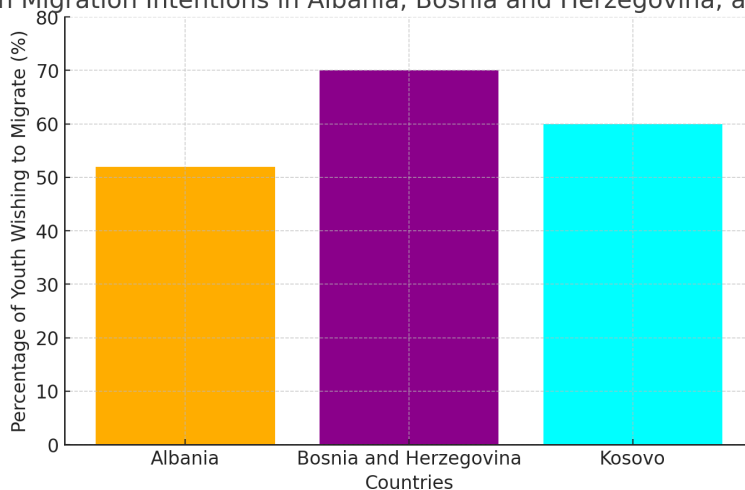
### 4.4 Civic Trust and Political Disengagement

Survey responses show **low levels of political trust and civic participation**:

- **58%** of respondents report having no trust in political parties or national institutions.
- Only **12%** have participated in public consultations or local governance processes.

Focus groups echoed these findings, with participants expressing skepticism toward decision-makers. Youth councils exist in some municipalities, but their impact is often constrained by lack of funding, training, or inclusion in policymaking.

Youth Migration Intentions in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo



Data reveals that migration intentions are highest in Bosnia and Herzegovina (70%), followed by Kosovo (60%), and Albania (52%).

#### 4.5 Exposure to Radicalization and Criminal Networks

Young people in BiH are exposed to **heightened risks of radicalization and crime**, particularly in underserved and marginalized areas. Survey results indicate:

- **29%** of respondents identified organized crime as a significant threat in their communities.

- **41%** associate extremist sympathies with **economic hardship, exclusion, and institutional distrust**, rather than religious ideology.

Interviewees emphasized that returning foreign fighters and stigmatized youth are especially vulnerable due to limited reintegration support.

#### 4.6 Youth Identity and Religion

Data from the survey show diverse affiliations and a trend toward secularization:

- **49%** identify as Muslim, **30%** as Orthodox, **8%** as Catholic, and **7%** reported no religious affiliation.
- **13.5%** reported not attending religious services at all, while **24.3%** attend regularly (weekly or more).

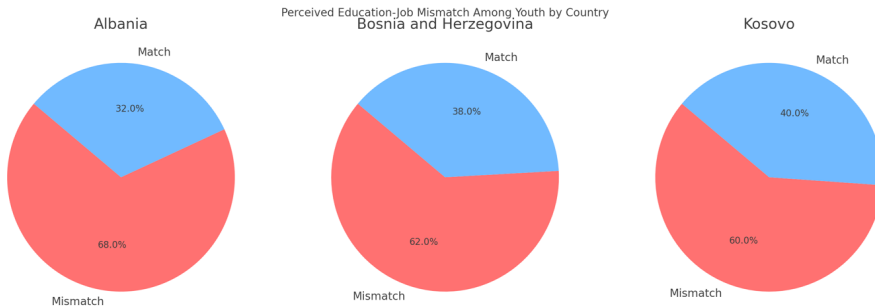
These figures reflect both the importance of religious identity for many and a growing segment of youth moving away from traditional practices.

#### 4.7 Youth Profile and Sentiment

A composite analysis of survey data reveals the typical respondent as:

- 22 years old
- Urban-based
- Unemployed or a student
- Living with parents or extended family

While many youth express **personal optimism**, they remain **deeply pessimistic about their country's direction**—highlighting a key paradox: personal hope amid systemic frustration.



Data show percentage of youth in each country who feel their education is mismatched with job market needs: **Albania:** 68% mismatch; **Bosnia and Herzegovina:** 62% mismatch; **Kosovo:** 60% mismatch.

