



Micro approaches to the study of radicalisation and violent extremism: a view from the Balkans region

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MICRO APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF RADICALISATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN MENA AND THE BALKANS

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Introduction

This paper examines the impact of predefined drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism (VE) (religion, economic deprivation, territorial inequalities, digital socialisation, political issues, education, leisure and cultural opportunities, and transnational dynamics) at a microlevel, contributing to VE in the Balkans region. The study is conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Bulgaria, Kosovo and North Macedonia. The population sizes of these countries discussed in this report exhibit considerable variation. Kosovo has the smallest population, with 1,739,825 residents, while Bulgaria is the most populous, boasting 7,364,570 residents. BiH and North Macedonia fall in between, with populations of 3,531,159 and 2,022,547, respectively. Furthermore, the population in all of them is ethnically and religiously diverse (Peci and Demjaha, 2021).

Against this backdrop, this study presents comparative quantitative findings based on non-representative national surveys conducted from March to April 2023, involving 1,636 young individuals aged 15 to 30 in Bosnia and Herzegovina (432), Bulgaria (400), Kosovo (404), and North Macedonia (400). The report wraps up by offering a series of policy recommendations with a preventive perspective that places emphasis on youth and gender considerations.

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The findings presented in this report offer policy and analytical insights that can benefit policy-makers and various stakeholders involved in preventing violent extremism (PVE), as well as academics. One distinctive aspect of this analysis is its exploration of the daily experiences of young individuals in relation to the drivers of VE. The insights derived from the quantitative data provide a better understanding of how youth in the Balkans are affected by VE drivers, thus contributing to a clearer understanding of PVE priorities concerning individual experiences. Furthermore, utilising data-driven analysis of the aforementioned drivers, this report sets the groundwork for more efficient and customised strategies in combating VE.

The results expounded upon in this report are under the influence of two specific limitations. Firstly, the utilisation of a non-representative research sample renders all findings suggestive rather than broadly generalisable. Their primary utility resides in the policy insights they offer for PVE. Secondly, the data collected does not provide a comprehensive elaboration of the micro-level impact of the predetermined drivers mentioned above. Thus, the qualitative data remains a subject for further exploration by researchers. It is imperative to undertake additional studies in a systematic manner to acquire a more comprehensive understanding of the results.

Methodology

The findings outlined in this report are based on non-representative national surveys conducted through face-to-face interviews in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Kosovo and North Macedonia between March and April 2023. The survey comprised 52 questions, strategically designed to explore the seven drivers of VE: education, culture and leisure opportunities, transnational dynamics, religion, political grievances, economic deprivation, and digital socialisation, as defined by CONNEKT. The survey aimed to gather insights on multiple factors associated with PVE.

In Bulgaria and North Macedonia, the surveys encompassed the entire respective countries. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the survey covered multiple cities, including Banja Luka, Bihać, Bijeljina, Bosanska Krupa, Brčko, Bugojno, Cazin, Doboj, Foča, Goražde, Jajce, Kakanj, Maglaj, Mostar, Prijedor, Sanski Most, Sarajevo, Travnik, Tuzla, Višegrad, Vlasenica, Zenica, Žepče, Živinice, and Zvornik. In Kosovo, the survey encompassed the cities of Ferizaj, Peja, Prishtina, and Prizren.

The gender lens is applied throughout this comparative report. In this regard, the gender distribution of respondents in these surveys across these countries is presented in the following table:

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Sex Percentage %	Bulgaria	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo	North Macedonia
Male	48.0%	40.1%	39.6%	51.0%
Female	52.0%	59.4%	57.2%	49.0%
Other	0.0%	0.2%	1.5%	0.0%
Don't want to answer	0.0%	0.2%	1.7%	0.0%



Reflections on the local in the regional dynamics

All four countries under consideration were formerly part of the communist bloc and have since evolved into relatively young democracies with a Euro-Atlantic orientation, undergoing extensive and challenging transitions. Presently, Bulgaria and North Macedonia are members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), with Bosnia and Herzegovina commencing the implementation of the Membership Action Plan in 2018. However, Kosovo faces delays in its efforts to join the Alliance, primarily due to non-recognition of its statehood by four NATO member states: Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain.

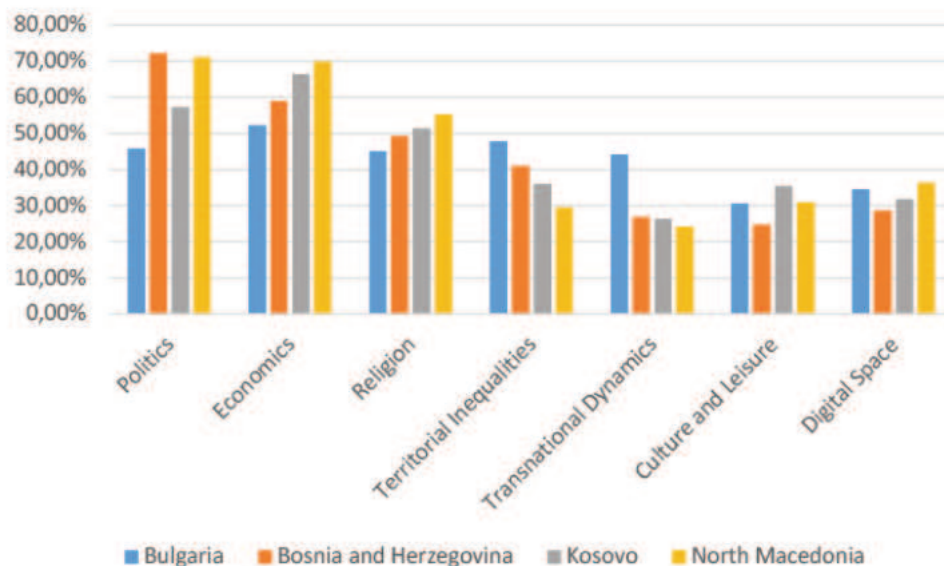
In contrast, Bulgaria became a European Union (EU) member in 2007, North Macedonia has been a candidate country since 2005, and Bosnia and Herzegovina attained candidate status in December 2022. Additionally, Kosovo signed Stabilisation and Association Agreements with the EU in 2015.

Nevertheless, all four states require further extensive reforms as they strive towards fully consolidated democracies. This need for reform is especially pronounced in the three Western Balkan countries, which must address critical issues related to the rule of law, the fight against corruption and organised crime, economic development and competitiveness, as well as regional cooperation and reconciliation (European Commission, 2022).

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These internal challenges, coupled with political instability, weak economies, and relatively high levels of poverty, have created fertile ground for radicalisation and VE. In this context it has to be noted that in 2022, the unemployment rate in Bulgaria was 4.40%, in Bosnia and Herzegovina 14.05%, North Macedonia 15.08% (Macrotrends, n.d), and in Kosovo 11.8% (CEIC, n.d).

Figure 1. Drivers of radicalisation





In light of this context, participants in the research conducted within the states of the region have exhibited varying attitudes regarding the significance of the drivers of VE.

The analysed data indicates that, according to the respondents in this research, the most crucial drivers of VE in Bulgaria are economic deprivation, territorial inequalities, and politics. In Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia, respondents identify politics, economy, and religion as the most important drivers, while in Kosovo, economy, politics, and religion are similarly considered key factors.

Rank the following factors from 1-7, where 1 is the most important and 7 is the least important driver of radicalisation: *Cumulative percentage for rankings 1, 2, 3

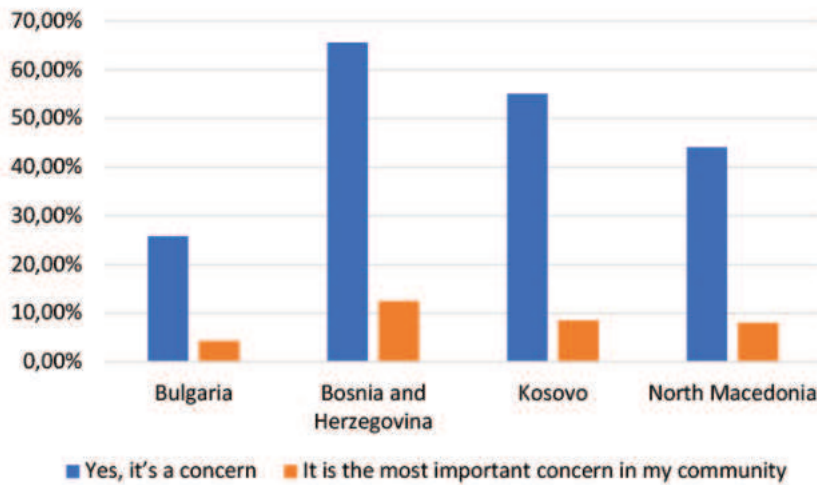
	Bulgaria	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo	North Macedonia
Politics	45.8%	72.2%	57.3%	71.1%
Economics	52.3%	59.0%	66.4%	69.8%
Religion	45.1%	49.3%	51.3%	55.3%
Territorial Inequalities	47.8%	41.0%	36.0%	29.5%
Transnational Dynamics	44.3%	26.9%	26.3%	24.1%
Culture and Leisure	30.6%	24.6%	35.5%	31.0%
Digital Space	34.6%	28.7%	31.9%	36.3%

In the examination of concerns related to radicalisation within respondents’ communities across the four countries notable patterns emerge. Bosnia and Herzegovina exhibits the highest level of apprehension, with a combined (It is of concern, and most important concern) percentage of 78.1% of respondents expressing concern about radicalism in their community. Kosovo follows closely with the second-highest percentage at 63.6%, indicating a substantial degree of awareness and unease regarding this issue. North Macedonia reports a moderate level of concern, with 52.0% of respondents expressing worry about radicalisation. In contrast, Bulgaria records the lowest percentage among the four countries, with 30.1% of respondents considering radicalism as a concern in their community.

In terms of gender-specific concerns about radicalisation within their communities, a consistent pattern is evident across all countries. Female respondents consistently demonstrate a higher concern compared to their male counterparts. Notably, in Bulgaria (31.0% female, 29.2% male) and North Macedonia (52.6% female, 51.5% male), the gender disparities in these concerns remain relatively modest. However, in Kosovo (72.1% female, 53.7% male) and Bosnia and Herzegovina, (80.6% female, 74.1% male) the gender differences in perceptions are more significant, with females expressing notably higher levels of concern. These variations highlight that gender dynamics play

a more prominent role in shaping perceived concerns about radicalisation, particularly in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, compared to Bulgaria and North Macedonia.

Figure 2. Level of concern regarding the radicalisation in community



When examining the responses related to the prevention of radicalisation across all countries, respondents consistently prioritise several key factors. Economic opportunities and employment, political rights and representation, and the equal distribution of services and wealth within their respective countries emerge as the most crucial aspects in the eyes of the respondents.

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The respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria and North Macedonia have ranked the following factors from 1 to 7, and those from Kosovo from 1 to 9. In both cases 1 is the most important, and 7 and 9 is the least important response to prevent radicalisation, respectively. *Cumulative for 1, 2, 3 (for Kosovo 1, 2, 3, 4)

	Bulgaria	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo	North Macedonia
Political rights and representation	50.3%	56.4%	72.7%	58.3%
Economic opportunities and employment	64.0%	55.4%	83.9%	68.5%
Religious education	34.8%	37.3%	64.1%	34.0%
Equal distribution of services and wealth within a country	57.8%	47.2%	68.2%	48.5%
Addressing injustices against Muslims	36.5%	42.4%	39.4%	41.0%
Offering opportunities for cultural dialogue and recreational spaces	30.3%	36.6%	43.4%	30.3%
Working on digital spaces and platforms	26.5%	24.9%	32.4%	35.5%

Against this backdrop, the same perceptions are observed among all respondents, regardless of gender, across all countries in the region regarding the most important responses to radicalisation. This suggests a commonality in how both male and female respondents perceive the identified factors related to the prevention of radicalisation. The absence of notable gender variations indicates a shared recognition of the importance of economic opportunities, political rights, and equal distribution of services in mitigating the risk of radicalisation.

The respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria and North Macedonia have ranked the following factors from 1 to 7, and those from Kosovo from 1 to 9. In both cases 1 is the most important, and 7 and 9 is the least important response to prevent radicalisation, respectively *Cumulative for 1, 2, 3 (for Kosovo 1, 2, 3, 4)

	Bulgaria		Bosnia and Herzegovina		Kosovo		North Macedonia	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Political rights and representation	47.9%	52.4%	58.9%	55.5%	70.1%	75.0%	58.3%	58.2%
Economic opportunities and employment	61.5%	66.3%	55.4%	56.3%	81.6%	86.5%	70.1%	66.8%
Religious education	30.2%	38.9%	40.5%	34.7%	66.0%	63.3%	35.3%	32.7%
Equal distribution of services and wealth within a country	59.9%	55.8%	47.0%	47.8%	72.1%	64.8%	48.0%	49.0%
Addressing injustices against Muslims	38.0%	35.1%	36.9%	45.3%	40.1%	39.0%	39.7%	42.3%
Offering opportunities for cultural dialogue and recreational spaces	32.8%	27.9%	34.5%	37.6%	45.6%	42.7%	28.9%	31.6%
Working on digital spaces and platforms	29.7%	23.6%	28.0%	22.4%	29.9%	32.5%	36.3%	34.7%

This indicates a collective recognition that addressing socioeconomic disparities, ensuring political inclusivity, and promoting equitable access to services are perceived as effective measures in preventing the rise of radicalisation. The emphasis on these factors underscores the interconnectedness of social, economic and political dimensions in the complex landscape of radicalisation prevention.

It would seem that similar issues concern most youth across the region, with the main variant being the level of concern.



Influence of drivers at the micro level

RELIGION

The religious background of the participants in this research mirrors the religious affiliations within these states' populations and aligns with the research's objectives.

What is your religion? (Percentage %)	Bulgaria	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo	North Macedonia
Catholicism	0.3	8.8	3.5	0
Orthodoxy	75.5	27.8	0	65.5
Islam	11.0	52.4	87.6	31.8
Protestantism	3.5	0.5	0.5	0.3
Judaism	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.0
Coptic	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0
I am an atheist	2.0	3.2	1.5	0.5
I have no religion	3.5	1.2	3.0	0.5
Other	0.5	1.2	0	0.3
I don't want to answer	3.8	4.9	2.7	1.3

Islam and Orthodoxy have the highest percentages of the respondents in this research. Kosovo stands out with the highest percentage of Muslim respondents (87.6%), followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina (52.4%) and North Macedonia (31.8%). In contrast, Bulgaria has the lowest percentage of Muslim respondents at 11.0%. The highest percentages of respondents identifying as Orthodox Christians are in Bulgaria (75.5%) and North Macedonia (65.5%). Bosnia and Herzegovina also has a notable Orthodox Christian representation, albeit lower at 27.8%. None of the respondents in Kosovo identified as Orthodox.

On the other hand, the percentage of respondents identifying as Catholics is relatively low in all countries, with the highest in Bosnia and Herzegovina (8.8%) and the lowest in North Macedonia (0%). Bosnia and Herzegovina has the highest percentage of respondents identifying as atheists (3.2%), followed by Bulgaria (2.0%) and Kosovo (1.5%), whereas North Macedonia has the lowest percentage of atheists (0.5%).

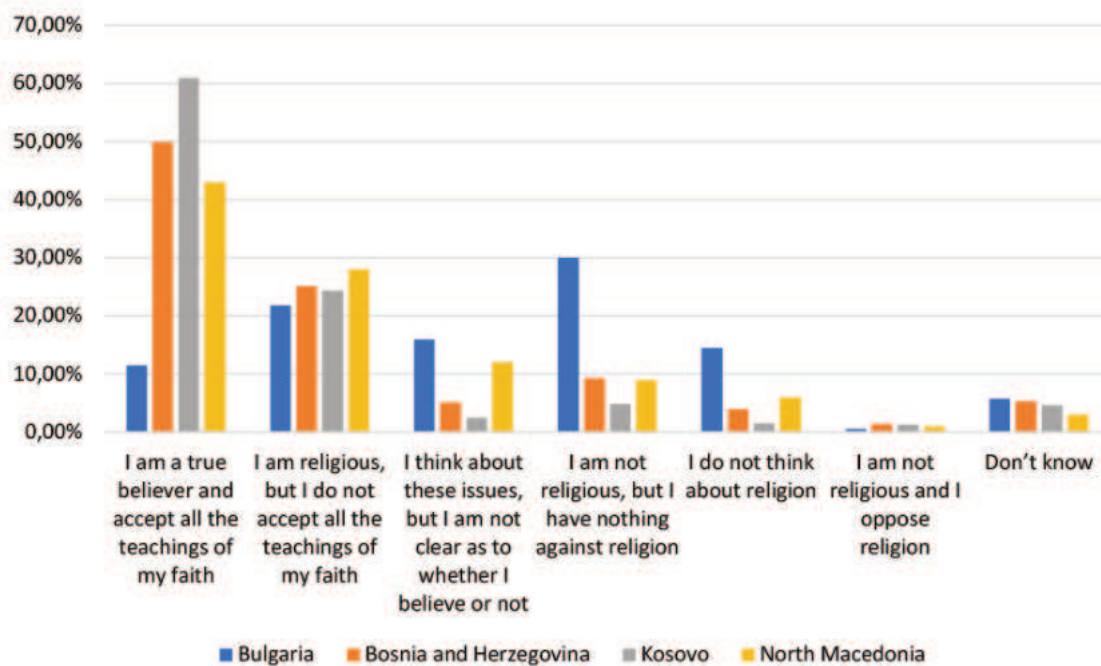
The percentage of respondents indicating no religion as affiliation is relatively low in all countries, with the highest in Bulgaria and Kosovo (both at 3.5%), and the lowest in North Macedonia

(0.5%). These patterns of religious affiliation among participants in this research are observed across all states, and this trend extends to gender as well.

What is your religion? (Percentage %)	Bulgaria		Bosnia and Herzegovina		Kosovo		North Macedonia	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Catholicism		0.5%	6.9%	10.2%	5.6%	2.2%		
Orthodoxy	75.0%	76.0%	26.0%	28.6%			64.2%	66.8%
Islam	9.4%	12.5%	60.1%	47.8%	81.9%	92.6%	33.3%	30.1%
Protestantism	4.2%	2.9%		0.8%	1.3%			0.5%
Judaism						0.4%		
Coptic						0.4%		
I am an atheist	1.6%	2.4%	3.5%	3.1%	2.5%	0.9%	1.0%	
I have no religion	4.7%	2.4%	0.6%	1.6%	5.0%	1.3%	0.5%	0.5%
Other	0.5%	0.5%		1.6%			0.5%	
I don't want to answer	4.7%	2.9%	2.9%	6.3%	3.8%	2.2%	0.5%	2.0%

When it comes to the level of religiosity, there are recorded different patterns among respondents in this research across all countries.

