Research within Regional Project:

"Men and Boys as Partners in Promoting Gender Equality and
the Prevention of Youth Extremism and Violence in the Balkans"

IRIDA SINA

ACT FOR SOCIETY CENTER

Bulevardi "Zhan D'Ark", Ndertesa 61, Hyrja 5, Apartamenti 24

Tirana, Albania

Executive Summary

The Men and Boys as Partners in Promoting Gender Equality and prevention of Youth Extremism and Violence in the Balkans or Young Men Initiative II (YMI II) project builds upon CARE´s comprehensive and programmatic effort to fight interpersonal and gender based violence (GBV) as well as to improve gender equality in the region and address preventative issues related to youth extremism and violence.

The project objective is to enable positive and peaceful societies for young people in Serbia, Kosovo, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, that support gender equality and decrease interpersonal violence and its extremism. ACT for SOCIETY Center is the implememnting Partner in Albania that has worked to reach this objective.

The project's specific objective is to improve Youth NGOs and government capacities to integrate Program Youth - Life Skills Educational Curriculum in the current educational and youth policy strategies and strengthen governmental and civil society efforts related to the inclusion of youth vulnerable to extremism. This project aims at scaling up and mainstreaming earlier achievements related to the implementation of the Gender Transformative Life Skills program, or short Program Y, via targeted advocacy and a close cooperation with relevant stakeholder through the support of movement / coalition building through the development of new alliances that engage parents and citizens in supporting gender equality focused life skills education program.

Context of Albania about Extremism

Radicalism and "violent extremism" are challenges widespread nowadays. 'Violent extremism" is not limited by age, sex, group or community, and young people are particularly affected by messages of violent extremists and terrorist organizations.

Albania has always been considered a tolerant country, with a constant constructive dialog between religions and a limited radicalism. Anyway, radicalism is a global threat and in the last years Albania has also been affected, with some other countries member of EU and countries of the western Balkans, by the phenomena of foreign fighters.

Between 2012 and 2015, approximately 144 Albanian citizens travelled to Syria and Iraq to join the armed conflicts there, while the European Commission (EC) country report 2018 notes that approximately 45 fighters have returned and 26 died, with 73 (includes 18 fighters and 55 family members) remaining in the field of war. In 2016, the Serious Crimes Court sentenced nine FF recruiters and collaborators to a total of 126 years imprisonment, with individual sentences varying from 7–18 years. Several operations have been carried out by law enforcement bodies and intelligence structures in cooperation with agencies from partnering countries. In 2017, five operations were conducted in which twelve suspects were arrested on charges of terrorism offences[1].

The Government of Albania adopted a National Strategy on the Fight against Violent Extremism and its Action Plan in November 2015[2].

A National Coordinator for Countering Violent Extremism was appointed the following year tasked with the duty to coordinate implementation of the national strategy. Almost two years later, the National CVE Coordinator Office was transformed into a well-resourced Coordination CVE Centre under the Prime Minister's office[3].

The past three years have been particularly intensive also from the perspective of preventive measures, guided by the National C/PVE Strategy and supported by a number of international donors from the United States of America (USA), European Union (EU) and its member states, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), United Nations (UN) agencies and other international organizations.

Religious communities, particularly the Albanian Muslim Community (AMC), and civil society actors have engaged in specific actions to prevent radicalisation, counter the effects of extremist narratives, develop capacities of front-liners, raise awareness, work with youth and women, develop cooperation models at the local level—such as the 'school as community center'—, promote religious tolerance, and so on[4].

UNESCO is also committed to implementing the UN Action Plan on the Prevention of Extremism, with a special focus on the priorities directly related to the work of this organization:

---

[1] EC Report 2018 Albania (p. 36). Source: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/
[2] Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 930, date 18 November 2015. See official gazette
http://www.qbz.gov.al/botime/fletore_zyrtare/2015/PDF-2015/203-2015.pdf
[3] Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 737, date 13 December 2017. Source: http://www.qbz.gov.al/
Botime/Akteindividuale/Janar%202017/Fletore%20225/VKM%20nr.%20737,%20date%2013.12.2017.pdf
[4] IDM Report 2018 Albania (p. 15). Source: http://idmalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Study_Violent-Extremism-in-Albania-2018-_-web.pdf