**Be a Man Club Tuzla In Bosnia**, the Be a Man Club Tuzla serves as a positive example of youth intervention. This local initiative, aimed at promoting gender equality, healthy masculinity, and non-violent behavior, stands out as a model for preventing violence and extremism among youth. It provides a safe space for high school and university students to engage in workshops focused on emotional literacy, mental health, and breaking harmful gender norms. Through its activities, young men are encouraged to embrace alternative roles, promote respect in relationships, and contribute to their communities positively.

# **4. KEY FINDINGS: KOSOVO**

This section summarizes findings from Kosovo based on survey responses, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. Youth in Kosovo face systemic challenges tied to high unemployment, education-employment mismatches, gender disparities, and risks related to marginalization and radicalization.

#### 4.1 Youth Unemployment and Economic Exclusion

Kosovo has one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the region:

- **Youth unemployment exceeds 40%**, with even higher figures among women and ethnic minorities.
- **33.7%** of youth aged 15–24 are classified as NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training).

Survey findings show:

- **74%** of respondents identify economic instability as their primary concern.
- **59%** do not believe they can find adequate employment within Kosovo’s current labor market.

#### 4.2 Education Gaps and Skill Mismatches

Although education reforms are underway, many youth remain underprepared for the labor market:

- **66%** of respondents report a lack of access to job-relevant vocational training.
- **60%** state that their education does not match current job market needs.

Barriers include outdated curricula, limited private sector engagement, and a shortage of career guidance programs. FGDs confirmed that practical training is limited or unavailable in many schools, particularly in rural areas.

### 4.3 Gender Disparities and Social Norms

Survey and focus group data show that gender inequality remains a critical issue:

- Female youth unemployment stands at 28.7%, compared to 25.9% for men.
- Young women report higher rates of bullying, harassment, and workplace discrimination. Cultural norms also influence attitudes toward gender roles. Focus group participants noted that many young men still believe women's primary role is domestic. This view restricts women's access to public and economic life and contributes to their underrepresentation in decision-making processes.

#### High Rates of Femicide

Kosovo faces high rates of femicide and gender-based violence, an issue that directly affects youth resilience. These incidents highlight broader socio-economic vulnerabilities and deeply ingrained gender norms. Addressing gender-based violence is critical for improving youth resilience, as young people exposed to such violence are more likely to experience psychological distress and social isolation, both of which are significant risk factors for radicalization.

#### 4.4 Political Disengagement and Institutional Distrust

Kosovar youth report limited participation in governance:

- **55%** feel disconnected from political institutions.
- Only **14%** have been involved in civic or governmental decision-making processes.

While some youth are active in NGOs or community initiatives, these spaces are often **urban-centric** and less accessible to youth from rural or ethnic minority communities.

#### 4.5 Radicalization Risks and Inactivity

Kosovo's history of foreign fighter recruitment continues to cast a shadow, though current risks are more nuanced. Survey data and interviews reveal:

- **46%** of youth believe radicalization is driven more by **economic exclusion and frustration** than ideology.
- **29%** identified **inactivity, social isolation, or lack of purpose** as factors contributing to radicalization among their peers.

FGD participants described this as an “identity vacuum,” especially among educated youth without employment prospects.

The radicalization in Kosovo is a youth phenomenon. A neglected explanatory factor has been the widespread inactivity among Kosovo youth. While interrelated to the socio-economic dimension, this factor is at the same time analytically different as it points out and recognizes the agency of those choosing a path of radicalization. This is related also to a widespread

absence of perspectives concerning those that have studied and that are not considered economically poor. In this framework, what is at stake is a dynamic of frustration of expectations, and a promise of order and meaning in a context that lacks both. Inactivity and the absence of perspectives among Kosovo youth is related to another explanatory dimension, that of identity. The identity dimension is to be seen as a central factor in understanding and explaining the radicalization of both Kosovo and other Western Balkans youth.

#### 4.6 Migration Pressures

Migration is a major strategy for coping with structural limitations:

- **Over 60%** of respondents expressed a desire to migrate to EU countries.
- Primary motivations include better employment opportunities, access to quality education, and safer living environments.