Figure 3. Level of religiosity

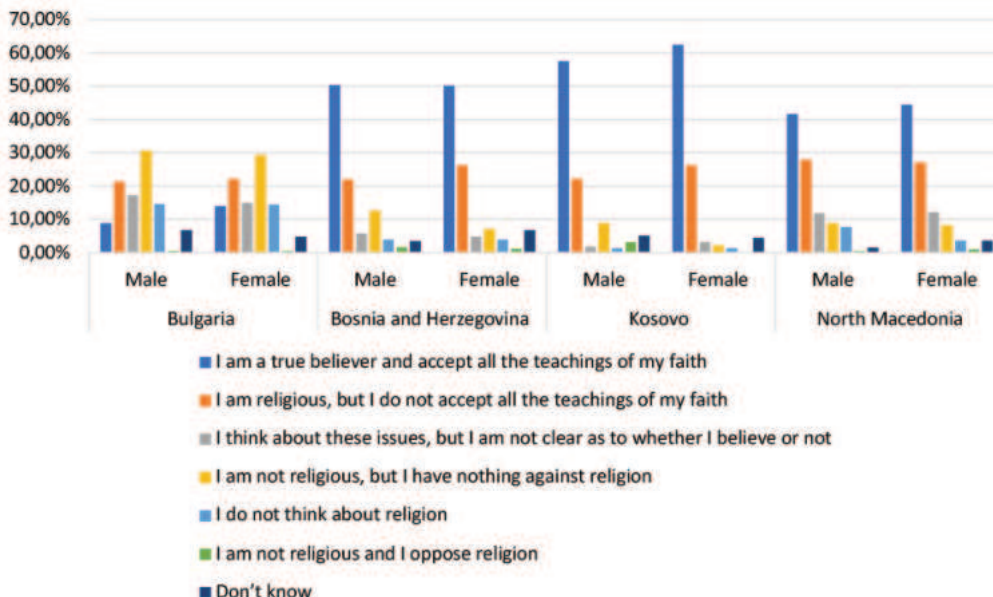


As shown in the following table, respondents in Kosovo generally have higher percentages of true believers, while those in Bulgaria often have higher percentages of respondents who are not religious or have doubts about their beliefs. Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia fall in between, showing a mix of beliefs and attitudes toward religion among respondents in this research.

Which of the following statements about religion best describes you?	Bulgaria	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo	North Macedonia
I am a true believer and accept all the teachings of my faith	11.5%	49.9%	60.9%	43.0%
I am religious, but I do not accept all the teachings of my faith	21.8%	25.1%	24.4%	28.0%
I think about these issues, but I am not clear as to whether I believe or not	16.0%	5.1%	2.5%	12.0%
I am not religious, but I have nothing against religion	30.0%	9.3%	4.8%	9.0%
I do not think about religion	14.5%	3.9%	1.5%	6.0%
I am not religious and I oppose religion	0.5%	1.4%	1.3%	1.0%
Don't know	5.8%	5.3%	4.6%	3.0%

When it comes to gender, these patterns of religiosity among participants in this research are observed across all states. Kosovo shows the highest level of religiosity among females (62.5%) and males (57.6%) subscribing to the statement “I am a true believer and accept all the teachings of my faith,” whereas the lowest percentage is among male (8.9%) and female (13.9%) respondents in Bulgaria. The second highest percentage for both genders is in Bosnia and Herzegovina (female 50.2%) and male (50.3%), and the third highest is in North Macedonia (female 44.4% and male 41.7%).

Figure 4. Level of religiosity



When it comes to the relation of religiosity and religious belonging, among respondents who claim that they are true believers and accept all teachings of their faith, the highest percentage has been noticed among Muslim believers in Kosovo (66.0%), North Macedonia (63.0%) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (59.3%)

Which of the following statements about religion best describes you: I am a true believer and accept all the teachings of my faith

	Bulgaria	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo	North Macedonia
Catholicism	0.00%	47.40%	42.90%	0.00%
Orthodoxy	9.60%	48.70%	0.00%	34.70%
Islam	22.70%	59.30%	66.60%	63.00%
Protestantism	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	100.00%

Regarding gender differences in religiosity, the highest level among male respondents has been observed among Muslim believers in North Macedonia (67.6%) and Kosovo (66.9%), followed by Catholic believers in Bosnia and Herzegovina (58.3%). Among female respondents, the highest level of religiosity has been noted among Protestant believers in Bulgaria (66.7%), followed by Muslim believers in Kosovo (66.0%) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (62.3%).

Gender breakdown: I am a true believer and accept all the teachings of my faith

	Bulgaria		Bosnia and Herzegovina		Kosovo		North Macedonia	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Catholicism			58.3%	42.3%	44.4%	40.0%		
Orthodoxy	6.3%	12.7%	46.7%	51.4%		29.8%	39.7%	
Islam	27.8%	19.2%	55.8%	62.3%	66.9%	66.0%	67.6%	57.6%
Protestantism	37.5%	66.7%		50.0%			100.0%	
Don't want to answer				20.0%	12.5%			

Additionally, the research has indicated that among respondents, there is no clear relationship between the level of religiosity and perceiving religion as a driver of radicalisation. Moreover, the majority of true believers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and North Macedonia agree that religion is a driver of VE.

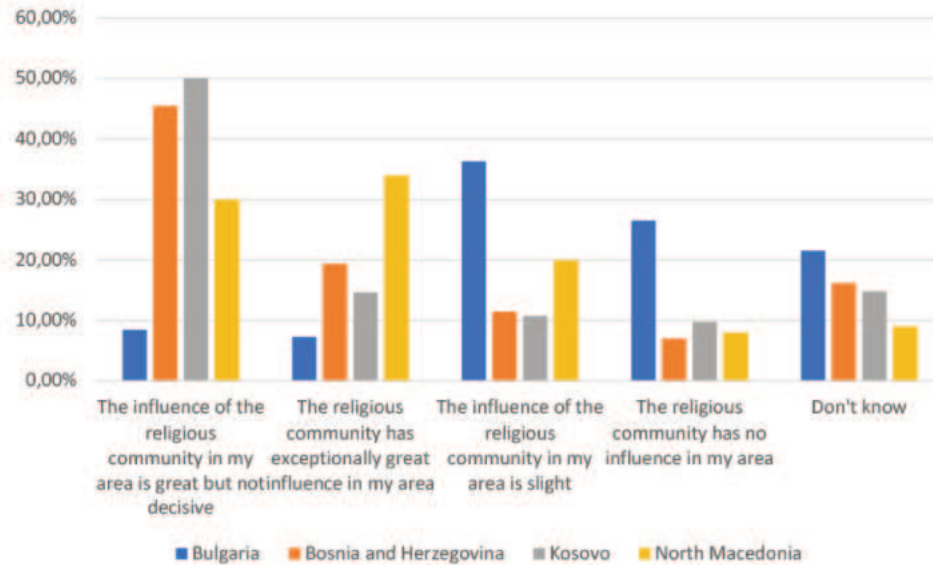
Level of religiosity vs opinion about religion as a driver of radicalisation

	I am a true believer and accept all the teachings of my faith	I am religious, but I do not accept all the teachings of my faith	I think about these issues, but I am not clear as to whether I believe or not	I am not religious, but I have nothing against religion	I do not think about religion	I am not religious and I oppose religion	Don't know
Bulgaria	43.5%	56.3%	46.9%	40.8%	36.2%	100.0%	39.1%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	50.2%	44.2%	40.9%	60.0%	50.0%	66.7%	45.5%
Kosovo	53.2%	45.6%	0.5	44.4%	16.7%	60.0%	61.1%
North Macedonia	56.4%	58.2%	56.3%	35.3%	52.2%	0.0%	90.0%

The research data uncover significant disparities in the perceptions of the influence of religious communities across these four countries. In Bulgaria, respondents exhibit a more divided stance. A notable segment perceives the influence as minimal (36.3%), and a substantial minority believes there is no influence whatsoever (26.5%). Conversely, a significant proportion of respondents also recognise a substantial but not definitive influence (8.5%) and an exceptionally substantial influence (7.3%), signifying a spectrum of perspectives. On the other hand, Bosnia and Herzegovina stands out with a clear predominance of the religious community's influence. A substantial majority views the influence as significant but not decisive (45.5%), while a considerable proportion acknowledges an exceptionally significant influence (19.4%). This data implies that the religious community plays a prominent role in shaping societal dynamics in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This may be due to the fact that the Islamic Community in BiH is influential and well organised (Kapidžić et al., 2020).

Similarly, in Kosovo, a majority of respondents regard the influence of the religious community as substantial, with 50.1% considering it significant but not definitive. While a smaller percentage acknowledges an exceptionally significant influence (14.6%), a notable segment perceives the influence as minimal (10.7%). This suggests that the religious community also exerts a considerable impact on societal matters in Kosovo. North Macedonia presents a more balanced distribution of perspectives. A substantial proportion regards the influence of the religious community as exceptionally significant (34%), highlighting its prominence. Another significant percentage perceives the influence as significant but not decisive (30%). Nevertheless, a sizeable minority views the influence as minimal (20%), and only a small fraction believes there is no influence (8%).

Figure 5. Influence of religious community in living area



Regarding the influence of religious communities in connection with religious belonging, the highest level has been observed among respondents of the small Catholic community in Bulgaria and the Protestant community in Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia. However, concerning more numerous religions, the greatest impact of religious communities has been noted among respondents belonging to Islam in North Macedonia (85.8%), followed by those in Bosnia and Herzegovina (68.9%) and Kosovo (66.3%). Additionally, Orthodox Christians in Bosnia and Herzegovina (64.7%) and North Macedonia (55.3%) also reported a notable influence.

1. The influence of the religious community in my area is great but not decisive

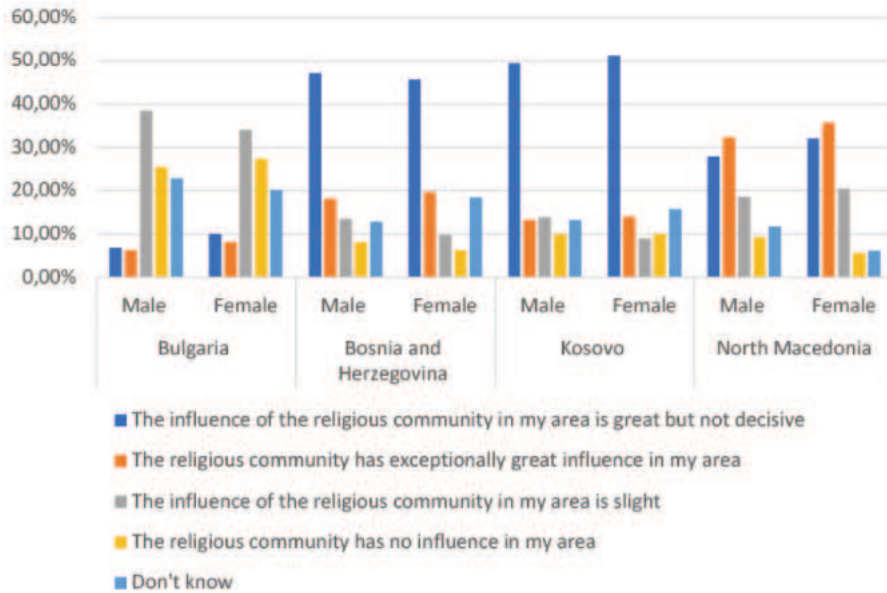
2. The religious community has exceptionally great influence in my area

*Cumulative for both statements

	Bulgaria	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo	North Macedonia
Catholicism	100%	52.6%	42.9%	0.00%
Orthodoxy	10.6%	64.7%	0.00%	55.3%
Islam	34.1%	68.9%	66.3%	85.8%
Protestantism	71.4%	100%	0.00%	100%

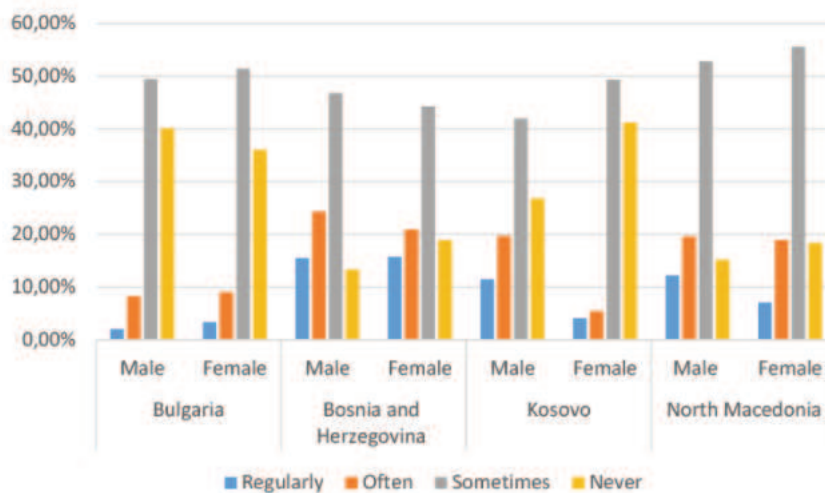
When it comes to gender, Kosovo has the highest percentage of males (49.4%) and females (51.1%), who believe that the influence of the religious community in their area is great but not decisive. The second highest percentage is in Bosnia and Herzegovina, males (47.1%) and females (45.7%). North Macedonia has slightly lower percentages of males (27.9%) and females (32.1%), whereas Bulgaria has the lowest percentage for both males (6.8%) and females (10.1%).

Figure 6. The Influence of the religious community



In comparing the combined percentages of respondents who attend religious services regularly and often, Bosnia and Herzegovina stands out with the highest figure at 37.5%, signifying that a significant portion of young people participate in regular religious service attendance. North Macedonia closely follows with a combined percentage of 29% among respondents, while Kosovo trails behind with a combined percentage of 19.5%, indicating a comparatively lower level of attendance. Bulgaria records the lowest combined percentage at 11.6%, signifying the least frequent religious service attendance among the surveyed countries.

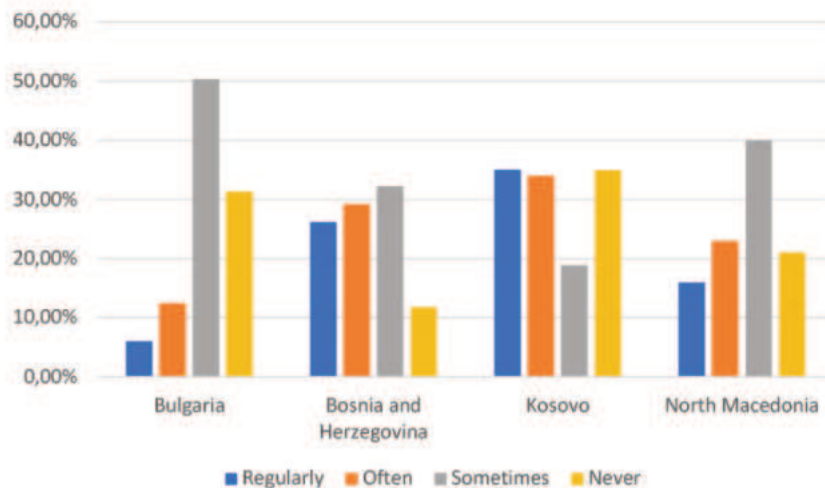
Figure 7. Frequency of religious service attendance



Concerning gender differences, Bosnia and Herzegovina records the highest percentages for both male (39.9%) and female (36.7%) respondents attending religious services. Following closely, North Macedonia has the second-highest percentages, with 31.9% of males and 26.0% of females

attending religious services. On the other hand, Kosovo exhibits the most substantial gender gap in religious service attendance among respondents, with 31.2% of males compared to only 9.5% of females participating in religious services. In contrast, Bulgaria reports relatively lower percentages for both males (10.4%) and females (12.5%) attending religious services.

Figure 8. Frequency of praying



When examining the combined percentages of respondents who engage in regular and frequent prayer across Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and North Macedonia, Kosovo emerges as the frontrunner with the highest combined percentage at 69.0%. This indicates a substantial portion of its youth participates in prayer regularly. In contrast, Bulgaria reports the lowest combined percentage of respondents at 18.5%, suggesting the smallest proportion of the youth praying regularly or often among the surveyed countries. The findings highlight diverse patterns of religious practice across these states, with Kosovo displaying the highest and Bulgaria the lowest levels of prayer observance among youth.

Regarding gender differences in engaging in regular and frequent prayer, Kosovo records the highest combined percentages for both males (57.3%) and females (76.5%) in this category. Bosnia and Herzegovina follows closely with the second-highest percentages, with 52.6% of males and 58.1% of females participating in regular and frequent prayer. The third-highest combined percentage is observed in North Macedonia, with 38.8% of males and 39.3% of females engaging in regular and frequent prayer. In contrast, Bulgaria reports the lowest combined percentages, with 15.6% of males and 21.1% of females participating in regular and frequent prayer. Is the fact that we know this meaningful in any way?

These findings underscore the dynamic interplay between belief intensity, religious influence, and youth engagement across these nations, reflecting the complex nature of social mobilisation and religious dynamics in the region. It is important to consider these variations when formulating policies and strategies related to religious and social mobilisation initiatives.

ECONOMIC DEPRIVATION

In this section, we will analyse job satisfaction among respondents across all countries, their income level, and their parents' income level to examine their impact on economic deprivation among youth in the region. Against this background we should note that the GDP per capita figures for these countries provide insights into their economic conditions and standards of living. In this vein, Bulgaria, with a GDP per capita of 14,890 USD, has the highest income level among the four countries. This suggests a relatively higher average income for its residents, which may correlate with the significant proportion of respondents identifying as middle class and the relatively high job satisfaction levels observed in the research. Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a GDP per capita of 8,220 USD, indicates a moderate income level for its population, aligning with the sizeable middle-class identification among respondents. North Macedonia, with a GDP per capita of 7,380 USD, has a slightly lower income level than Bosnia and Herzegovina, reflecting a similar economic situation for its residents. Kosovo, with a GDP per capita of 5,640 USD, has the lowest income level among the four countries (IMF, n.d). Against this backdrop, in 2022, the unemployment rate in Bulgaria was 4.40%, in Bosnia and Herzegovina 14.05%, North Macedonia 15.08% (Macrotrends, n.d), and in Kosovo 11.8% (CEIC, n.d).