1. education, skills development and ease of employment;

2. empowerment of young people;

3. Strategic communications, internet and social media
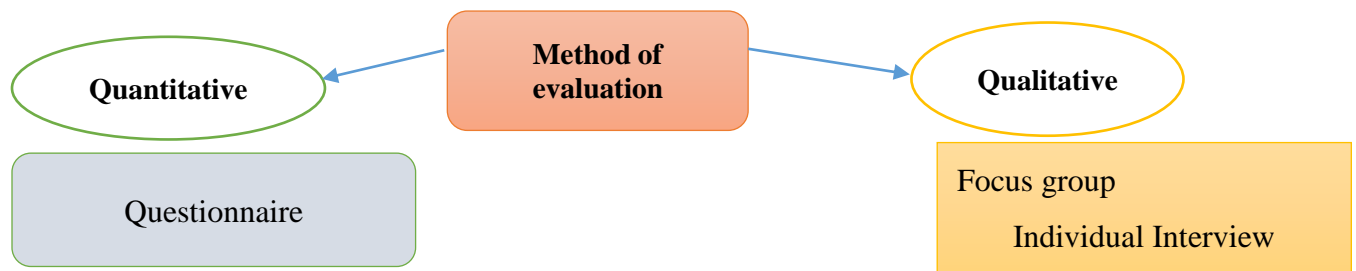
4. gender equality and empowerment of women.

The specific objectives of the research were:

1) Conducting the situation analysis on overall situation in the country related to youth extremism and radicalism (cases of violence, research and studies already done, strategic and action plans already developed; activities that are being done in the country to prevent that kind of violence, led by institutions or NGOs).

2) Data analysis related to exploration of life situations and push factors as well as recommendations for adequate methodology and programs for youth at risk, their parents/guardians.

3) Exploration of attitudes and views of social welfare and health system representatives, educational institutions, formal or informal education, NGO activists, religious leaders, media representatives in order to get recommendation for programming.

4) Conducting a Baseline and Endline study in order to measure the change in attitudes, knowledge and behavior of main beneficiaries group young men and young women but also parents/guardians, representatives of institutions, religious leaders and media representatives.

1. METHODOLOGY

1.1. Approach and Methods

In this evaluation, participatory approach using both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection was utilized. The evaluation also used both secondary and primary sources of data. Secondary data was collected through detailed document review from approved project documents such as annual reports, project proposal and logframe, monitoring report, etc. Primary data was gathered through Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with parents, community groups and Key Informants Interviews (KIIs), and questionnaire with the community and youth in a risk situation and youth that take care of their community.

```
          ┌──────────────┐
┌─────────┐│  Method of   │┌─────────┐
│Quantitative│  evaluation │ Qualitative│
└─────────┘│              │└─────────┘
          └──────────────┘
```


1.2. Project evaluation techniques

Systematic desk based review: This evaluation employed systematic desk review techniques to collect high quality data sets based on large representative samples on the project design, indicator targets and benchmarks. Thus, electronic and physical databases, project documents and partners and organisations reports were identified and reviewed: project logical frameworks, results framework as well as regular follow up monitoring reports.

The objective of the knowledge summary was:

• Prepare an accessible overview of the content of existing research.

• Identify the topics about which knowledge is available.

• Identify knowledge gaps.

• Provide suggestions for possible continued studies in the field.

Focus Group Discussions (FGD): The FGD's were used to capture individual and group experiences, groups who participated in the project. Further, separate FGDs were conducted for children, parents. FDGs were also used to assess the extent to which the outcomes of the project were achieved relative to the project design and outputs[5]. We organised focus groups before the implementation of the project and in the end of the project.

Target group:

• 1 group of 8 schoolchildren: the success factors of these children who go to school and stay away from violence.

• 2 focus groups with 10 parents: to see the mitigating and preventing factors for young people in a risk situation.

---

[5] For more information about this section read the **Table 1: Approach, Description of Methods of evaluation report.**

It is intended that during focus groups we will identify parents who are willing to be volunteers and people who help in encouraging parents to participate in the training.