This outflow contributes to ongoing **brain drain**, with long-term consequences for Kosovo's economic and demographic stability.

#### 4.7 Positive Indicators: Civic Engagement and Youth Agency

Despite significant challenges, survey data show encouraging levels of **peer-led engagement**:

- **100%** of respondents reported participation in at least one structured youth initiative (e.g. mentorship, education, or advocacy programs).

- Respondents emphasized the value of **youth-driven community projects** in building resilience and reducing isolation.

One youth leader stated:

“What makes us stay is the chance to make a difference—even if it’s in our neighborhood or school. We need more spaces where we’re taken seriously.”

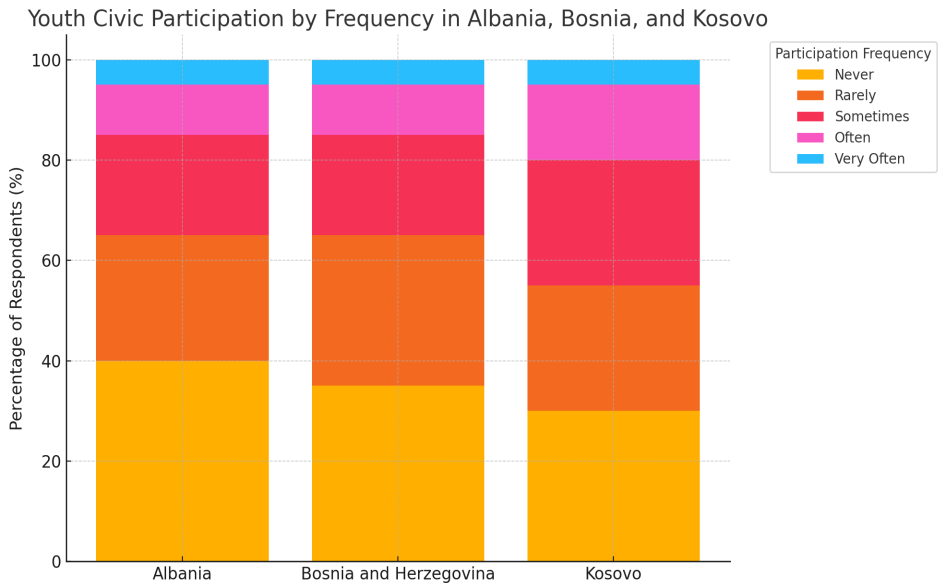
Indicator	Albania	Bosnia & Herzegovina	Kosovo
Youth Unemployment Rate	27%	26.5%	40%+
Desire to Migrate	52%	70%+	60%+
Perceived Job Mismatch	68%	62%	60%
Civic Engagement (Participation)	Low	12%	14%
Exposure to Hate Speech	12%	N/A	N/A

### Addressing Femicide and Gender-Based Violence

In Kosovo, femicide and gender-based violence are pressing issues, reflecting systemic gender inequalities that continue to affect youth, particularly young women. A substantial percentage of youth in Kosovo acknowledge the prevalence of gender-based violence, and there is a notable difference in how male and female youth perceive responsibility in cases of sexual violence. The country faces challenges in overcoming deep-rooted traditional gender norms, but initiatives aimed at addressing these issues, through education and empowerment programs, are beginning to gain traction. However, continuous efforts are required to challenge harmful cultural perceptions and provide both victims and

perpetrators with the tools to break the cycle of violence .

These case studies underline the urgency of tackling systemic issues through both reactive measures (like legal reforms) and proactive community-based interventions, focusing on education, gender equality, and youth empowerment as key elements in building resilience against extremism and violence.



As shown, Kosovo has the highest unemployment rate at over 40%, followed by Albania at 27%, and Bosnia and Herzegovina at 26.5%.

# **5. CROSS-CUTTING REGIONAL OPPORTUNITIES**

This section identifies regional opportunities for enhancing youth resilience across Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo, based on common patterns revealed through empirical data. Despite national differences, several overlapping challenges and entry points provide a foundation for coordinated interventions across the Western Balkans.

## 5.1 Aligning Education and Employment Systems

Survey results across all three countries reveal a widespread **skills mismatch** between formal education and labor market needs:

- Over **60%** of youth in each country reported that their education did not adequately prepare them for employment.
- Participation in vocational training and non-formal education remains limited, particularly in rural areas.