These GDP per capita figures provide a broad economic context for understanding the income and economic conditions in each of these countries. However, it is essential to remember that GDP per capita is an average, and income distribution within each country can vary significantly, impacting individual experiences and perceptions.

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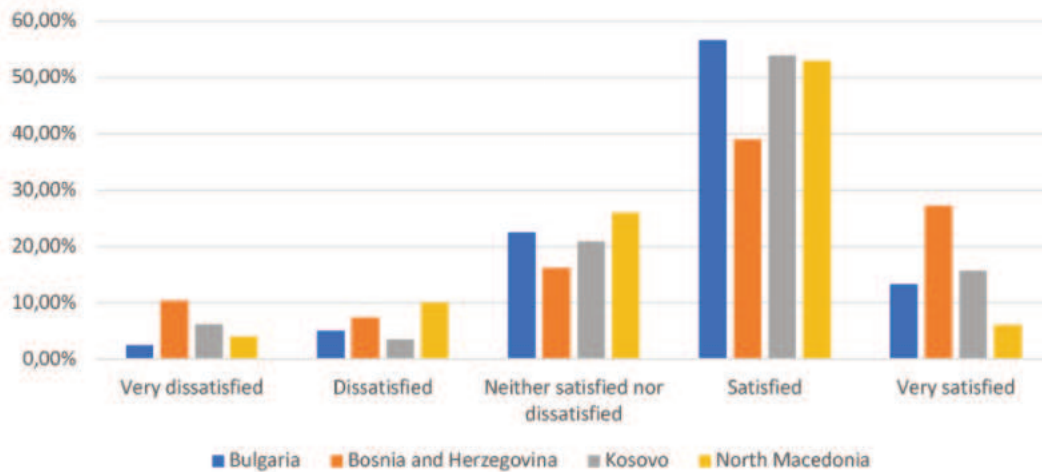
In terms of employment status among respondents in this research, the highest percentage of those full-time employed is in Bulgaria (55.0%), followed by North Macedonia (38.5%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (30.3%), and Kosovo (19.8%).

What is your current status (respondent)?

	Bulgaria	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo	North Macedonia
Employed full-time	55.0%	30.3%	19.8%	38.5%
Employed part-time	3.3%	1.4%	5.9%	1.8%
Work independently/freelance	1.8%	2.3%	2.1%	2.5%
Unemployed	7.3%	11.4%	6.4%	9.8%
Pupil	22.8%	24.7%	13.1%	32.0%
Student	10.0%	27.5%	51.0%	14.8%
Agricultural worker			0.3%	0.3%
Company owner		0.5%	1.0%	0.3%
Other		1.9%	0.3%	0.3%

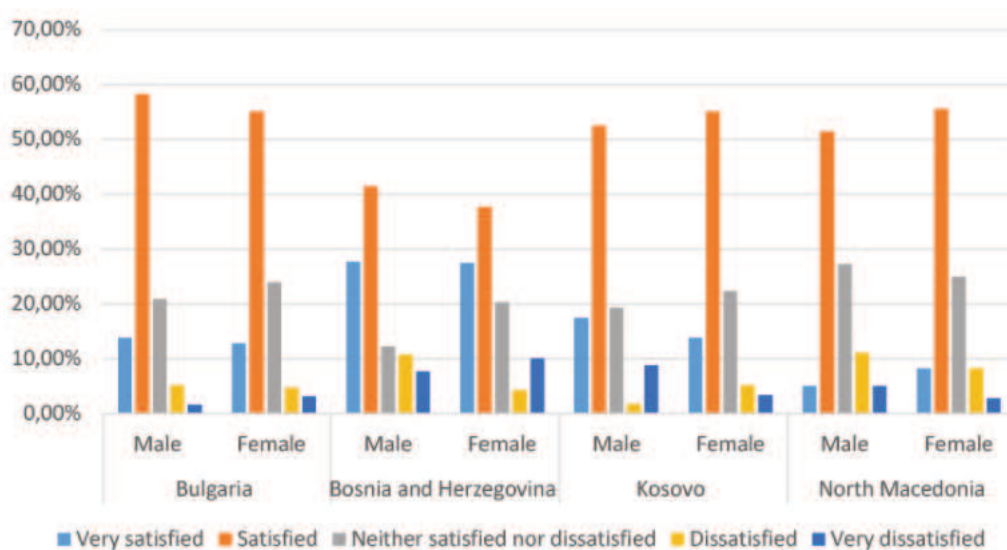
The research data reveals that Bulgaria boasts the highest combined percentage at 70.0%, signifying that a significant proportion of respondents express either very high or moderate levels of job satisfaction. Kosovo closely follows with a combined percentage of 69.6%, indicating a similarly elevated degree of job satisfaction among respondents. Bosnia and Herzegovina reports a combined percentage of 66.2%, also underscoring a substantial portion of respondents who are satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs. In contrast, North Macedonia presents the lowest combined percentage of 59.0%, suggesting a relatively lower level of job satisfaction in comparison to respondents in other surveyed countries.

Figure 9. Job satisfaction



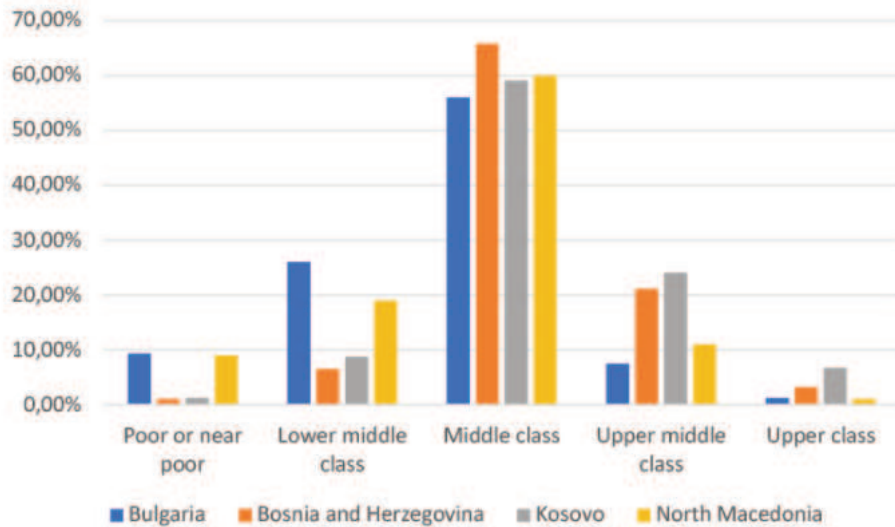
Regarding gender differences in job satisfaction among male respondents and female respondents, the level of satisfaction is relatively similar, while women generally are less dissatisfied but also less satisfied with the job than men.

Figure 10. Satisfaction with job



Across all countries in this research, the majority of respondents identify themselves as belonging to the middle class, with 65.7% in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 60.0% in North Macedonia, 59.0% in Kosovo, and 56.0% in Bulgaria.

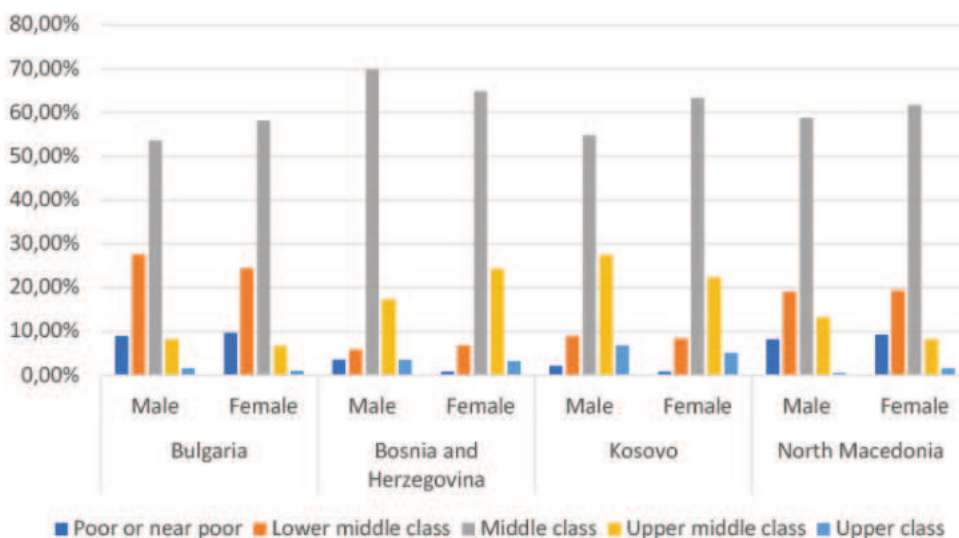
Figure 11. Income class



When examining the combined percentages of respondents who self-identify as either upper middle class or upper class across the four countries, Kosovo emerges with the highest percentage of youth at 30.8%, which suggests an over-representation of this class considering the lower level of GDP for Kosovo. Bosnia and Herzegovina follows closely with a combined percentage of 24.3%, signifying a considerable portion among respondents in these income categories. Respondents in North Macedonia exhibits a lower level of respondents who consider themselves upper middle class or upper class, with a cumulative percentage of 12.0%. In contrast, Bulgaria reports the lowest cumulative percentage at 8.8%, suggesting the smallest proportion of youth that identifies with these higher income categories among the countries surveyed.

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Figure 12. Income class

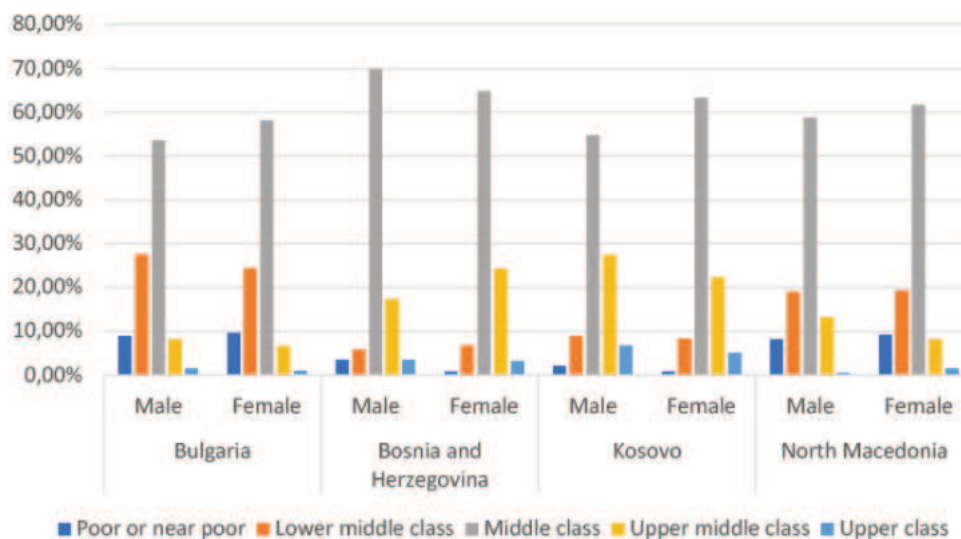


In terms of gender and perceptions of economic status, Bulgaria stands out with the highest percentages among respondents for both males (8.9%) and females (9.6%) perceiving themselves as poor or near poor. North Macedonia follows closely with the second-highest percentages for both males (8.3%) and females (9.2%) holding similar perceptions. In contrast, Bosnia and Herzegovina has the lowest percentage among females (0.8%) who view themselves as poor or near poor, but for males in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the percentage is higher at 3.5%. Similarly, Kosovo reports low percentages, with 0.9% of females and 2.1% of males perceiving themselves as poor or near poor. These findings highlight variations in economic self-perceptions across gender and among the surveyed countries, with Bulgaria having the highest percentages of individuals who perceive themselves as economically disadvantaged, while Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo report the lowest percentages among females in this category. It must be noted that here the case bias of the respondents is reflected in these findings, as the Bulgarian case studies worked more with disadvantaged groups.

Regarding of perceptions of belonging to the middle class and gender, Bosnia and Herzegovina stands out with the highest percentages for both males (69.8%) and females (64.9%) perceiving themselves as part of the middle class, indicating a strong middle-class identity among respondents in this country. Kosovo exhibits the largest gender gap in this category, with 54.8% of males and 63.3% of females perceiving themselves as belonging to the middle class, suggesting a more pronounced middle-class identity among females in Kosovo. Similarly, Bulgaria and North Macedonia also show gender gaps, with 53.6% of males and 58.2% of females in Bulgaria, as well as 58.8% of males and 61.7% of females in North Macedonia, perceiving themselves as middle class.

In terms of self-perceptions of belonging to the upper class and gender, Kosovo stands out with the highest percentages for both males (6.8%) and females (5.1%), who consider themselves in the upper class. Bosnia and Herzegovina follows with the second-highest percentages, with 3.5% of males and 3.2% of females perceiving themselves as in the upper class. In contrast, Bulgaria reports lower percentages, with 1.6% of males and 1.0% of females considering themselves in the upper class, while North Macedonia also has lower percentages, with 0.5% of males and 1.5% of females perceiving themselves as in the upper class.

Figure 13. Parents' income class



On the other hand, when comparing the combined percentages of respondents who perceive their parents to belong to either the upper middle class or upper class income categories across the surveyed countries of the region, Kosovo emerges with the highest cumulative percentage at 44.8%, indicating that a relatively larger portion of respondents views their parents as having an upper middle class or upper-class status. Bosnia and Herzegovina follows closely with a combined percentage of 30.3%, highlighting a significant presence of individuals who perceive their parents in these higher income categories. North Macedonia exhibits a lower but still notable level of respondents who consider their parents to be in the upper middle class or upper class, with a combined percentage of 15.0%. Bulgaria has the lowest cumulative percentage at 9.3%. These findings shed light on the varying perceptions of parental income and social class across these countries, with Kosovo having the highest and Bulgaria having the lowest proportions of respondents in the upper middle class and upper-class categories.

Moreover, the research has not uncovered significant differences between the perceptions of respondents and their parents' income class.

What income class do you consider you and your parents belong to?

	Bulgaria		Bosnia and Herzegovina		Kosovo		North Macedonia	
	Respondent	Parents	Respondent	Parents	Respondent	Parents	Respondent	Parents
Poor or near-poor	9.3%	11.8%	1.9%	0.7%	1.3%	0.8%	8.8%	8.3%
Lower middle class	26.0%	24.8%	6.6%	6.3%	8.8%	5.2%	19.3%	17.8%
Middle class	56.0%	54.3%	66.8%	61.0%	59.0%	49.0%	60.3%	59.0%
Upper middle class	7.5%	8.5%	21.4%	27.1%	24.1%	36.8%	10.8%	14.0%
Upper class	1.3%	0.8%	3.3%	4.9%	6.7%	8.0%	1.0%	1.0%

Similar patterns of perceptions among respondents regarding the income class are recorded in terms of gender as well, as presented in the following table.

What income class do you consider your parent belong to? (Percentage %)

	Bulgaria		Bosnia and Herzegovina		Kosovo		North Macedonia	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Poor or near poor	9.9%	13.5%	0.6%	0.8%	1.3%	0.5%	7.8%	8.7%
Lower middle class	27.1%	22.6%	7.9%	4.9%	6.6%	4.5%	18.1%	17.3%
Middle class	53.1%	55.3%	58.5%	62.7%	48.3%	50.5%	56.9%	61.2%
Upper middle class	8.3%	8.7%	28.7%	26.2%	36.4%	37.8%	16.7%	11.2%
Upper class	1.6%		4.3%	5.3%	6.6%	6.8%	0.5%	1.5%

The disparities in perceptions of income class belonging among respondents in the surveyed countries indeed appear to contradict the GDP per capita data of the region. This suggests that the perception of belonging to the middle-upper class and upper class in Kosovo, despite being the poorest country in the region in terms of GDP per capita, may not align with the same perceptions of income class belonging among respondents in Bulgaria, the richest country in the region. This discrepancy underscores the complexity of individuals’ perceptions of social class, which can be influenced by various factors beyond just economic indicators as well as the case selection and the data bias that emanates from it. Cultural, social and historical contexts, as well as individual experiences and aspirations, can all play a role in shaping how individuals perceive their own and their parents’ social class status. As a result, these perceptions may not always align with objective economic data, highlighting the need for a nuanced understanding of social class dynamics.

TERRITORIAL INEQUALITIES

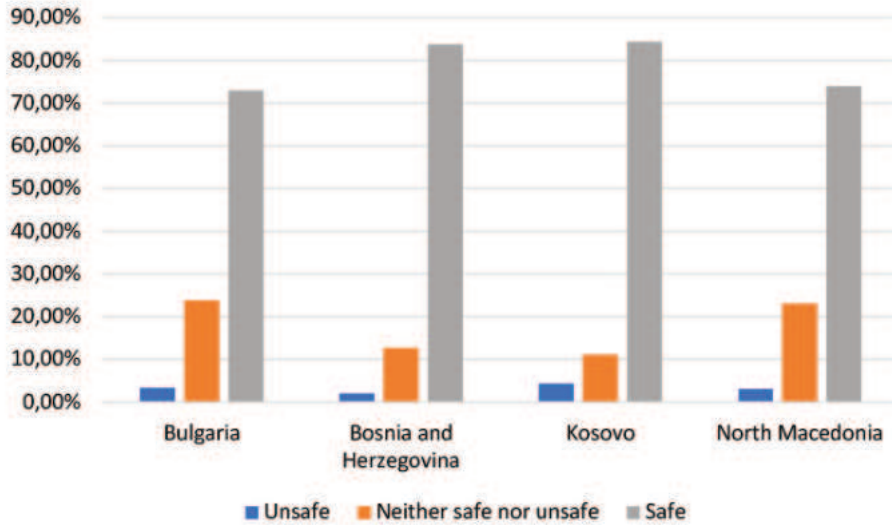
Territorial inequalities across all countries of the region are limited to the analyses of the feeling of safety of the respondents in their neighbourhoods, area/town city, and at the country level. In alignment with this perspective, the Safety Perceptions Index of 2023 reveals the rankings for these countries, with Kosovo in 44th place in the world, Bulgaria in 47th place, Bosnia and Herzegovina in 62nd place, and North Macedonia in 64th place (Safety Perception Index, 2023). These rankings offer additional insights into the perceptions of safety and security within these countries and provides a broader context for understanding the social and economic dynamics that influence individuals’ perceptions of various aspects of their lives, including safety.