Interviews:

Individual interviews administered by the research assistants using structured questionnaire formed one of the main methods in this evaluation. These interviews were conducted with responsible that have supported the project, teachers that worked with pupils, director of school and coordinator of AfS. The interviews focused on project relevance, effectiveness, sustainability and impact in relation to program objectives. These also helped in establishing the post project knowledge, attitudes and practices project strengths and challenges as well as social, structural and economic factors that enabled and/or constrained the achievement of project results.

Also, in the project was selected a field coordinator that is part of the community in Bërzhita, and will serve to provide us with detailed information about the strengths and weaknesses of the community.

Questionnaire: we used structured questionnaire as check list to understand the benefits of this project.

A questionnaire was implemented before the implementation of the project so that the forums were implemented to best serve their needs. Meanwhile, a questionnaire was completed at the end of the project to see how the forums have influenced their lives. Meanwhile, to measure the effectiveness of trainings with the community, we performed pre and post-test so that we could also measure how our project responded to the needs of the community at the end of project implementation.

Key Informant Interviews: The rationale for key informant interviews was to discuss in detail project interventions with partners and implementers. These include assessing project success, intervention approaches, partnerships, barriers and efforts in delivering inclusion of Roma Children. The major respondents were the implementing partner organisation staff.

Workshop with parents, community members and youth at the end of the project to measure how the activities carried out within the project have impacted on the lives of young people and the community

8. Conclusions and Reccomandations for continuity

From meetings and thanks to analysis we reach the conclusion that some factors are very influencing toward violent extremism.

Young people say that they regularly use social media to communicate with each other.

Extremist environments systematically exploit the internet and social media as a platform for spreading propaganda, recruiting new followers and coordinating activities, and it enables them to disseminate symbols, images, films, music and news containing anti-democratic and violent messages at a very fast rate. A multi-pronged effort is needed to counter extremist propaganda and pre-vent radicalisation via the internet and social media. The dissemination of extremist online contents must be curbed, while the appeal and attraction of extremist messages must be weakened and young people's resilience to extremist propaganda strengthened.

- **Mapping of extremists' use of social media** Recognition of young people with ways how violent materials can be distributed online. Close collaboration with school that these meetings with young people to be more frequent in order that their mobilization and awareness to be higher.

- **Mobilisation of young voices in the prevention of online radicalisation**

It was important that AfS compiled a strategic plan in collaboration with school, for young people mobilization against violent extremism. Young people need to be trained about how to use digital media to produce positive messages against violent extremism. Through computer programs that young people learn in high school curricula, they can produce posters, banners and short videos, to promote collaboration between young people and to be empowered against violent extremism.

- **New methods and enhancement of professionals' skills**

It is seen with high priority the creation of a resource packet that would encourage critical thinking as the best form to fight against violent extremism. Training organization with teachers is seen as priority to encourage collaboration parents, community and students.

Results:

1. School Dropout factors (Academic results, Behaviour, Other Problems, Age, Family Problems) turned insignificant for the group of in school youth we worked with. There was an expectancy of 30% drpout that did not happen. The youngsters are either still at school, or for those graduated, already enrolled at University, or studying vocational courses.

2. Community life is more youth friendly and respectful towards women – Girls can now go out after school hours, still with a strict curfew, but they feel they are more "free''.

3. 70% of out of school youth have left the country to emigrate towards European countries, but 30% of them have either started a stable job, or have enrolled into vocational courses.

4. Teachers are aware of radicalisation risks and now have developed an internal reporting mecanizm for youth at risk – helping students and their families into leading a better life into the community

Recommendations for continuity

-   Trainings with parents of the community on how to encourage to listen to their children, understand and appreciate their perspective, and then train or motivate them to use the information or services provided in the interest of their health.

-   Trainings with teachers on understanding that normal development of adolescent it can help teachers be effective communicators with young people.

-   Develop innovative and creative education methods to reduce or eliminate the damage caused by their deviant behaviours.

-   Better cooperation with the municipality of the community on identyfing youth at risk

-   Continuing the Empowerment of young people to timely identify gender-based violence, sexual violence and cyberbullying as well as reporting to responsible bodies.