**Opportunity:** Governments and educational institutions should prioritize dual-education models, expand career guidance services, and increase private sector collaboration in vocational curricula development.

## 5.2 Expanding the Youth Guarantee Framework

All three countries have expressed interest in or begun piloting **Youth Guarantee programs**, but implementation remains inconsistent:

- Albania has adopted an action plan but lacks broad rollout.
- BiH has partial alignment at entity level, but

- no national implementation plan.
- Kosovo has initiated pilots in select municipalities.

**Opportunity:** Regional alignment around the EU Youth Guarantee model could ensure that all young people receive a quality offer of employment, education, or training within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving school.

### 5.3 Combating Youth Brain Drain

More than **half of youth respondents in all three countries** expressed a desire to migrate, citing economic insecurity, lack of institutional trust, and political exclusion.

**Opportunity:** Investments in youth entrepreneurship, innovation hubs, and inclusive local job markets—especially in smaller municipalities—can offer viable alternatives to migration. Regional cooperation could also promote **circular migration** strategies that retain ties with diaspora youth.

### 5.4 Preventing Radicalization Through Resilience-Building

Empirical findings indicate that radicalization is often driven not by ideology, but by:

- Economic marginalization
- Social exclusion
- Political alienation
- Online exposure to extremist narratives

**Opportunity:** A coordinated regional approach to **preventing violent extremism (PVE)** should focus on:

- Civic education
- Digital literacy
- Mentorship and peer-led interventions
- Local reintegration programs for returnees

## 5.5 Enhancing Local Youth Infrastructure

All three countries show weak local-level engagement structures:

- Fewer than half of municipalities have functional youth councils or youth offices.
- Where they exist, they often lack funding, legitimacy, or inclusiveness.

**Opportunity:** Regional donors and national governments should invest in sustainable youth participation mechanisms—especially at the municipal level. This includes funding for youth centers, participatory budgeting, and structured roles for youth in local safety councils.

## 5.6 Promoting Inclusive Youth Policies

Findings show that **marginalized youth groups**—including Roma, LGBTQI+, and youth in rural areas—are disproportionately affected by exclusion and underrepresentation.

**Opportunity:** Youth policies should be disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, and geography, with targeted funding to support inclusion, safety, and leadership development. Regional networks and civil society platforms can share good practices and tools to improve outreach to underrepresented youth.

# **6. GOOD PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED**

## What Worked Effectively in Strengthening Youth Resilience

Across Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo, several targeted interventions have effectively strengthened youth resilience, particularly in marginalized communities. The integration of sports programs, capacity-building initiatives, and community mobilization efforts has provided young people with opportunities for personal development, civic engagement, and crime prevention. Insights from interviews and focus groups reinforce the impact of these approaches and illustrate how different stakeholders collaborate to create safer environments for youth.

### Albania: Sports as a Tool for Youth Inclusion and Violence Prevention

A sports-based intervention designed for marginalized communities in Albania has proven highly effective in fostering social cohesion and reducing youth involvement in crime and violence. Interviews with program participants reveal that engaging in structured team sports provided a sense of belonging and discipline, which helped many young people stay away from delinquent behavior.

One young participant from the program noted: "Before joining this initiative, I had nothing to do after school, and the streets were the only option. Now, I have a team, a coach, and a goal. I feel part of something positive."

Moreover, coaches and mentors played a critical role in guiding at-risk youth by offering not just athletic training but also life coaching. As a result, participants developed stronger peer relationships and communication skills, which contributed to a broader reduction in community tensions.

## **Bosnia and Herzegovina: Strengthening Collaboration Between Local Structures and Youth Councils**

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, local youth councils and public safety councils have worked together to increase youth participation in decision-making processes. Findings from focus group discussions with youth representatives and municipal officials indicate that regular communication and collaboration between these structures have led to more youth-centered policies.

A municipal official from Sarajevo stated:

“The more we engage young people in our safety initiatives, the more they take responsibility for their communities. They bring fresh ideas and energy, which has significantly improved our outreach efforts.”