In this context, to enhance understanding of the subsequent analyses presented, data on the respondents of each country are provided in the following tables concerning their urban and rural residence, along with the corresponding gender breakdown.

	Bulgaria	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo	North Macedonia
Urban	23.3%	76.3%	63.6%	57.5%
Rural	76.8%	23.7%	36.4%	42.5%

Against this backdrop, concerning the perceptions of the safety of respondents in their respective neighbourhoods across all the countries in the region, Kosovo stands out with the highest percentage of respondents feeling safe in their neighbourhoods, reaching 84.4%. Following closely, Bosnia and Herzegovina reports a similarly high percentage, with 83.8% of respondents feeling safe in their neighbourhoods. In comparison, North Macedonia and Bulgaria share similar percentages, with 74.0% and 73.0% of individuals, respectively, reporting a sense of safety in their neighbourhoods.

Figure 14. Extent of feeling safe - neighbourhood



Regarding gender, the perceptions of safety in their neighbourhoods among both male and female respondents across all countries in the region generally follow similar patterns, with a slight higher level of safety feeling among male respondents. This suggests that, in terms of feelings of safety within their neighbourhoods, gender does not appear to play a substantial role in shaping respondents' perceptions across the four countries.

To what extent do you feel safe in your neighbourhood? (Percentage %)

	Bulgaria		Bosnia and Herzegovina		Kosovo		North Macedonia	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Unsafe	2.1%	4.3%	2.3%	2.0%	1.9%	4.4%	2.0%	4.6%
Neither safe nor unsafe	22.4%	25.0%	10.5%	14.3%	10.1%	11.9%	20.1%	26.5%
Safe	75.5%	70.7%	87.2%	83.7%	87.3%	83.7%	77.9%	68.9%

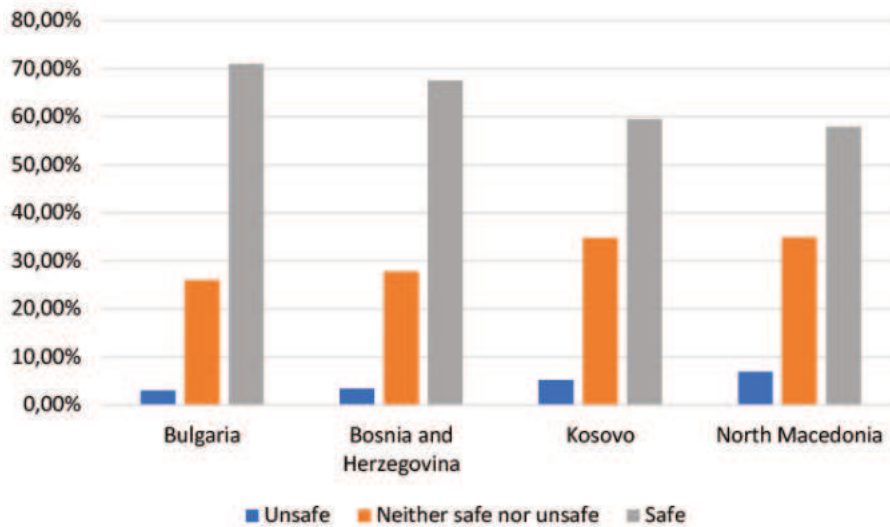
Conversely, in regard to the safety perceptions in their area/town/city, Bulgaria reports the highest percentage of respondents feeling safe in their localities, with 71.0% expressing a sense of safety. Bosnia and Herzegovina closely follows with 67.6% of respondents feeling safe in their areas. In comparison, Kosovo and North Macedonia share similar percentages, with 59.5% and 58.0% of respondents, respectively, reporting feelings of safety in their local areas.

Regarding the gender-specific breakdown of safety perceptions in their area, town, or city, it is noteworthy that in all four countries, male respondents generally report a higher percentage of feeling safe compared to their female counterparts. In this context, Bosnia and Herzegovina stands out with the highest percentage among male respondents, with 79.1% expressing a sense of safety. Following closely, Bulgaria reports 74.5% of male respondents feeling safe, while Kosovo and North



Macedonia have percentages of 72.6% and 61.8%, respectively, among male respondents who feel safe in their local areas. On the other hand, Bulgaria has the highest percentage among female respondents, with 67.8% feeling safe in their areas. These gender-specific differences in safety perceptions highlight variations in how men and women experience safety within their communities across these states.

Figure 15. Safety feeling safe - area/town/city



In terms of safety perceptions at the national level among respondents, Bulgaria and Kosovo report the highest percentages of feeling safe, with 56.5% and 56.4% of respondents, respectively. Bosnia and Herzegovina follows with 43.1% of respondents feeling safe at the national level, while North Macedonia reports a somewhat lower percentage of 40.5% among respondents who feel safe in their country.

Figure 16. Safety in area/town/city

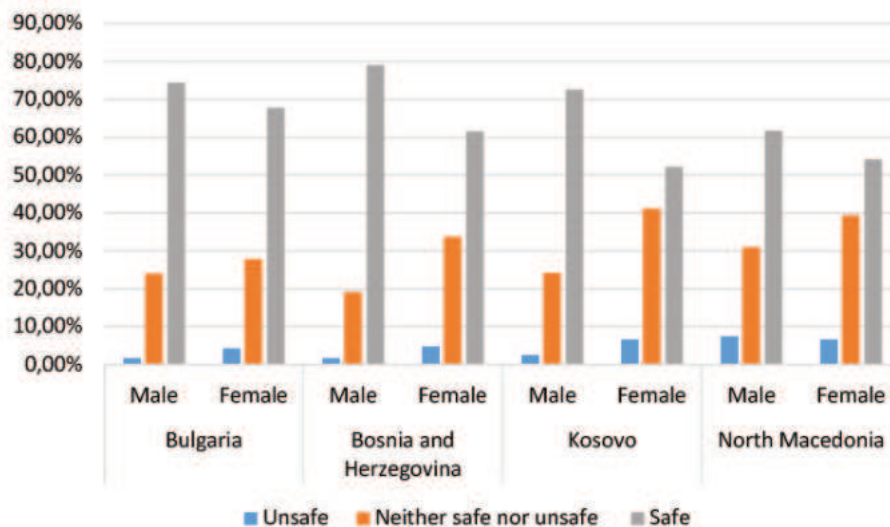
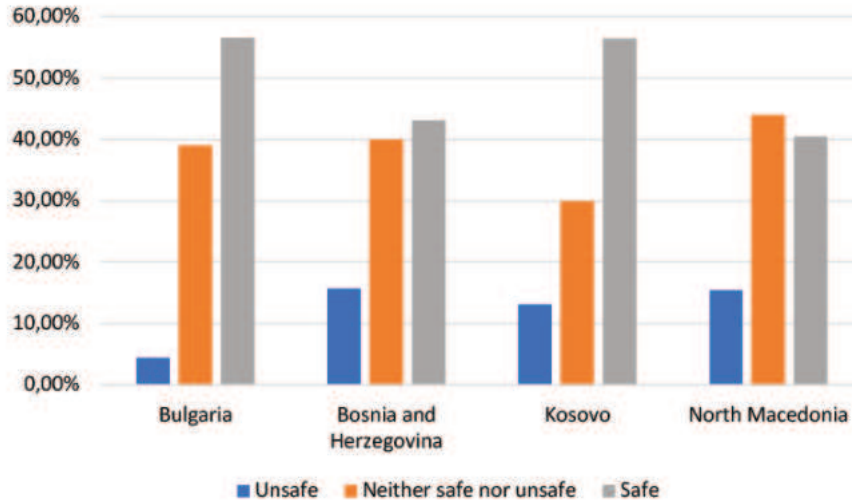


Figure 17. Safety feeling at country level



When examining safety perceptions at the national level based on gender, a consistent pattern emerges across all four countries: male respondents generally report a higher percentage of feeling safe compared to female respondents. In this context, Kosovo stands out with the highest percentage of male respondents (71.5%) expressing a sense of safety at the national level. Bulgaria follows closely with 60.0% of male respondents feeling safe, while Bosnia and Herzegovina reports 53.5% and North Macedonia has the lowest percentage at 42.2% among male respondents feeling safe in their country. On the other hand, among female respondents, Bulgaria has the highest percentage (52.9%) expressing a sense of safety at the national level. Kosovo follows with 46.9%, North Macedonia with 38.8%, and Bosnia and Herzegovina with 36.9%. These gender-based variations shed light on how safety perceptions at the national level differ between male and female respondents in the region.

When examining the relationship between safety perceptions in respective neighbourhoods, towns/cities, and at the national level among participants in urban and rural areas, as well as considering gender differences, a clear correlation has not been found in terms of cross tabulation between the same gender and urban rural belonging of respondents.

The observed trends in safety perceptions among respondents in these countries are indeed consistent with their respective rankings in the Safety Perceptions Index of 2023 (Safety Perceptions Index, 2023). Countries like Kosovo and Bulgaria, which have higher percentages of respondents feeling safe at both the neighbourhood and national levels, tend to have higher rankings on the Safety Perceptions Index. Conversely, countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia, where a smaller percentage of respondents report feeling safe, have lower rankings on the index. These findings suggest a correlation between public safety perceptions and the objective safety measures used to compile the index, highlighting the importance of both subjective and objective measures when assessing safety in a given region.

	Bulgaria		Bosnia and Herzegovina		Kosovo		North Macedonia	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
To what extent do you feel safe in your neighbourhood? (Percentage %)								
Urban	74.4%	64.0%	90.2%	86.9%	86.7%	81.0%	80.0%	66.1%
Rural	75.8%	72.8%	84.1%	73.9%	88.7%	87.8%	75.3%	72.8%
To what extent do you feel safe in your area/town/city?								
Urban	74.4%	64.0%	79.5%	61.6%	72.4%	50.7%	64.3%	55.7%
Rural	74.5%	69.0%	79.5%	56.5%	73.1%	54.4%	58.4%	51.9%
To what extent do you feel safe in your neighbourhood? (Percentage %)								
Urban	69.8%	50.0%	53.6%	35.6%	70.8%	44.5%	46.1%	45.2%
Rural	57.7%	53.8%	52.3%	30.4%	73.1%	50.6%	37.1%	29.6%

In conclusion, in environments where safety perceptions are relatively lower, especially in urban areas and among females, a discernible vulnerability becomes palpable. This heightened vulnerability can potentially act as a catalyst for radicalisation, as extremist groups may exploit these insecurities to propagate their narratives of belonging and purpose.

DIGITAL SOCIALISATION

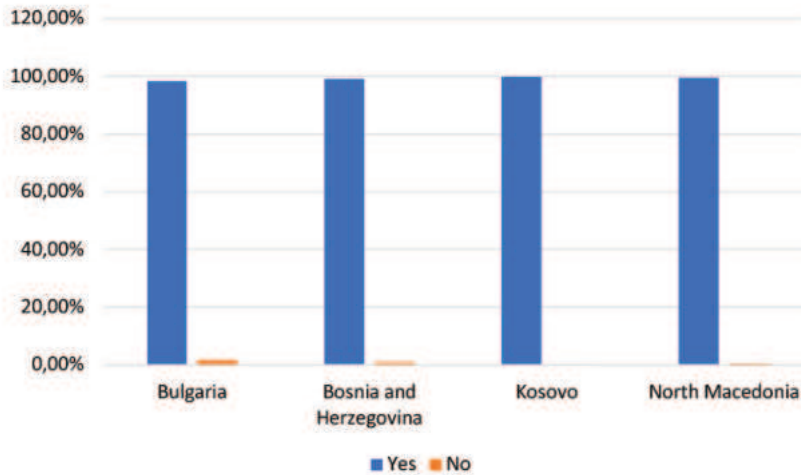
Internet coverage serves as a vital metric in the contemporary digital landscape, representing the availability of information and communication technologies. Notably, Kosovo leads with a remarkable 100% Internet coverage (World Bank, 2023), symbolising comprehensive online accessibility. Bulgaria also distinguishes itself with a substantial internet coverage rate of 87.31%, signifying extensive internet reach. Conversely, Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia exhibit marginally lower internet coverage rates, standing at 82.42% and 83.0%, respectively (Statista, n.d). Nevertheless, these figures reflect substantial connectivity within these nations, facilitating widespread access to the digital realm.

These high internet coverage rates can influence various aspects of societies in these countries, including communication patterns, access to information, and economic opportunities. They may also impact how individuals in these countries engage with digital technologies for education, political participation, and socialising.

In this context, Kosovo boasts the highest percentage of respondents with Internet access at 99.8%, closely followed by North Macedonia at 99.5% and Bosnia and Herzegovina at 99.0%. In comparison, Bulgaria, while still relatively high at 98.3%, holds the lowest percentage of people with Internet access among these four countries. Regarding gender breakdown, across all four countries, the majority of respondents enjoy Internet access, with near-universal accessibility.

On the other hand, the provided statistics on internet coverage and access in the region also carry implications for the prevention of radicalism and VE. While internet access can facilitate communication, education and economic opportunities, it can also serve as a platform for the dissemination of extremist ideologies and recruitment efforts by violent extremist groups.

Figure 18. Access to Internet



When it comes to the hours spent on the internet, Bosnia and Herzegovina stands out with the highest percentage of respondents spending over 4 hours per day online (44.1%). North Macedonia and Kosovo also report a relatively high percentage of people spending over 4 hours daily on the internet, with 35.0% and 34.0%, respectively, while Bulgaria has a lower percentage of respondents in this category (28.0%). In the 3-4 hours category, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo are relatively close, with 26.5% and 26.1% of respondents, respectively, while Bulgaria stands out with 24.9% of respondents. North Macedonia has the lowest percentage of respondents in this category, with 19.0%.

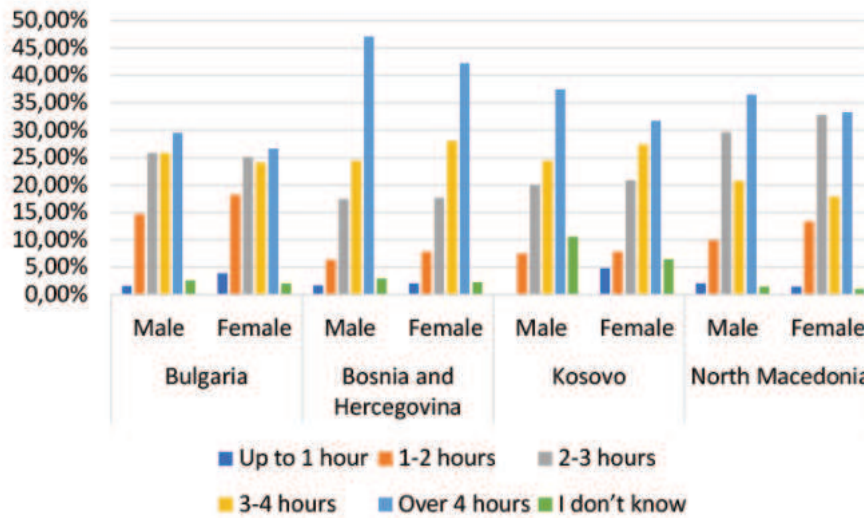
How many hours per day on average do you spend on the Internet?

	Bulgaria	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo	North Macedonia
Up to 1 hour	2.8%	2.1%	2.7%	2.0%
1-2 hours	16.5%	7.2%	7.7%	12.0%
2-3 hours	25.4%	17.6%	20.6%	31.0%
3-4 hours	24.9%	26.5%	26.1%	19.0%
Over 4 hours	28.0%	44.1%	34.0%	35.0%
I don't know	2.3%	2.6%	8.4%	1.3%

Regarding the gender breakdown of time spent on the internet, the research reveals interesting findings. In the category of spending “over 4 hours” on the internet, males in all four countries generally exhibit more extensive internet use than females. Notably, Bosnia and Herzegovina (47.1%) has the highest percentage of males in this category, followed by Kosovo (37.5%) and North Macedonia (36.5%), and Bulgaria (29.5%).

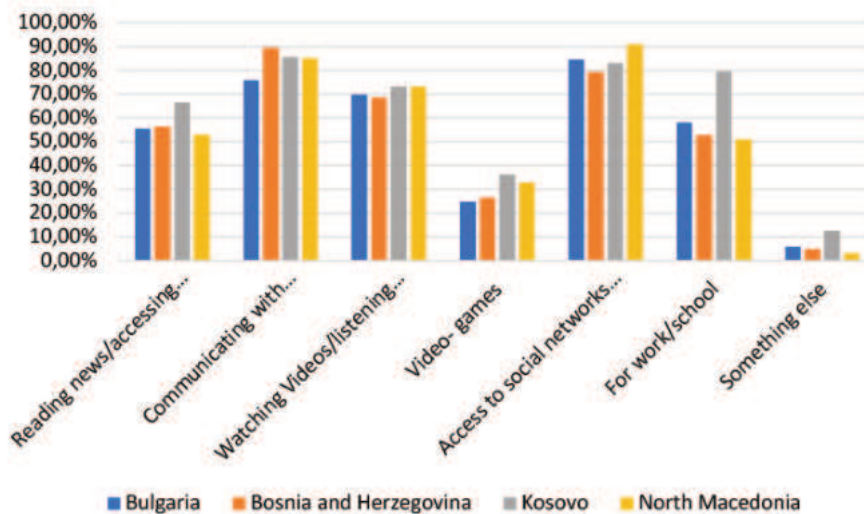


Figure 19. Hours spent on the Internet



When it comes to the purpose of using the internet, North Macedonia has the highest percentage of internet users accessing social networks (91.0%), while Bosnia and Herzegovina has the lowest percentage in this category (79.1%), showing an overall high usage of social media among youth. Kosovo has the highest percentage of internet users accessing information for work/school (79.4%), while Bosnia and Herzegovina has the lowest percentage in this category (52.7%). For video games, Kosovo has the highest percentage (36.2%), and Bulgaria has the lowest (24.8%). Accessing news and information is more popular in Kosovo (66.5%) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (56.4%) compared to Bulgaria (55.6%) and North Macedonia (53.0%).