By training youth councils on policy advocacy, leadership, and problem-solving, young people have gained the skills necessary to propose and implement local initiatives. This collaboration has strengthened trust between youth and government institutions, reducing feelings of exclusion and disengagement that can often push young people toward negative influences.

## **Kosovo: Community Mobilization and Civic Engagement**

In Kosovo, a youth resilience program focused on community mobilization and peer-led initiatives has helped create a sense of collective responsibility among young people. Through volunteer work, social campaigns, and engagement with local public safety councils, youth have taken an active role in crime prevention and community safety.

One youth leader from the initiative shared:

“When we work together to improve our neighborhood, we feel like we actually belong here. Instead of waiting for someone else to solve our problems, we take action ourselves.”

This program has been particularly effective in fostering a sense of empowerment, as young people have been given tools and platforms to influence change in their communities. By engaging youth in structured discussions on safety, crime prevention, and conflict resolution, the initiative has reduced risks of delinquency and radicalization.

### **Challenges Encountered and How They Were Managed**

While the initiatives in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo achieved significant successes, they also faced several challenges that required adaptive strategies and strong collaboration to overcome.

### **Sustaining Funding and Institutional Support**

One of the most pressing challenges was ensuring that programs could continue beyond the initial project cycle. Many initiatives—such as the sports program in Albania, youth councils in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and community mobilization in Kosovo—needed long-term funding and institutional backing. Without sustained support, there was a risk of losing momentum and impact.

A major concern for the civil society sector was the shifting priorities of international donors, many of whom moved toward security-focused funding rather than youth development and prevention-based initiatives. As donors restructured their support toward hard security interventions, civil society

organizations (CSOs) struggled to maintain funding for grassroots resilience-building programs. To address this, project teams actively engaged with municipalities, private sector partners, and international donors to establish co-funding mechanisms. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, youth councils successfully advocated for municipal funding, ensuring their initiatives were integrated into local governance structures. Similarly, in Kosovo, community engagement projects were linked to ongoing national strategies, increasing their sustainability. However, the need for consistent, flexible, and locally-driven funding remains an ongoing challenge for CSOs working in youth resilience.

## YOUTH RESILIENCE FRAMEWORK



civil society organizations (CSOs), and international partners was sometimes inefficient, leading to overlapping initiatives or delays in program implementation. Different actors often worked toward similar goals but lacked a unified strategy to align their efforts effectively.

To address this, project teams established joint action plans, regular consultation meetings, and shared digital resource platforms to enhance communication and coordination. In Kosovo, local youth councils and public safety councils began working more closely, bridging the gap between youth voices and policy implementation. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, structured engagement between CSOs and municipal authorities ensured that programs complemented rather than duplicated each other.

### **Outreach to Marginalized Communities**

The program served as a valuable opportunity to enhance and balance participation between rural and urban areas. Through a series of programmatic activities, including capacity-building workshops and training sessions, youth were equipped with essential skills and knowledge. Partner organizations in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo developed tailored training manuals focused on community-based approaches, radicalization prevention, and life skills development. These events stimulated local dialogue and contributed to the revitalization of local youth councils, which received technical support through the program.

### **General Difficulties and Broader Context**

Beyond the specific challenges encountered during implementation, a major difficulty faced by civil

society organizations (CSOs) across Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo is the broader regional and political context. The Western Balkans remain heavily focused on EU integration reforms, which, while essential for long-term development, often overshadow immediate needs at the local level. Governments in the region are primarily engaged in fulfilling high-level political and economic reforms required for EU accession, focusing on legislative changes, judicial improvements, and regional diplomacy. However, this top-down approach often neglects the day-to-day struggles of local communities and youth. Many young people continue to face unemployment, lack of social services, and exclusion from decision-making, while funding for community-driven programs remains limited.

Additionally, with international donors shifting towards security-oriented funding, prevention-based programs that focus on youth empowerment, education, and local resilience-building are often deprioritized. This has left a gap in sustainable, long-term support for youth and community engagement, even though these initiatives are critical to reducing vulnerabilities to crime, violence, and radicalization.

In this context, it becomes increasingly difficult for CSOs to secure resources and institutional backing for their initiatives. Local governments and international actors need to recognize that youth resilience is not just a social issue—it is a security and stability issue. Without sustained support, the risks of disengagement, migration, and vulnerability to criminal or extremist networks will only grow.

# **7. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY REFLECTIONS**

This empirical assessment offers a unique comparative insight into the lived realities of youth in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo. Across the region, youth face persistent and interconnected challenges that undermine their development, stability, and long-term resilience. These include high unemployment, educational mismatches, weak civic infrastructure, and limited trust in public institutions. While these findings are not new, this report reinforces them through first-hand data collection and youth-centered analysis.

What distinguishes this study is its reflection on how **structural fragility and perceived stagnation are shaping a regional youth identity**—one defined increasingly by frustration, outward migration, and political disengagement. Youth across all three countries overwhelmingly report a sense of exclusion—not only from economic life but from public discourse and decision-making. Yet despite these obstacles, young people consistently demonstrate a capacity for critical reflection, agency, and even optimism about their own futures, albeit less so about their countries'. This divergence highlights a crucial paradox: personal ambition is alive, but public trust is eroding.

Several critical insights emerge from the data:

- **Migration as a rational coping strategy:** For many youth, emigration is not merely a dream—it is a calculated response to structural failures at home. The strong desire to leave reflects not just economic need, but a broader absence of institutional credibility and accountability. This points to a deeper legitimacy crisis facing governments across the region.

- **Radicalization is less about belief and more about belonging:** The findings reinforce that violent extremism among youth is rarely rooted in deep ideological commitment. Rather, it emerges in contexts where economic despair, identity fragmentation, and a lack of meaning prevail. Addressing radicalization, then, is less about deradicalizing ideas and more about creating spaces of inclusion, opportunity, and voice.
- **Youth participation is systemically undervalued:** While youth programs exist in all three countries, they often operate at the margins—either donor-driven, poorly integrated, or implemented through tokenistic structures. Local governments frequently lack the budgetary or institutional capacity to support youth systematically. Until youth councils, school governance, and participatory budgeting become embedded and resourced, meaningful engagement will remain aspirational.
- **Gender and geographic inequality is widening the resilience gap:** Young women, Roma youth, and those from rural communities face disproportionately higher levels of exclusion, discrimination, and risk. Interventions must go beyond the rhetoric of inclusion and instead offer differentiated programming with equity at the center. One-size-fits-all youth policy is not just ineffective—it is exclusionary by design.

Critically, the report assumes that youth are not passive beneficiaries but **political and social actors**—capable of challenging, reshaping, and transforming their societies if given the tools and space to do so. The implications for policymakers, civil society, and donors are clear: **investments in youth resilience**

**are not simply about protection—they are about transformation.** Failing to recognize this will not only deepen existing discontent but may also accelerate outflows of talent, political extremism, and social fragmentation.

Ultimately, regional resilience requires more than programs—it demands political will. Youth need to be seen not as a demographic challenge but as **co-authors of the region’s democratic, economic, and social future.** If this generation is to remain rooted in the Western Balkans, institutions must show they are worth investing in—and worth staying for.

## Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

### 1. For Governments

- **Youth-Centered Crime Prevention and Resilience Building**
  - Institutionalize youth engagement through national and local frameworks, such as youth councils and municipal youth strategies.
  - Recognize sports, education, arts, and civic initiatives as strategic tools for crime prevention, not just social development.
  - Integrate youth development into national education, employment, public safety, and social protection strategies.
  - Prioritize stable public funding for youth-led initiatives and local crime prevention mechanisms.
  - Develop inclusive policies that reflect

the diverse experiences of youth, particularly from ethnic minority, LGBTQI+, and rural communities.

- **Education-to-Employment Alignment**
  - Reform education systems to better align with labor market needs.
  - Introduce dual-education models, career counseling, and structured internships or apprenticeships.
  - Incentivize private sector collaboration in youth employment and innovation.
- **Preventing Radicalization and Extremism**
  - Promote civic education, media literacy, and inclusive citizenship within formal education systems.
  - Support digital counter-narrative campaigns targeting online extremism and hate speech.
  - Institutionalize national and local reintegration strategies for youth disengaging from extremist ideologies or crime.
- **Gender and Minority Protection**
  - Enforce anti-discrimination laws and scale up services for gender-based violence and exclusion.
  - Increase targeted funding for programs supporting marginalized groups like Roma youth and those from rural areas.