Figure 20. Purpose of using the Internet

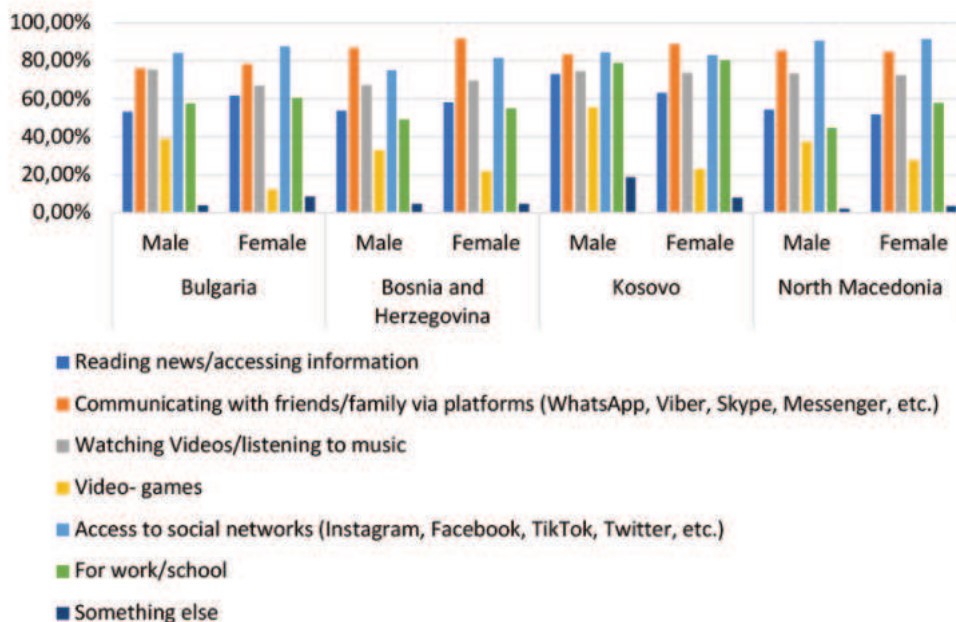


Internet usage for accessing news and information is widespread in these countries, with Kosovo having the highest percentage of respondents, including both males (73.1%) and females (63.0%), using the internet for this purpose. Other countries also report significant usage for staying informed, such as Bulgaria (males 53.2%, females 61.6%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (males 53.8%,

females 58.0%), and North Macedonia (males 54.2%, females 51.8%). Communication through internet platforms like WhatsApp, Viber, Skype and Messenger is prevalent, with Bosnia and Herzegovina having the highest usage at 86.7% of males and 91.8% of females, followed by North Macedonia with 85.2% of males and 84.6% of females.

Watching videos and listening to music online is also common, with balanced participation between genders ranging from 65% to 75% across all countries. However, playing video games online shows significant gender disparities, with males having substantially higher usage rates than females, especially in Kosovo, where 55.6% of males engage in this activity compared to only 23.0% of females. Accessing social networks like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter is highly prevalent in all countries, with North Macedonia having the highest participation (90.6% of males and 91.3% of females). Finally, using the Internet for work or school-related purposes is common, with Kosovo having the highest percentage of respondents, especially among females (80.4%).

Figure 21. Purpose of using the Internet



On the other hand, Kosovo leads with the highest percentage of respondents who are familiar with what a Virtual Private Network (VPN) is, with 74.1%. Bosnia and Herzegovina follows with 50% of respondents indicating their knowledge of VPNs, while both Bulgaria and North Macedonia show similar percentages of respondents, with 39.8% and 39.0%, respectively.

Across all countries, there is a consistent trend of higher knowledge of VPNs among male respondents compared to female respondents. In Kosovo, a significant 83.0% of males and 66.8% of females are familiar with VPNs, showcasing a strong awareness of online privacy tools. Bosnia and Herzegovina also reports a high level of knowledge, with 59.0% of males and 43.9% of females being aware of VPNs. In Bulgaria, 45.8% of males and 34.1% of females are familiar with VPNs, indicating a moderate level of awareness, followed by North Macedonia, where 46.1% of males and 31.6% of females are aware of VPNs.

The same trends are observed among respondents regarding the usage of VPNs as well. However, it's important to note that the usage of VPNs by respondents is significantly lower than their knowledge about it, with the exception of Kosovo where a relatively higher proportion of respondents appear to use VPNs.

Have you ever used a VPN? (Percentage %)

	Bulgaria		Bosnia and Herzegovina		Kosovo		North Macedonia	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Yes	17.7%	15.9%	29.8%	17.3%	72.3%	52.6%	19.1%	10.7%

VPN usage varies by country and exhibits some gender differences. Protecting one's location on social media is a common use, especially among males in North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Accessing regionally restricted content is prevalent in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Seeking online independence and privacy is most significant in North Macedonia. The influence of the perception that "All My Friends Use VPNs" is limited. Protecting visited websites is popular in North Macedonia. Accessing blocked content at school or home is more common in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina

What was the reason for using VPN? (Percentage %)

	Bulgaria		Bosnia and Herzegovina		Kosovo		North Macedonia	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Protect my location on social media	11.1%	4.9%	44.6%	44.4%	40.4%	33.9%	53.8%	38.1%
Access regionally restricted content	11.1%	6.5%	48.2%	44.4%	53.8%	38.1%	20.5%	19.0%
Want more independence and privacy	9.4%	5.7%	17.9%	17.8%	21.9%	23.6%	56.4%	52.4%
All my friends use VPNs	4.3%	3.3%	5.4%	2.2%	3.5%	8.7%	7.7%	9.5%
Don't want that anyone can see the sites that I visit	5.1%	3.3%	16.1%	13.3%	14.9%	13.4%	46.2%	47.6%
Want to use blocked sites/apps at school or home	2.6%	0.8%	17.9%	11.1%	19.3%	15.7%	12.8%	9.5%
Something else	0.9%	7.3%	25.0%	22.2%	21.9%	26.8%	5.1%	4.8%



In summary, it can be concluded that the widespread internet access in these countries, particularly in Kosovo, North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, prompts intriguing considerations regarding the potential for radicalisation. The substantial time spent online, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina, may foster an environment where extremist ideologies find a receptive audience. Gender differences in internet usage, particularly in the realms of video gaming and familiarity with VPNs, illuminate distinct patterns that could impact susceptibility to radicalisation. Additionally, the purpose of internet use, such as accessing social networks and seeking information, plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals' exposure to diverse perspectives.

Noteworthy is the high usage of VPNs in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, coupled with an awareness of online privacy tools, suggesting a nuanced understanding of internet security but also data accessibility. However, this nuanced awareness does not necessarily translate into widespread VPN usage. The variations in motivations for VPN usage, including protecting one's location on social media and accessing regionally restricted content, add further complexity to the internet landscape. These factors, along with the diverse motivations within the "Something Else" category, underscore the intricate nature of the online environment and its potential role in shaping perceptions that may influence susceptibility to radicalisation.

In this context, it should be emphasised that a significant proportion of VPN users across all countries have been involved in violence, especially in their neighbourhoods, clubs, cafes, sports halls, or schools and universities.

Have you ever used VPN- only respondents who have said YES

Bulgaria Bosnia and Herzegovina Kosovo North Macedonia

	Bulgaria	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo	North Macedonia
Physically violent conflict with other young people in the neighbourhood/quarter where I reside?				
No	74.6%	75.5%	76.0%	91.5%
Yes	25.4%	24.5%	24.0%	8.5%
Physically violent conflict with other young people in a club or in a café?				
No	80.6%	75.3%	87.9%	93.2%
Yes	19.4%	24.7%	12.1%	6.8%
Physically violent conflict in a sports hall, on a football pitch, etc.?				
No	80.6%	74.5%	86.3%	89.7%
Yes	19.4%	25.5%	13.8%	10.3%
Physically violent conflict in school/at university?				
No	73.1%	74.2%	74.0%	86.0%
Yes	26.9%	25.8%	26.0%	14.0%
Physically violent conflict with young people of other political or religious convictions?				
No	89.6%	94.6%	97.9%	94.9%
Yes	10.4%	5.4%	2.1%	5.1%
Physically violent conflict with the police (e.g., on protests)?				
No	92.5%	94.7%	97.5%	98.3%
Yes	7.5%	5.3%	2.5%	1.7%
Physically violent conflict with a partner?				
No	92.5%	93.5%	96.3%	96.6%
Yes	7.5%	6.5%	3.3%	3.4%

POLITICAL ISSUES

Voter turnout is a vital metric that offers insights into the dynamics of a society and its relationship with its political institutions. High turnout often signifies an engaged and politically aware populace that trusts in the democratic process. It reflects social cohesion and shared values, along with successful political mobilisation. Factors affecting turnout include ease of access to voting, demographic characteristics, perceptions of political efficacy, and the nation's political culture.

Voter turnout patterns are valuable for understanding civic engagement, trust in institutions, and broader social dynamics within a country. In this regard, Bulgaria's relatively low voter turnout of 39.4% in 2022 raises concerns about the level of enthusiasm and engagement among its electorate (Spirova, 2023). This could be indicative of various factors, including disillusionment with the political process, apathy, or challenges related to accessibility and outreach by political parties. Kosovo's voter turnout of 48.78% in 2021 (Republic of Kosovo, 2021)¹ indicates a significant portion of the eligible population participating in the electoral process. While this is a low turnout, it reflects a level of civic responsibility and engagement, which is noteworthy, especially considering the country's complex political landscape. In contrast, Bosnia and Herzegovina's turnout of 51.5% (Kapidžić et al., 2022), which could be attributed to factors such as increased political awareness, mobilisation efforts by political actors, or a stronger sense of civic duty among Bosnian voters. North Macedonia's 2020 voter turnout of 52.2% (International Foundation for Electoral Systems, n.d) suggests a reasonably engaged electorate during their election.

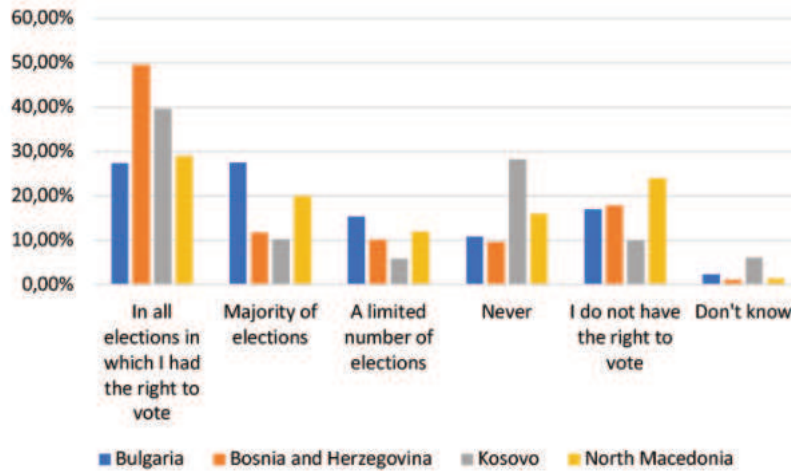
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In the context of voting behaviour, several interesting trends can be observed among respondents in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Bulgaria. The data shows that the percentage of among all respondents who claim to have voted in all elections is highest in Bosnia and Herzegovina (49.5%), closely followed by Kosovo (39.6%), while North Macedonia (29.0%) and Bulgaria (27.3%) have relatively similar percentages in this category. On the other hand, Bulgaria has a higher percentage of respondents (27.5%) who say they have voted in the majority of elections, with North Macedonia (20%) coming in second. In contrast, Kosovo (10.2%) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (11.7%) show low levels of voting and engagement with political parties, indicating that there is political apathy among youth.

When it comes to those who claim to have voted in only a limited number of elections, Bulgaria leads with 15.3%, followed by North Macedonia at 12.0%, while Bosnia and Herzegovina (10.1%) and Kosovo (5.8%) have lower percentages. The percentage of respondents who have never voted is relatively low in Bosnia and Herzegovina (9.6%) and Bulgaria (10.8%), but notably higher in Kosovo (28.2%). Additionally, North Macedonia has the highest percentage (24.0%) of respondents who do not have the right to vote, while Kosovo (9.9%) has the lowest.

¹ General Statistics, Elections for the Assembly of Kosovo 2021, Central Election Commission of Kosovo, <https://kqz-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/1.Statistikat-e-pergjithshme-1.pdf>

Figure 22. Using the right to vote



On the other hand, when it comes to participation in all elections in which respondents had the right to vote, females consistently have higher percentages of participation in this category compared to males across all countries.

How many times have you voted since you were granted the right to vote? (Percentage %)

	Bulgaria		Bosnia and Herzegovina		Kosovo		North Macedonia	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
In all elections in which I had the right to vote	21.9%	32.2%	47.4%	51.2%	39.4%	41.6%	28.4%	28.6%
Majority of elections	26.0%	28.8%	14.6%	9.9%	11.0%	10.2%	19.6%	20.4%
A limited number of elections	17.2%	13.5%	8.2%	10.7%	3.9%	7.5%	11.8%	11.2%
Never	12.5%	9.1%	11.7%	8.3%	27.1%	27.4%	18.1%	13.8%
I do not have the right to vote	19.3%	14.9%	17.0%	18.7%	9.7%	10.2%	21.6%	26.0%
Don't know	3.1%	1.4%	1.2%	1.2%	8.4%	3.1%	0.5%	

When examining trust levels in various institutions across Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and North Macedonia, noteworthy patterns emerge. In terms of trust in state government bodies, Kosovo stands out with the highest level at 44.4%, while Bulgaria (38.8%) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (35.9%) have relatively closer percentages, and North Macedonia records the lowest trust percentage at 22.0%. Shifting to trust in local government bodies, Bulgaria leads with 47.0%, followed by Kosovo (41.9%) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (38.9%), while North Macedonia lags slightly behind with 36.0%.

Trust in the police is notably high in Kosovo (77.4%), with Bosnia and Herzegovina (53.0%) following as the second-highest, while Bulgaria (50.6%) and North Macedonia (49.0%) have relatively lower and closer percentages. Trust in the army is highest in Kosovo (89.8%), while North Macedonia (59.0%) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (57.7%) show relatively similar percentages, and Bulgaria reports the lowest trust level at 47.8%. The judiciary has the lowest level of trust across the countries. Up to 45.6% of Kosovo’s youth trust the judiciary, followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina (36.0%), with Bulgaria (29.6%) and North Macedonia (25%). Trust in the media is also nuanced as is showing less trust. Trust is highest in North Macedonia (47.0%), followed by Bulgaria (35.3%), Kosovo (23.7%) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (18.8%).

Trust in religious leaders is notably high in Kosovo (63.0%), with North Macedonia (49.0%) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (42.9%) having relatively closer percentages, and Bulgaria reporting the lowest trust level at 23.6%. Political parties are the least trusted actor, North Macedonia’s youth only has 23% trust in political parties, followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina (16.3%) and Kosovo (14.6%), while Bulgaria reports the lowest trust at 9.8%. Trust in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is relatively high in Kosovo (46.1%) and North Macedonia (46.0%), with Bosnia and Herzegovina (34.7%) and Bulgaria (33.1%). These variations in trust levels shed light on the complex dynamics of institutional trust across these countries, influencing their social and political landscapes.

How much trust do you have in the following institutions?

	Bulgaria		Bosnia and Herzegovina		Kosovo		North Macedonia	
	Fully trust	Generally trust	Fully trust	Generally trust	Fully trust	Generally trust	Fully trust	Generally trust
State government bodies	3.8%	35.0%	5.1%	30.8%	8.5%	35.9%	5.0%	17.0%
Local government bodies	5.0%	42.0%	5.6%	33.3%	4.9%	37.0%	8.0%	28.0%
Police	5%	45.3%	11.3%	41.7%	31.5%	45.9%	11.0%	38.0%
Army	9.8%	38.0%	18.1%	39.6%	52.9%	36.9%	16.0%	43.0%
Judiciary	3.3%	26.3%	4.7%	31.3%	14.0%	31.6%	7.0%	18.0%
Media	1.3%	34.0%	2.8%	16%	4.9%	18.8%	6.0%	41.0%
Religious leaders	3.8%	19.8%	8.9%	34%	21.7%	41.3%	12.0%	37.0%
Political parties	0.8%	9.0%	3.0%	13.3%	2.8%	11.8%	6.0%	17.0%
NGOs	1.3%	31.8%	5.8%	28.9%	9.2%	36.9%	9.0%	37.0%

When scrutinising trust in these institutions across all countries from a gender breakdown among respondents, intriguing results have emerged. In examining trust in state government, with the exception of North Macedonia, females generally exhibit higher levels of trust compared to males.

On the other hand, trust in the police is influenced by gender dynamics, with females generally expressing higher levels of trust across all countries. Perceptions of trust in the army exhibit slightly higher trust among male respondents across all countries with the exception of North Macedonia. Trust in the judiciary unveils intriguing gender dynamics. While females in Kosovo express higher trust, males in other countries, particularly Bosnia and Herzegovina, lead in judicial confidence.

Trust in the media reveals significant disparities between countries and genders. Male respondents in Bulgaria and Kosovo have exhibited higher trust in them than female respondents, whereas female respondents in Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia have shown higher trust than male ones. Perceptions of trust in religious leaders showcase diverse patterns. Female respondents in Kosovo and North Macedonia have exhibited slightly higher trust than male ones, whereas male respondents in Bulgaria and Bosnia and Herzegovina have shown slightly higher trust in religious leaders and figures. Male respondents tend to express higher trust in political parties, a trend consistent across countries. Female respondents consistently exhibit higher trust in NGOs across all four countries.

How much trust do you have in the following institutions? *Cumulative percentage for fully trust and generally trust

	Bulgaria		Bosnia and Herzegovina		Kosovo		North Macedonia	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
State government bodies	37.5%	39.9%	36.3%	36.4%	44.3%	45.5%	22.5%	20.4%
Local government bodies	46.8%	47.1%	38.2%	39.5%	43.3%	42.2%	37.2%	34.1%
Police	48.0%	52.9%	53.7%	52.7%	76.3%	77.3%	47.6%	50.0%
Army	50.0%	45.7%	59.0%	57.1%	90.4%	90.1%	57.3%	59.7%
Judiciary	31.2%	27.8%	37.2%	35.2%	40.1%	50.4%	28.9%	27.0%
Media	35.9%	34.6%	15.7%	21.1%	25.1%	23.0%	43.7%	50.0%
Religious leaders	23.4%	23.5%	44.8%	41.2%	61.6%	63.6%	46.6%	50.5%
Political parties	10.4%	9.2%	18.5%	14.7%	16.7%	13.1%	24.5%	19.4%
NGO's	30.8%	35.1%	34.7%	34.8%	42.6%	49.3%	42.1%	48.5%

Against this backdrop, it can be concluded that the low level of turnout across all countries raises concerns about enthusiasm and engagement, potentially indicating factors such as disillusionment or accessibility challenges. This disenchantment with the political process can create fertile ground for radicalisation as shown at the meso and macro level research of CONNEKT (Georgieva et al., 2021; Kapidžić et al., 2023), as individuals may seek alternatives outside the established political system.