## 2. For Law Enforcement Agencies

- **Youth-Friendly Policing**
  - Establish community policing units specifically trained to engage with young people constructively.
  - Prevent youth profiling and discriminatory practices during law

enforcement encounters.

- Train officers in cultural sensitivity, youth communication, and non-violent conflict resolution.
- **School and Community Safety Collaboration**
  - Collaborate with schools, youth workers, and CSOs to develop early-warning systems and violence prevention protocols.
  - Regularly assess and ensure the safety of public spaces frequented by youth, including online platforms.
- **Countering Online and Offline Extremism**
  - Coordinate with digital platforms and cybercrime units to monitor and respond to online radicalization.
  - Enhance law enforcement capacity for digital investigations and promote positive digital engagement.
- **Youth Rehabilitation and Diversion**
  - Expand diversion programs that offer alternatives to incarceration, focusing on education, training, and psychological support.
  - Strengthen reintegration systems in collaboration with CSOs and social services for youth recovering from criminal or extremist activities.

### **3. For Local Governments and Agencies**

- **Youth Infrastructure and Participation**
  - Establish and fund municipal youth offices, youth councils, and accessible youth centers.
  - Systematically include youth in local policymaking and development planning.

- **Community-Based Crime Prevention**
  - Set up Local Public Safety Councils with youth representatives, educators, civil society actors, and police to co-create solutions.
  - Use participatory budgeting to fund youth-led community and safety projects.
- **Youth Employment and Innovation Hubs**
  - Develop local youth employment centers offering career guidance, entrepreneurship support, and vocational training.
  - Encourage partnerships with businesses to create internships and apprenticeships.
- **Outreach to Vulnerable Youth**
  - Create programs tailored for NEET youth, Roma youth, and those from rural or marginalized communities.
  - Establish mobile outreach teams to engage with youth in hard-to-reach areas.

#### 4. For Schools and Educational Institutions

- **Safe and Inclusive School Environments**
  - Implement comprehensive School Security Plans in collaboration with police, health services, and community actors.
  - Train school personnel to recognize and address bullying, mental health issues, and signs of radicalization.
- **Relevant and Inclusive Curriculum**
  - Integrate peace education, civic engagement, digital literacy, and critical thinking into core curricula.
  - Promote inclusive historical narratives and intercultural understanding.

- **Career Preparation and Skill Building**
  - Facilitate mentorship programs, career exploration visits, and job-readiness activities.
  - Embed soft skills like communication and collaboration into regular learning activities.
- **Student Participation in Governance**
  - Establish empowered student councils and ensure their input informs school decision-making.
  - Support student-led initiatives on safety, school improvement, and civic advocacy.

### **Sustainability Strategies**

To ensure the long-term impact of youth-focused crime prevention and resilience programs:

- Shift from project-based approaches to policy-integrated, structural programming.
- Embed youth development into national and local policies, education systems, and municipal budgets.
- Diversify funding through public-private partnerships, international support, and private sector involvement.
- Build institutional capacity at both national and local levels to manage and sustain youth programs.

### **Scaling-Up Opportunities Across the Western Balkans**

Successful models can be replicated regionally:

- Albania's sports-based inclusion program provides an effective model for engagement and crime prevention.
- Bosnia and Herzegovina's youth council empowerment strategy increases civic participation and governance inclusion.

- Kosovo's local public safety councils foster trust between youth and institutions and can be expanded across the region.

Establishing a **Western Balkans Youth Resilience Network** will strengthen regional collaboration, sharing tools, policy frameworks, and donor coordination.

# **ANNEXES**

## Annex 1:

### Survey Questionnaire for Youth, CSOs, CVE Representatives, and Other Stakeholders

#### Section 1: Demographics

1. **Age:**  
[Dropdown: 14-18, 19-24, 25-29]
2. **Gender:**  
[Male, Female, Prefer not to say]
3. **Country of residence:**
  - Albania
  - Bosnia & Herzegovina
  - Kosovo
4. **Education level:**
  - Primary
  - Secondary
  - Higher Education
  - Other
5. **Employment status:**
  - Employed
  - Unemployed
  - Student
  - Other
6. **Are you affiliated with any CSO, youth program, or CVE initiative?**  
[Yes/No]

## Section 2: Youth Resilience & Program Impact

### 7. What are the biggest challenges affecting youth in your community?

[Select all that apply]

- Economic instability
- Limited access to education and training
- Political instability
- Social exclusion/discrimination
- Radicalization/extremism threats
- Other (please specify)

### 8. How often do you engage in community or civic activities?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Very often

### 9. Do you believe existing programs help improve youth resilience?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

### 10. Which types of youth support programs have you participated in?

[Select all that apply]

- Education/training programs
- Civic engagement initiatives
- Mentorship programs
- Awareness campaigns
- None

### Section 3: CVE & Policy Effectiveness

**11. How would you rate your awareness of radicalization risks among youth?**

- Very low
- Low
- Moderate
- High
- Very high

**12. What support mechanisms do you believe are most effective in strengthening youth resilience?**

[Select all that apply]

- More education/training programs
- Better economic opportunities
- More youth involvement in decision-making
- Stronger community networks
- Targeted CVE initiatives
- Other (please specify)

**13. What additional interventions do you think are needed in your region?**

## Annex 2:

### Focus Group Discussion for Youth, Local Safety Council Members, CVE Representatives, Educators, Community Leaders

Duration: 40-60 minutes  
Discussion Topics & Questions

#### A. Introduction & Warm-up

1. Can you introduce yourself and briefly explain your role in the community?
2. What are some key challenges youth face in your region?

#### B. Youth Resilience & Program Impact

3. What does “youth resilience” mean to you?
4. Have you or someone you know benefited from any youth support program? What was the experience like?
5. Are there sufficient opportunities for youth to participate in community decision-making?

#### C. Perceptions on Radicalization & Prevention Mechanisms

6. Do you think radicalization is an issue in your community? Why or why not?
7. How well do existing CVE programs address these concerns?
8. What are some early warning signs of radicalization in youth?

#### D. Future Interventions & Recommendations

9. What types of programs or policies would have the most impact on youth resilience?
10. What can local governments, institutions, and CSOs do better to support youth?
11. How can youth play a more active role in shaping the future of their communities?

### Annex 3:

#### Key Informant Interview with Policymakers, Research Experts, CSO Leaders, P/CVE Stakeholders

Semi-structured interviews (30-60 min)  
Interview Questions

#### **A. Background Information**

1. Can you describe your role and experience related to youth resilience or CVE?

#### **B. Regional Challenges & Youth Resilience**

2. What do you see as the biggest threats to youth resilience in the Western Balkans?
3. How has your institution/organization addressed these issues?

#### **C. Effectiveness of Current Programs & Policies**

4. How would you assess the effectiveness of existing youth resilience programs?
5. Are there any gaps in the current approaches that need to be addressed?

#### **D. Institutional Collaboration & Capacity**

6. How well do institutions, CSOs, and community groups collaborate on youth resilience initiatives?
7. What are the main challenges to better regional cooperation?

#### **E. Future Interventions & Recommendations**

8. What policy recommendations would you suggest for strengthening youth resilience?
9. How can regional networks like IANS be better leveraged for impact?
10. What are the top three priorities for improving youth resilience in the next five years?

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# **PROJECT SUMMARY**

This project has strengthened youth resilience in the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo) by addressing key socio-economic challenges, including education and employment struggles, migration pressures, crime, and violent extremism. Rooted in the “Smart Balkans” programmatic framework and aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the initiative has actively worked to prevent youth marginalization and foster social cohesion through education, skills development, and civic engagement.

Through its interventions, the project has tackled critical regional challenges, such as:

- High youth unemployment, which has been a persistent barrier to economic inclusion (World Bank, 2023).
- Migration trends that have contributed to brain drain and weakened local communities.
- Limited youth participation in decision-making and policy development.
- Vulnerabilities to crime and radicalization, exacerbated by economic hardship, political instability, and weak governance structures (UNDP, 2022; EU Radicalization Awareness Network, 2023).