On the other hand, concerning voting behaviour, the low levels of voting and political engagement among respondents, indicating potential political apathy among the youth, are reflected in a low level of trust in state institutions and political parties. Such disengagement can make individuals susceptible to radical ideologies, as they may feel marginalised or disenchanted with mainstream political processes. Additionally, the higher trust in religious leaders in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina may suggest a potential influence of religious institutions. This influence can contribute to shaping perceptions and ideologies, potentially impacting susceptibility to radicalisation.

In this context, an intriguing discovery is that the involvement of respondents in physically violent incidents with young people holding diverse political and religious beliefs, and who consistently or predominantly participate in voting, is notably high in Bulgaria (71.4%), North Macedonia (63.2%), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (46.2%). Kosovo follows with a lower percentage of 20.0%. These respondents also show a high level of involvement in violent conflicts with the police across all surveyed countries. This data indicates a clear presence of political and religious militancy in the region.

How many times have you voted? *Cumulative for: In all elections in which I had the right to vote and Majority of elections

	Physical violence- only for respondents who have said yes (participated in physical violence)			
	Bulgaria	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo	North Macedonia
Physically violent conflict with young people of other political or religious convictions?	71.4%	46.2%	20.0%	63.2%
Physically violent conflict with the police (e.g., on protests)?	60.0%	71.4%	50.0%	71.4%

On the other hand, another finding shows that the respondents across all countries of the region, except for Bulgaria, who have engaged in physical violence with young people of different political or religious views are the ones who have the highest trust in religious leaders among all institutions, namely Kosovo (80%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (41.7%), and North Macedonia (52.6%). Furthermore, all respondents in Kosovo who have participated in violent conflicts with police have the highest trust in religious leaders. These findings suggest that they might have been influenced by the religious leaders to act violently, or that they seek guidance from them after being violent.

How much trust do you have in the following institutions:

	State gov. bodies	Local gov. bodies	Police	Army	Judiciary	Media	Religious leaders	Political parties	NGOs
Physically violent conflict with young people of other political or religious convictions?									
Bulgaria	35.7%	42.9%	35.7%	35.7%	50.0%	28.6%	28.6%	21.4%	21.4%
BiH	30.8%	23.1%	38.5%	30.8%	23.1%	41.7%	15.4%	23.1%	
Kosovo	40.0%	40.0%	80.0%	60.0%	40.0%	0.0%	80.0%	0.0%	20.0%
North									
Macedonia	10.5%	36.8%	52.6%	52.6%	42.1%	36.8%	52.6%	31.6%	36.8%
Physically violent conflict with the police (e.g., on protests)?									
Bulgaria	26.7%	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	26.7%	26.7%	26.7%	33.3%
BiH	25.0%	25.0%	12.5%	37.5%	50.0%	25.0%	42.9%	12.5%	12.5%
Kosovo	16.7%	16.7%	83.3%	40.0%	16.7%	16.7%	100.0%	16.7%	50.0%
North									
Macedonia	28.6%	21.4%	64.3%	57.1%	21.4%	57.1%	42.9%	50.0%	35.7%

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In summary, the intricate interplay between voter turnout, voting behaviour, trust in institutions, and gender dynamics offers valuable insights into the potential susceptibility to radicalisation. Disenchantment, political apathy, and trust differentials emerge as key factors that shape the landscape and may influence individuals' receptivity to extremist ideologies.

FOREIGN POLICIES AND INFLUENCES

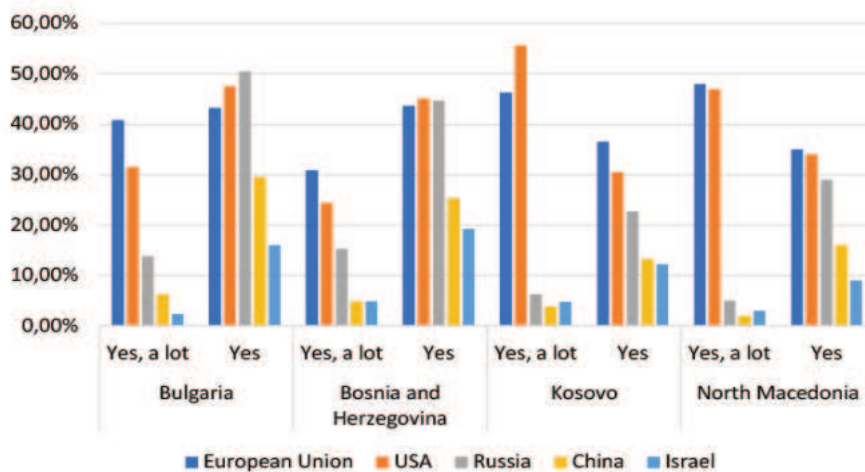
In this section, the research results related to the perceptions of respondents across all countries on the perceived influence of the EU, US, Russia, China, and Israel, as well as their levels of agreement with their national government policies towards Palestine, Afghanistan, Ukraine, and Syria will be presented.

Examining the combined percentages of respondents who believe there is foreign influence in their respective countries from various states reveals intriguing insights into the perceptions and attitudes of the populations in Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In terms of the EU, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, and Kosovo show similar levels of perception regarding foreign influence, with more than 80% of respondents in each country believing there is influence from the EU. In contrast, Bosnia and Herzegovina records a slightly lower percentage.

Kosovo stands out with the highest percentage of respondents (86.1%) who believe in foreign influence from the USA. North Macedonia and Bulgaria also report substantial percentages in this category, indicating a widespread belief in American influence. In contrast, Bosnia and Herzegovina records the lowest percentage among these countries, although it is still relatively high at 69.5%.

Bulgaria has the highest percentage of respondents (64.3%) who perceive foreign influence from Russia, followed closely by Bosnia and Herzegovina (60.0%). In North Macedonia and Kosovo, the percentages are considerably lower, suggesting that there might be less belief in Russian influence in these countries. China's and Israel's influence are overall perceived as being lower than that of the other actors. Bulgaria has the highest percentage of respondents (35.4%) who believe in foreign influence from China, followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina (30.3%). Lastly, Bosnia and Herzegovina has the highest percentage (24.1%) of respondents who believe in foreign influence from Israel, followed by Bulgaria (18.3%).

Figure 23. Level of foreign influence



The perceptions of foreign influence in the countries of Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and North Macedonia in terms of gender breakdown offer intriguing insights into the dynamics of international relations and their impact on public sentiment as well. The EU's influence is widely acknowledged in all these countries, with Kosovo displaying the strongest perception. Interestingly, while males tend to have a higher percentage in each country, the gender gap is narrower in Bulgaria, where females express relatively high confidence in the EU. The USA's influence is significant, particularly in Kosovo, where both genders recognise its impact. In Bulgaria, however, a notable gender gap exists, with males holding a considerably higher perception of US influence compared to females.

Is there foreign influence in your country:

Cumulative (Yes, a lot, and Yes)	Bulgaria		Bosnia and H.		Kosovo		North Macedonia	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
European Union	84.9%	83.2%	75.7%	74%	89.8%	80.3%	84.3%	80.1%
USA	85.9%	72.6%	73.4%	67.2%	92.3%	83.3%	84.3%	77%
Russia	69.8%	59.1%	62.2%	58.4%	27.8%	29.2%	36.3%	32.1%
China	37.5%	34.1%	26.6%	32.4%	15.2%	18.3%	18.1%	18.4%
Israel	22.9%	13.9%	23.1%	24.8%	22.4%	12.3%	11.8%	11.7%

These findings provide valuable insights into how the populations of these states perceive external influences, which can have implications for their foreign policy attitudes, international relations, and geopolitical perspectives.

In exploring respondents' perspectives on foreign policy concerning Palestine, Ukraine, Syria, and Afghanistan, it is crucial to consider the historical and diplomatic contexts. Palestine, having supported Serbia during NATO's intervention in the former Yugoslavia in 1999, strongly opposes Kosovo's independence (San Francisco Chronicle, 1999). In contrast, Ukraine, while not officially recognising Kosovo, has received support from Kosovo's government, particularly through joint international sanctions against Russia following the aggression in February 2022 (European Pravda, 2023). Afghanistan was among the first nations to recognise Kosovo's independence (Balkan Insight, 2008), whereas the Assad regime in Syria does not recognise Kosovo's independence. However, Kosovo's active participation in the Global Coalition to Counter Daesh (The Global Coalition, n.d).

Turning to Bulgaria, it forged diplomatic ties with Palestine in 1973, advocating for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria A, n.d). Bulgaria encountered a setback in Afghanistan, leading to the temporary suspension of diplomatic relations following the embassy bombing in 2017 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria B, n.d). In the context of Ukraine, Bulgaria has been a steadfast supporter, particularly during the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the subsequent conflict in Donbas. This support heightened after the 2022 Russian invasion, among others, by extending a warm welcome to around half a million Ukrainian refugees (WHO, 2022). Additionally, bilateral relations between Bulgaria and the Syrian Arab Republic were established on 24 August 1954. Since May 1955, Bulgaria has maintained an embassy in Damascus. In the context of the war in Syria, Bulgaria has aligned its policy with NATO (The Time, 2015) and is an active member of the Global Coalition to Counter Daesh (The Global Coalition, n.d).

In North Macedonia's distinctive diplomatic stance, the country lacks relations with Palestine. The country has participated to International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Mission in Afghanistan (Ministry of Defence of North Macedonia, n.d). It established diplomatic relations with Syria in 2010, and participates in the Global Coalition to Counter Daesh (The Global Coalition, n.d). Significantly, North Macedonia provided military aid to Ukraine during the 2022 Russian invasion, showcasing its commitment to international solidarity (Radio Free Europe, 2022).

Turning to Bosnia and Herzegovina, the relationship with Palestine dates back to May 1992, with diplomatic establishment in October 1992 (Ministry for Foreign Relations of Bosnia and Herzegovina, n.d). Bosnia and Herzegovina has a neutral stance in the face of Russian aggression against Ukraine due to Republika Srpska's pro-Russian inclination (Euronews, 2020). Additionally, Bosnia and Herzegovina holds diplomatic ties with Afghanistan symbolically supporting the ISAF Mission (NATO, n.d). It has established diplomatic relations with Syria in December 1994 (Ministry for Foreign Relations of Bosnia and Herzegovina, n.d), and actively participated in the Global Coalition to Counter Daesh (The Global Coalition, n.d).

Against this background, when examining the degree of agreement with government foreign policies on specific international issues, Bosnia and Herzegovina consistently stands out as having

the highest percentage of respondents who express agreement. In the context of Palestine, Bosnia and Herzegovina leads with 28.5% of respondents expressing agreement, followed by Kosovo with 17.9%. Bulgaria and North Macedonia exhibit lower percentages of agreement. Regarding Ukraine, Bosnia and Herzegovina again has the highest agreement percentage at 35.4%, closely followed by Kosovo at 34.0%. Bulgaria and North Macedonia show comparatively lower levels of agreement. In the case of Syria, Bosnia and Herzegovina maintains the highest agreement rate at 24.2%, while North Macedonia has the lowest agreement percentage. Concerning Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina once more leads with 20.3% of respondents agreeing with their government’s foreign policy.

Do you agree with the foreign policy of your government regarding:

	Bulgaria		Bosnia and H.		Kosovo		North Macedonia	
	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Agree
Palestine	1.5%	8.8%	8.0%	20.5%	6.5%	11.4%	0.0%	6.0%
Ukraine	4.0%	18.5%	7.0%	28.4%	13.0%	21.0%	0.0%	18.0%
Syria	1.0%	11.8%	5.7%	18.5%	4.4%	14.5%	0.0%	7.0%
Afghanistan	2.5%	8.8%	5.4%	14.9%	5.2%	14.5%	0.5%	7.0%

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These findings highlight the propensity of Bosnian and Herzegovinian respondents to align with their government’s foreign policy stances across various international issues. In contrast, while Kosovo consistently ranks second, Bulgaria and North Macedonia tend to exhibit lower levels of agreement, reflecting the nuanced diversity of public opinion on foreign policy matters within the region.

Across four distinct foreign policy areas – Palestine, Ukraine, Syria and Afghanistan – a gender breakdown analysis reveals intriguing trends in how respondents in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Kosovo and North Macedonia perceive their governments’ stances.

Do you agree with the foreign policy of your government regarding:(Percentage %)

Cumulative (Strongly agree and Agree)	Bulgaria		Bosnia and H.		Kosovo		North Macedonia	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Palestine	31.1%	22.4%	34%	24.7%	23,5%	13.6%	7.4%	4.6%
Ukraine	29.5%	29.9%	40.4%	31.6%	40.5%	30.1%	19.1%	16.8%
Syria	25.3%	29.5%	29.1%	20.9%	24.3%	15%	9.3%	4.6%
Afghanistan	28%	20.7%	22.5%	18.8%	23.7%	16.4%	9.8%	5.6%

The disaggregating of data by gender underscores the nuanced variations in agreement with government foreign policies across these countries, revealing distinct patterns in perceptions shaped by respondents of different genders.

Given the above context, it can be concluded that the intricate dynamics of international relations and their impact on public sentiment across Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina reveal compelling insights into potential susceptibility to radicalisation. The belief in foreign influence from entities like the EU, USA, Russia, China, and Israel sets the stage for understanding how external factors shape ideologies and perceptions, potentially influencing vulnerability to radicalisation.

Moreover, analysing respondents' perspectives on foreign policy concerning Palestine, Ukraine, Syria, and Afghanistan provides valuable insights into how geopolitical factors contribute to shaping public opinion. The alignment or divergence of views with government foreign policies can influence individuals' receptivity to extremist ideologies.

In summary, the combined findings on foreign influence perceptions, voter turnout, political engagement, trust levels, and foreign policy perspectives offer a comprehensive understanding of the potential susceptibility to radicalisation in these countries. The interplay of these factors creates a complex landscape where external influences, political disillusionment, and trust differentials may contribute to shaping individuals' vulnerability to extremist ideologies.

SATISFACTION WITH PUBLIC SERVICES

Analysing the combined satisfaction levels across multiple societal aspects in the four countries provides valuable insights into the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents. Satisfaction with cultural aspects is notably similar in Bulgaria (45.5%), Kosovo (44.5%), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (42.6%). However, North Macedonia stands out with the lowest satisfaction level (22.0%), suggesting potential variations in cultural perceptions among respondents.

Kosovo leads in health satisfaction (33.8%), reflecting positive perceptions of the healthcare system. Bulgaria (28.3%) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (23.2%) exhibit comparable satisfaction levels. In contrast, North Macedonia reports the lowest health satisfaction (13.0%), signalling possible concerns within its healthcare system.

Kosovo boasts the highest satisfaction with its youth (43.3%), highlighting positive sentiments toward the younger population. North Macedonia (31.0%) follows with the second-highest satisfaction level, suggesting favourable perceptions of youth. However, Bosnia and Herzegovina (24.1%) and Bulgaria (20.5%) report lower satisfaction levels, possibly indicative of specific societal dynamics related to young people.

Satisfaction with the environment is quite low in Bosnia and Herzegovina (39.4%), reflecting dissatisfaction with environmental conditions or policies particularly considering the dangerous levels of air pollution (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Bulgaria (28.8%) and Kosovo (25.6%) display relatively similar satisfaction

levels, indicating very low satisfaction. Conversely, North Macedonia (15.0%) exhibits the lowest reported satisfaction level. These findings imply potential environmental concerns in the region that are reflected by very low satisfaction among respondents in line with real issues and concerns with air pollution across the region (BIRN, 2023).

In the realm of education, the 2018 PISA results cast a revealing light on the performance of countries in the region, reflecting a notable challenge across all nations. Bulgaria secured the 50th position in mathematics, 57th in science, and 54th in reading. Bosnia and Herzegovina faced comparatively lower scores, ranking 63rd in mathematics, 68th in science, and 63rd in reading. Kosovo exhibited the lowest performance, ranking 76th in mathematics, 76th in science, and 75th in reading, followed closely by North Macedonia, securing the 68th position in mathematics, 63rd in science, and 67th in reading (OECD, 2018). These scores, assessed among 79 countries, offer valuable insights into the educational landscapes of these nations, emphasising prevalent weaknesses in educational performance. In this vein, Bosnia and Herzegovina (43.6%) and Bulgaria (43.3%) report nearly identical satisfaction levels with education. This suggests relatively positive perceptions of their educational systems. Kosovo (30.0%) follows with the satisfaction level, indicating overall dissatisfaction with education. However, North Macedonia (22.0%) reports the lowest satisfaction level regarding education, pointing to potential issues or concerns within their educational institutions.

In general, all countries of the region have shown low level of satisfaction with employment. Among them, Bulgaria (32.8%) reports the highest satisfaction level with employment, indicating positive employment perceptions or experiences. Kosovo (16.1%) and North Macedonia (16.0%) show nearly identical levels of satisfaction with employment, which may suggest similar labour market conditions. In contrast, Bosnia and Herzegovina (13.6%) has the lowest reported satisfaction level with employment, indicating potential employment-related challenges or concerns.

Satisfaction with the administration is very low across all countries of the region. The highest level of satisfaction is reported in Bulgaria (28.3%), followed by Kosovo (19.9%). Conversely, Bosnia and Herzegovina (13.6%) and North Macedonia (13.0%) have nearly identical, and the lowest, satisfaction levels with the administration. This might point to shared concerns or challenges related to governance and administration in these countries.

Rate your level of (dis)satisfaction with the country's public services

	Bulgaria		Bosnia and H.		Kosovo		North Macedonia	
	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied	Satisfied
Culture	3.5%	42.0%	7.7%	34.9%	13.9%	30.6%	1.0%	21.0%
Health	0.5%	27.8%	5.4%	22.8%	9.6%	24.2%	1.0%	15.0%
Youth	1.5%	19.0%	4.7%	19.4%	15.2%	28.1%	2.0%	29.0%
Environment	1.0%	27.8%	8.2%	31.2%	7.1%	18.5%	2.0%	13.0%
Education	3.8%	39.5%	8.7%	34.9%	7.8%	22.2%	3.0%	19.0%
Employment	2.3%	30.5%	2.8%	10.8%	4.0%	12.1%	5.0%	11.0%
Administration	2.3%	26.0%	2.8%	10.8%	5.1%	14.8%	2.0%	11.0%

In essence, the prevailing dissatisfaction with education across all countries may foster a sense of alienation, compelling individuals to seek alternative ideologies or sources and spaces of empowerment. This inclination potentially renders them more susceptible to radicalisation. Concurrently, economic dissatisfaction serves as a catalyst for frustration and discontent, creating fertile ground for radicalisation as individuals explore alternative solutions beyond established systems. Conversely, dissatisfaction with the administration plays a pivotal role in eroding trust in institutions, potentially heightening susceptibility to radical ideologies promising alternative forms of governance.

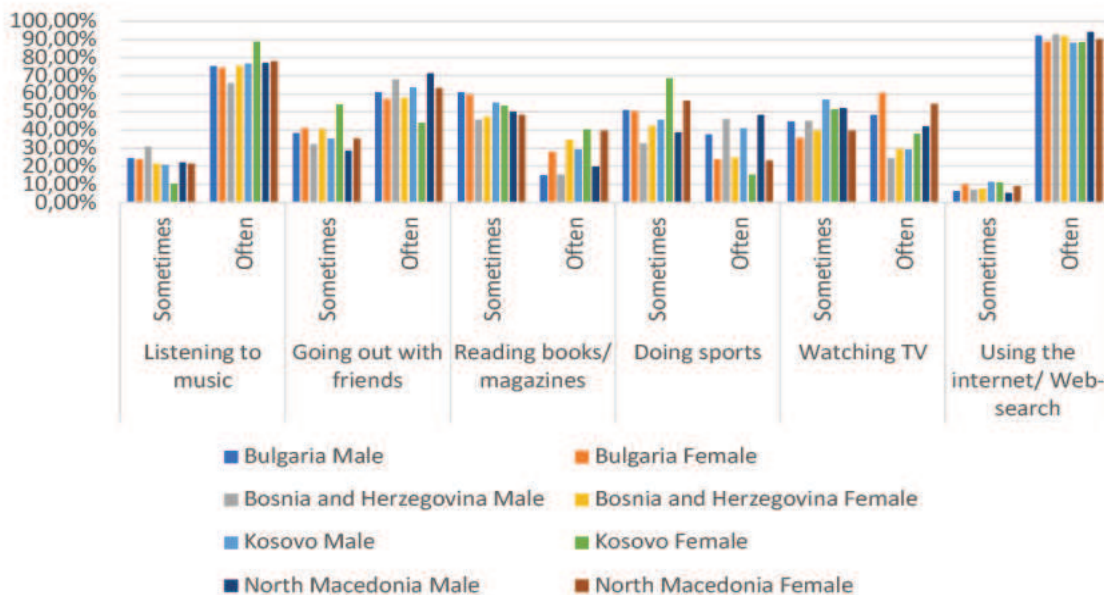
EDUCATION, CULTURE AND LEISURE OPPORTUNITIES

Analysing the combined percentages of respondents who engage in various leisure activities, a distinct pattern emerges across the four countries. In terms of listening to music, all respondents boast remarkably high percentages, with North Macedonia leading at 100%, closely followed by Bulgaria (99.3%), Kosovo (98.8%), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (97.0%). Similarly, the trend continues for going out with friends, where Bosnia and Herzegovina records the highest percentage at 99.3%, trailed by North Macedonia (99.0%), Kosovo (98.5%) and Bulgaria (97.8%).

Examining sports engagement, all four countries exhibit substantial percentages, with Kosovo leading at 84.6%, closely trailed by North Macedonia (83.0%) and Bulgaria (81.3%). Bosnia and Herzegovina reports the lowest percentage in this category at 72.0%.

In the realm of Internet usage and web search, all four countries showcase exceptionally high percentages, with Bosnia and Herzegovina leading at 99.8%, closely followed by Kosovo (99.5%), North Macedonia (99.0%), and Bulgaria (98.8%).

Figure 24. Leisure activities



Across Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and North Macedonia, several noteworthy commonalities in activity preferences among males and females emerge. Firstly, the love for music transcends gender boundaries in all four countries, with more than 90% of both genders engaging in music-related activities sometimes and often. The widespread affinity for music signifies its universal appeal as a leisure activity. Moreover, socialising by going out with friends is another shared interest among genders in these nations, marking more than 90% participation for both males and females sometimes and often. While there are slight variations, with males tending to engage slightly more often in most cases, the overall trend suggests a common inclination for social activities.

Watching TV is another widespread activity, with more than 90% participation for both genders sometimes and often, except in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the engagement is slightly lower at 69.5% for both genders. Additionally, using the Internet for web searches is a common practice in all four countries, with almost 100% participation for both genders sometimes and often. Although there are minor differences in gender distribution, the overall trend indicates active participation in this digital pursuit by both males and females.

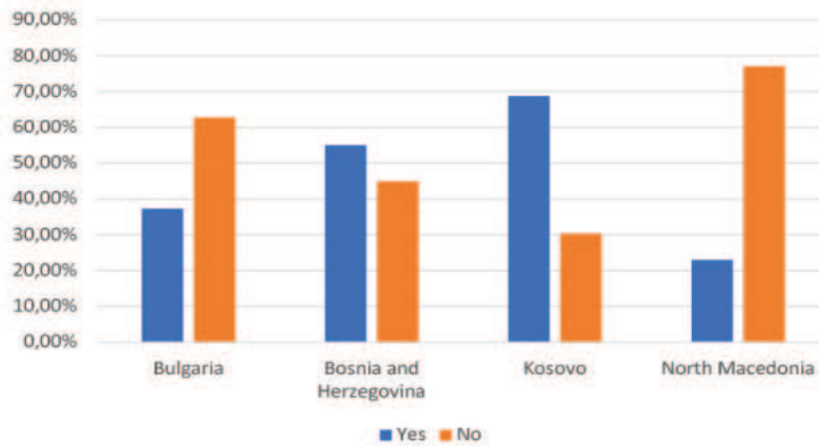
In the realm of reading books and magazines, Bulgaria stands out as a country where females engage in reading sometimes at 56.6%, and females from Kosovo read often at 40.3%, the highest among both genders in these activities. In summary, music, socialising, TV, and web searches emerge as commonalities across the four countries, while reading preferences show some gender-specific variations, particularly in Bulgaria and Kosovo.

How often do you conduct each of these activities?

	Bulgaria		Bosnia and Herzegovina		Kosovo		North Macedonia	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Listening to music								
Sometimes	24.5%	24.0%	31.0%	21.6%	20.8%	10.5%	22.1%	21.4%
Often	75.5%	74.5%	66.1%	75.3%	76.7%	89.0%	77.0%	78.1%
Going out with friends								
Sometimes	38.5%	40.9%	32.2%	40.8%	35.2%	54.2%	28.6%	35.4%
Often	60.9%	57.2%	67.8%	58.0%	63.5%	44.1%	71.4%	63.1%
Reading books/ magazines								
Sometimes	60.9%	59.6%	45.9%	47.5%	55.1%	53.5%	50.2%	48.5%
Often	15.1%	27.9%	15.3%	34.5%	29.1%	40.3%	19.7%	39.7%
Doing sports								
Sometimes	51.0%	50.5%	32.7%	42.5%	45.9%	68.6%	38.7%	56.2%
Often	37.5%	24.0%	46.2%	24.8%	40.9%	15.5%	48.5%	23.2%
Watching TV								
Sometimes	44.8%	35.6%	45.0%	39.8%	56.7%	51.5%	52.0%	39.7%
Often	48.4%	60.6%	24.6%	29.7%	29.3%	37.9%	42.1%	54.6%
Using the Internet/ Web search								
Sometimes	6.3%	10.1%	7.0%	7.8%	11.4%	11.0%	5.4%	9.2%
Often	92.2%	88.9%	93.0%	91.8%	88.0%	88.5%	94.1%	90.3%

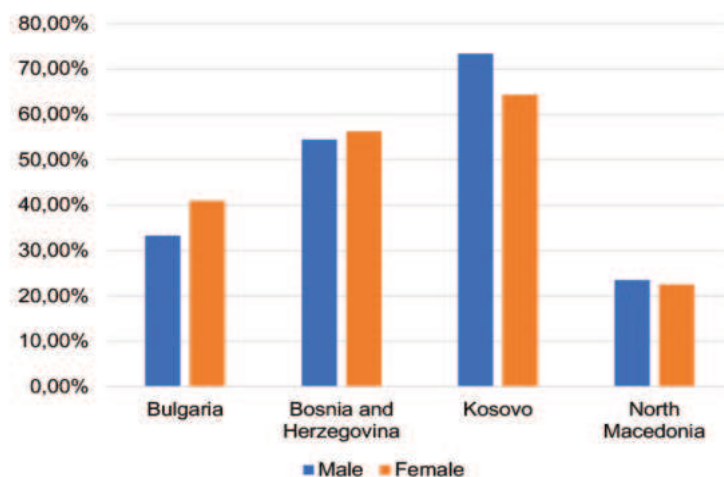
When it comes to volunteering, Kosovo (68.8%) boasts the highest percentage of respondents, showcasing a strong culture of community engagement. Bosnia and Herzegovina follows closely with the second-highest percentage at 55.0%, indicating a considerable level of volunteerism. Bulgaria records a lower percentage at 37.3%, while North Macedonia has the lowest percentage of involvement in volunteering work at 23.0%.

Figure 25. Involvement in volunteering work



In terms of gender differences, the engagement rates in volunteering work exhibit interesting patterns across the surveyed countries. In Bulgaria, females show a slightly higher engagement rate (40.9%) than males (33.3%), a trend that carries over to Bosnia and Herzegovina (female 56.3%, male 54.4%). However, a distinctive gender dynamic unfolds in Kosovo, where, despite high engagement rates for both genders, males (73.4%) are significantly more involved in volunteering or unpaid work than females (64.3%). Similarly, in North Macedonia, males (23.5%) demonstrate slightly higher engagement in volunteering compared to females (22.5%).

Figure 26. Voluntary work



On the flip side, intriguing patterns in volunteering emerge when considering age groups among participants in this research. The highest percentage of respondents engaged in voluntary work in Kosovo (67.5%) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (54.7%) falls within the 19-25 age group, whereas in Bulgaria (47.9%) and North Macedonia (39.8%), it aligns with the 25-30 age group.

Respondents who have volunteered

	Bulgaria	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo	North Macedonia
15- 18 years old	14.1%	17.9%	16.5%	26.1%
19- 25 years old	38.0%	54.7%	67.5%	34.1%
26-30 years old	47.9%	26.9%	15.6%	39.8%

On the other hand, Bosnia and Herzegovina records the highest percentage of respondents (50.0%) participating in volunteering public activities in the local community, showcasing a moderate community engagement. Kosovo (32.4%) and North Macedonia (32.0%) exhibit almost identical percentages, reflecting a moderate level of community involvement. In contrast, Bulgaria reports the lowest percentage (16.3%), indicating a comparatively lower participation rate. Respondents in Bosnia and Herzegovina (41.4%) demonstrate the highest participation in supporting vulnerable groups, emphasising a strong commitment to social responsibility. Kosovo (29.8%) and North Macedonia (26.0%) display relatively similar percentages, suggesting a moderate involvement in assisting these populations. Bulgaria reports the lowest percentage (15.5%) in this category, indicating a lesser degree of engagement in supporting these vulnerable groups.

Moreover, as illustrated in the table below, the research findings have revealed that the majority of respondents who have volunteered across all countries of the region have either voted in all or the majority of elections. This correlation holds true across participants, irrespective of their gender.

Respondents who have volunteered

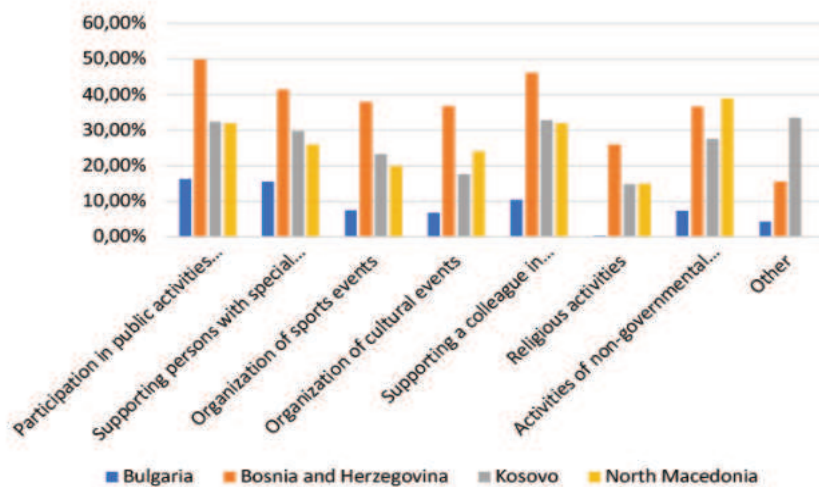
	Bulgaria		Bosnia and Herzegovina		Kosovo		North Macedonia	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
In all elections in which I had the right to vote	32.8%	30.9%	53.3%	55.9%	39.8%	41.4%	43.5%	28.6%
Majority of elections	21.3%	40.7%	17.8%	10.3%	10.7%	6.8%	13.0%	19.0%
Limited number of elections	16.4%	7.4%	4.4%	6.6%	2.9%	6.8%	13.0%	7.1%
Never	9.8%	11.1%	6.7%	8.1%	30.1%	27.1%	17.4%	19.0%
I do not have the right to vote	19.7%	9.9%	16.7%	18.4%	8.7%	13.5%	10.9%	26.2%
Don't know	0.0%	0.0%	1.1%	0.7%	6.8%	4.5%	2.2%	0.0%

The research data has revealed a low level of participation in sports events among respondents. Bosnia and Herzegovina stands out with the highest percentage (37.9%) of respondents engaged in organising sports events, reflecting a moderately pronounced interest in sports-related

community activities. Kosovo (23.3%) and North Macedonia (20.0%) exhibit comparable percentages, indicating a relatively low involvement in organising sports events. Bulgaria reports the lowest percentage (7.5%) in this category, highlighting a lower level of engagement in sports event organisation. Respondents in Bosnia and Herzegovina (36.8%) are most involved in organising cultural events, emphasising a significant interest in cultural initiatives within the community. North Macedonia (24.0%) follows with the second-highest percentage, while Kosovo (17.6%) records a slightly lower level of participation. Bulgaria reports the lowest percentage (6.8%) in this category, indicating a comparatively lower engagement in organising cultural events.

In general respondents across all countries have reported a low level of participation in religious practices. In this regard, respondents in Bosnia and Herzegovina (25.9%) have reported the highest level of participation. Kosovo (14.9%) and North Macedonia (15.0%) exhibit almost identical percentages, indicating a moderate level of participation in religious activities. Bulgaria reports the lowest percentage (0.3%) in this category, highlighting a notably lower engagement in religious activities. In regard to participation in social activities, respondents in North Macedonia (39.0%) are most engaged in NGO activities, showcasing a significant commitment to NGOs. Bosnia and Herzegovina (36.6%) follows closely with the second-highest percentage, indicating a moderate involvement in NGO-related initiatives. Kosovo (27.5%) reports a noteworthy level of engagement. Bulgaria reports the lowest percentage (7.3%) in this category, indicating a comparatively lower involvement in NGO activities.

Figure 27. Involvement in voluntary activities



Certainly, gender breakdowns in volunteering work demonstrate notable variations across all countries. Females generally exhibit higher involvement in public activities in the local communities across all countries. Bosnia and Herzegovina stands out with the highest participation for both males (49.5%) and females (50.4%), highlighting a gender-balanced engagement. Bulgaria follows with males (42.6%) and females (40.9%) participating actively. Kosovo reports slightly lower male (39.1%) and female (25.7%) participation rates, indicating a gender gap in involvement. North Macedonia has the lowest male (39.1%) and the lowest female participation rate (23.8%). In addition, females consistently demonstrate higher engagement in supporting persons with special needs/the

elderly/children across all countries. Bosnia and Herzegovina reports the highest female participation rate (47.5%), showcasing a significant commitment to supporting vulnerable groups. North Macedonia has the lowest male participation rate (19.6%), indicating a gender disparity in involvement.

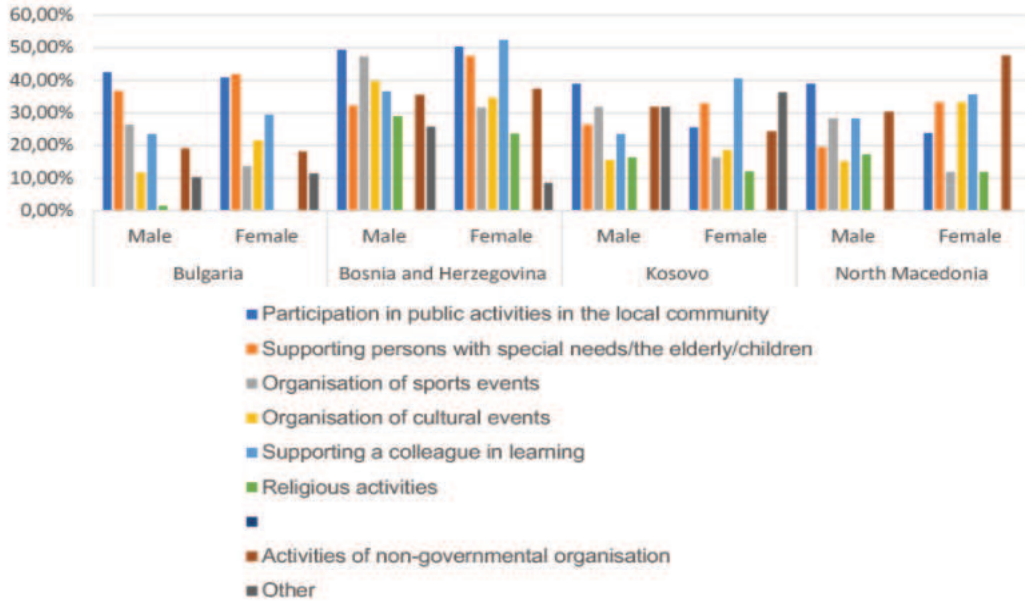
Bosnia and Herzegovina leads with the highest participation rate for both males (47.3%) and females (31.7%) in reflecting a strong interest in organising sports events. North Macedonia reports the lowest male (28.3%) and female (11.9%) participation rates, suggesting a noticeable gender difference with males being more actively involved in sports event organisation across all countries. Females tend to have higher participation rates in organisation of cultural events in all countries. Bosnia and Herzegovina stands out with the highest participation for both males (39.8%) and females (34.8%), emphasising a gender-balanced interest in cultural initiatives. North Macedonia reports the lowest male participation rate (15.5%), while Kosovo has the lowest female participation rate (18.6%), indicating variations in gender engagement in cultural events.

Religious activities exhibit significant gender differences, with males participating more actively. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, both genders have relatively high participation, with males at 29.0% and females at 23.7%. Bulgaria has the lowest male participation (1.5%), and females show no participation. Both genders exhibit relatively equal participation in activities of NGOs across all countries. Bosnia and Herzegovina has the highest participation for both males (35.5%) and females (37.4%), indicating a balanced engagement in NGOs. Bulgaria has the lowest male participation (19.1%) and female participation rate (18.2%), suggesting a minor gender difference in involvement. When it comes to the participation in other activities, Kosovo reports the highest participation rates for males (31.8%) and females (36.4%), indicating a relatively higher interest in unspecified activities. On the other hand, North Macedonia does not report any participation in this category, suggesting a lack of engagement in unspecified activities.

In which of the following did you volunteer?

	Bulgaria		Bosnia and Herzegovina		Kosovo		North Macedonia	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Participation in public activities in the local community	42.6%	40.9%	49.5%	50.4%	39.1%	25.7%	39.1%	23.8%
Supporting persons with special needs/the elderly/children	36.8%	42.0%	32.3%	47.5%	26.4%	32.9%	19.6%	33.3%
Organisation of sports events	26.5%	13.6%	47.3%	31.7%	31.8%	16.4%	28.3%	11.9%
Organisation of cultural events	11.8%	21.6%	39.8%	34.8%	15.5%	18.6%	15.2%	33.3%
Supporting a colleague in learning	23.5%	29.5%	36.6%	52.5%	23.6%	40.7%	28.3%	35.7%
Religious activities	1.5%	0.0%	29.0%	23.7%	16.4%	12.1%	17.4%	11.9%
Activities of non-governmental organisation	19.1%	18.2%	35.5%	37.4%	31.8%	24.3%	30.4%	47.6%
Other	10.3%	11.4%	25.8%	8.6%	31.8%	36.4%	0.0%	0.0%

Figure 28. Volunteering activities



TRANSNATIONAL DYNAMICS

The exploration of transnational dynamics delves into the perspectives of respondents regarding various facets of the diaspora’s impact on the regional countries. The Bosnian diaspora encompasses approximately three million emigrants of Bosnian origin across diverse ethnicities and their descendants, spanning countries like the US, United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, Australia, and beyond (Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2009). Approximately three million ethnic Bulgarians are dispersed globally, predominantly in Europe, including neighbouring nations like Romania, Greece, Serbia, Turkey, and North Macedonia. Moreover, sizeable Bulgarian diaspora communities are found in France, Germany, Spain, Argentina, Italy, Russia, and the United Kingdom, with an estimated 200,000 in the USA, 50,000 in Canada, 20,000 in Australia, and 20,000 in Brazil (Family Search, n.d).

Kosovo, with a resident population of 1.8 million, boasts a substantial diaspora of around 800,000 individuals, mainly situated in Western Europe and the US. Notably, according to the Central Bank of Kosovo in 2022, the diaspora contributed over three billion Euros to the country, significantly influencing Kosovo’s economic landscape (Republic of Kosovo, 2023). On the other hand, the EUROSTAT data shows that as of 1 January 2019, reveals the presence of 102,000 North Macedonian individuals in Germany, 66,600 in Switzerland, 63,600 in Italy, 23,400 in Austria, and 12,300 in Slovenia. The data also underscores that there were 156,900 Macedonian citizens in the EU in 2010, a number that increased to 220,400 in 2019. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the likelihood of underestimation in these figures (Georgieva et al., 2023).

In general, Kosovo emerges as a country where a significant proportion of respondents (77%) believe that the diaspora has a notable effect on society at large. This sentiment is echoed, albeit to a lesser extent, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where 63.6% share a similar perception. In contrast, Bulgaria (16.5%) and North

Macedonia (15.0%) show markedly lower percentages of respondents attributing societal impact to the diaspora.

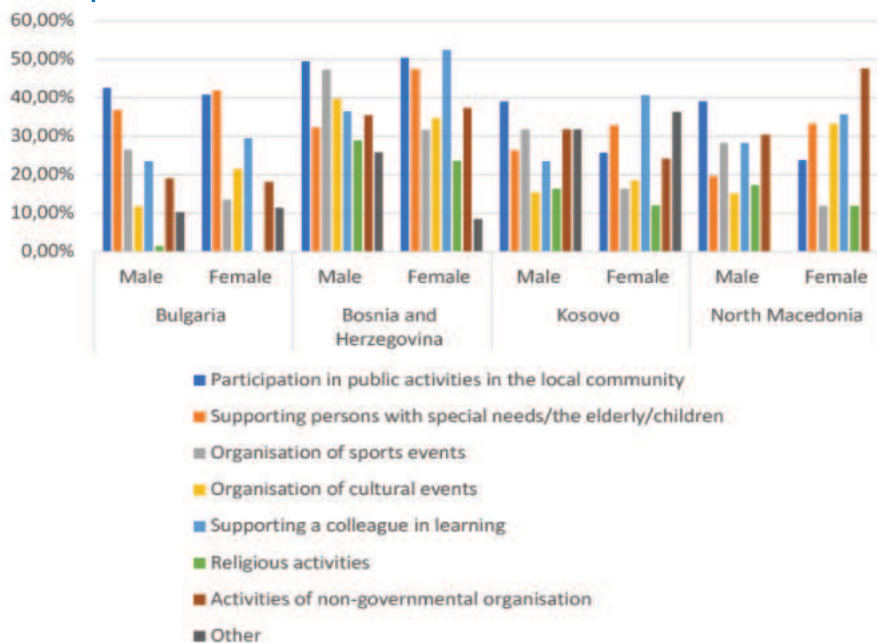
Examining the personal sphere on perceptions of the diaspora affecting their individual lives, Kosovo again leads with the highest percentage, which is relatively moderate overall at 32.6%. Bosnia and Herzegovina follows closely with 28.5%, while North Macedonia (21.0%) records a moderate level of agreement. Bulgaria, at 13.8%, demonstrates the lowest percentage among the four countries in this category. Therefore, despite the influence that the diaspora has in some of these countries, they are not seen as affecting individual lives significantly, which is an interesting finding, either hinting at the decrease of remittances, or a result of the young age of the respondents.

The connection between the diaspora and the resident population is perceived most strongly in Kosovo (75.8%) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (71.0%), suggesting a prevailing belief in the interlinked nature of these communities. Conversely, North Macedonia (31.0%) and Bulgaria (26.8%) exhibit lower percentages, indicative of a perception that the diaspora is less intricately connected to the local population in these countries.

Considering the socioeconomic realm, Kosovo stands out once more, with 82.8% of respondents believing that the diaspora significantly influences the socioeconomic situation. Bosnia and Herzegovina follows with a notable 64.8%. In contrast, North Macedonia (35.0%) and Bulgaria (30.5%) display the lowest percentages, indicating a comparatively subdued perception of the diaspora’s impact on the socioeconomic landscape.

The influence of diaspora on religious life is most pronounced in Bosnia and Herzegovina (21.9%), followed by North Macedonia (18.0%). In Kosovo (9.4%) and Bulgaria (5.1%), the percentages are notably lower, reflecting a perception that the diaspora has a comparatively minor impact on religious aspects in these countries.

Figure 29. Diaspora impact



In summary, Bulgaria stands out for its general perception of a lower impact from the diaspora, suggesting a minimal influence across diverse spheres. This implies that the diaspora's role is perceived as less significant in shaping various aspects of Bulgarian society. On the contrary, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo perceive a more substantial diaspora impact, particularly in societal and socio-economic dimensions. This indicates that the diaspora plays a more pronounced role in shaping these facets of life in these countries. North Macedonia falls in the middle ground, with a moderate impact perceived across different aspects, showcasing a balanced influence of the diaspora.

While gender differences in perception vary across countries, with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo showing more pronounced variations between genders, Bulgaria and North Macedonia exhibit relatively consistent perceptions among males and females. These variations underscore the importance of considering regional contexts and societal dynamics in understanding how individuals perceive the diaspora's impact on their lives and communities.

What do you think?

	Bulgaria		Bosnia and Herzegovina		Kosovo		North Macedonia	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Diaspora in general affects the society								
High	15.1%	11.1%	36.3%	42.3%	39.2%	35.6%	10.8%	13.8%
Extreme	2.6%	4.3%	28.1%	28.1%	43.7%	37.3%	2.9%	3.6%
Diaspora affects your life								
High	10.9%	10.1%	17.0%	17.8%	22.3%	11.6%	13.7%	11.7%
Extreme	3.1%	3.4%	8.2%	13.0%	19.7%	14.7%	7.8%	8.2%
Diaspora is connected to the resident population								
High	25.5%	18.8%	37.4%	39.5%	30.6%	34.8%	20.1%	20.4%
Extreme	3.6%	5.8%	33.3%	31.2%	49.7%	37.5%	11.8%	9.7%
Diaspora affects the socioeconomic situation								
High	20.8%	22.1%	27.9%	36.0%	27.7%	25.9%	18.6%	19.9%
Extreme	10.4%	7.7%	34.3%	30.4%	66.7%	49.1%	16.7%	14.8%
Diaspora affects the religious life								
High	4.7%	3.8%	11.1%	12.9%	6.3%	4.0%	12.7%	11.7%
Extreme	0.0%	1.4%	9.4%	9.3%	6.3%	2.2%	7.4%	4.6%



Conclusion

The research findings across the surveyed Balkan countries reveal distinct dynamics in the perceptions of the most important drivers, reflecting the socioeconomic and political contexts of each state. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Kosovo, respondents consider politics, economics, and religion as the most influential drivers. In contrast, Bulgaria places a higher emphasis on economics, territorial inequalities (safety), and politics as the primary drivers.

Moreover, the highest level of concern about radicalisation is expressed by respondents in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and North Macedonia, where a significant portion of the respondents identifies with the Muslim faith. Conversely, in Bulgaria, which has a smaller Muslim population, the concern is comparatively lower, since it has had only one foreign terrorist fighter. Also, across all countries, female respondents consistently demonstrate a higher collective concern compared to their male counterparts.

Examining responses related to the prevention of radicalisation across all countries, respondents consistently prioritise key factors. Economic opportunities and employment, political rights and representation, and the equal distribution of services and wealth within their respective countries emerge as the most critical aspects. This indicates a shared understanding among respondents across diverse countries in the Balkans regarding the key elements in preventing radicalisation, emphasising the importance of socioeconomic and political factors in shaping these perceptions.

Against this background, analysing the drivers of political grievances in terms of trust in various institutions across surveyed Balkan countries provides nuanced insights. In terms of trust in state government bodies, Kosovo stands out with the highest level, indicating a significant degree of confidence in the government. Following closely are Bulgaria and Bosnia and Herzegovina, while North Macedonia trails slightly behind. Shifting the focus to trust in local government bodies, Bulgaria takes the lead, signifying a notable level of trust in the local government. Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina follow, with North Macedonia showing a slightly lower level of trust in local authorities. Examining trust in law enforcement, Kosovo demonstrates notably high levels of trust in the police, followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria and North Macedonia. Trust in the army is highest in Kosovo, with North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina closely behind, while Bulgaria lags in this aspect. Turning to trust in the judiciary, Kosovo emerges as the leader, followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria and North Macedonia.

Trust in the media is highest in North Macedonia, with Bulgaria following closely, while Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina exhibit lower levels of trust in media outlets. Notably, trust in religious leaders, which can have positive and negative implications, depending on the nature of the messages disseminated by them, is high in Kosovo, followed by North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, with Bulgaria reporting the lowest level of trust in this domain. When it comes to trust in political parties,

respondents express a low level of trust, with North Macedonia recording the highest, followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, while Bulgaria reports the lowest level of trust in political parties. Trust in NGOs is relatively high in Kosovo and North Macedonia, followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina and Bulgaria, indicating a more consistent level of trust across these institutions.

These findings highlight distinct patterns in the satisfaction levels with employment and administration across the surveyed countries. Bulgaria stands out with a relatively positive outlook on employment, suggesting a more favourable employment environment. In contrast, Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina exhibit significantly lower satisfaction levels, indicating potential challenges or concerns in the realm of employment.

Moreover, the satisfaction with the administration reflects varying perceptions of government practices. Bulgaria leads in this aspect, suggesting a positive view of administrative practices. Kosovo follows closely, indicating a relatively favourable perception of the administration. On the other hand, Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia share nearly identical and the lowest satisfaction levels with the administration, signalling a less positive assessment of government practices in these countries.

This analysis underscores notable variations in job satisfaction levels among respondents across the surveyed countries, particularly in relation to the driver of economic deprivation. Bulgaria emerges as a leader in job satisfaction, with respondents expressing quite high levels of contentment with their employment situations. Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina follow closely, indicating substantial satisfaction with their jobs, whereas respondents from North Macedonia have shown slightly lower satisfaction.

In terms of the religious driver, Kosovo consistently shows higher percentages of individuals identifying as true believers, indicating a more pronounced religious orientation. In contrast, Bulgaria often records higher percentages of respondents identifying as non-religious or expressing doubts about their beliefs. Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Macedonia, fall between these two extremes, illustrating a diverse spectrum of beliefs and attitudes toward religion among the respondents in this research.

Examining the relationship between religiosity and religious belonging, respondents who claim to be true believers and fully accept the teachings of their faith display the highest percentage among Muslim believers in Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Regarding gender differences in religiosity, the highest level among male respondents is observed among Muslim believers in North Macedonia and Kosovo, followed by Catholic believers in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Among female respondents, the highest level of religiosity is noted among Protestant believers in Bulgaria, followed by Muslim believers in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Furthermore, the research suggests that among respondents, there is not a distinct correlation between the level of religiosity and the perception of religion as a driver of radicalisation. Additionally, the majority of believers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and North Macedonia agree that religion serves as a driver of VE.

The research data reveals notable disparities in the perceptions of the influence of religious communities across the four countries. Bosnia and Herzegovina stands out with a substantial level of

perceived influence among respondents, indicating a strong impact of religious communities in shaping societal dynamics. Kosovo follows closely with a noteworthy level of perceived influence. In contrast, North Macedonia registers lower perceptions, and Bulgaria records significantly lower perceptions, suggesting a comparatively diminished impact of religious communities in this country. Conversely, when considering the impact of religious communities in relation to religious affiliation, the highest level has been noted among respondents from the small Catholic community in Bulgaria and the Protestant community in Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia. However, for more extensive religions, the most significant impact of religious communities has been observed among respondents belonging to Islam in North Macedonia, followed by those in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. Furthermore, Orthodox Christians in Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia have also reported a notable influence.

Contrastingly, an additional discovery highlights that, excluding Bulgaria, respondents across all countries in the region who have been involved in physical violence with young people holding divergent political or religious perspectives exhibit the highest levels of trust in religious leaders among all institutions. Particularly, this pattern is notable in Kosovo and North Macedonia. Notably, all respondents in Kosovo who have taken part in violent conflicts with the police also express the highest trust in religious leaders. These findings suggest a potential influence of religious leaders on their propensity for violent actions or indicate a tendency to seek guidance from these leaders after engaging in violence.

In the context of attending religious services, Bosnia and Herzegovina exhibits the highest percentage, highlighting a significant portion of young individuals participating in regular religious services. North Macedonia closely follows, showing a notable level of attendance, while Kosovo trails behind with a comparatively lower frequency of attendance. Bulgaria records the lowest percentage, indicating the least frequent attendance at religious services among the surveyed countries.

Concerning territorial inequalities, as perceived through the safety sentiments of respondents, Kosovo and Bulgaria register high percentages, indicating a strong sense of safety at both the neighbourhood and national levels. In contrast, Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia show a lower percentage of respondents reporting feeling safe, suggesting a comparatively lower sense of safety in these regions. Yet, in settings where safety perceptions are comparatively diminished, particularly in urban areas and among females, a noticeable vulnerability becomes apparent. This heightened vulnerability has the potential to serve as a catalyst for radicalisation, as extremist groups often exploit these insecurities to disseminate their narratives of belonging and purpose.

All countries in the region boast extensive Internet coverage. Notably, male respondents across all surveyed nations tend to spend more time on the Internet than their female counterparts. Communication through popular Internet platforms such as WhatsApp, Viber, Skype and Messenger is widespread. The prevalent use of VPNs in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, accompanied by an awareness of online privacy tools, is significant, indicating a nuanced comprehension of Internet security. However, this nuanced understanding does not necessarily translate into widespread VPN usage. The diverse motivations for VPN use, such as protecting one's location on social media and

accessing regionally restricted content, contribute to the complexity of the online landscape. These factors, combined with the varied motivations within the “Something Else” category, underscore the intricate nature of the online environment and its potential role in shaping perceptions that may impact susceptibility to radicalisation. In this context, it should be emphasised that a noteworthy proportion of VPN users across all countries have been involved in violence, particularly in their neighbourhoods, clubs, cafes, sports halls, or schools and universities.

Across all countries, the love for music transcends gender boundaries, with over 90% of both genders engaging in music-related activities sometimes and often. Concerning volunteering, Kosovo and Bosnia exhibit a high level of voluntarism, followed by Bulgaria with considerably lower rates and North Macedonia with the lowest level of engagement in voluntarism.

Kosovo stands out as a country where a significant proportion of respondents believe that the diaspora has a notable impact on society at large. This sentiment is echoed, albeit to a lesser extent, in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In contrast, Bulgaria and North Macedonia show markedly lower percentages of respondents attributing societal impact to the diaspora.

On the flip side, when delving into voting behaviour, the observed low levels of political participation among respondents, particularly pointing to political apathy among the youth, align with a general lack of trust in state institutions and political parties. This disengagement from mainstream political processes creates a vulnerable space where individuals become more receptive to radical ideologies, driven by a sense of marginalisation or disenchantment. Adding complexity to the landscape, the higher trust in religious leaders in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina introduces the potential influence of religious institutions, further shaping perceptions and ideologies. This influence, in turn, contributes to the overall susceptibility to radicalisation in these regions. An intriguing revelation within this context is the pronounced involvement in physical violence among consistent or frequent voters with other people of different political and religious affiliations, especially in Bulgaria and North Macedonia. This group of respondents also displays a notable engagement in violent conflicts with the police across all surveyed countries, underscoring a palpable presence of political and religious militancy in the region.

Fundamentally, the widespread discontent with education in all countries could cultivate feelings of alienation, prompting individuals to explore alternative ideologies or sources of empowerment. This inclination may increase their vulnerability to radicalisation. Simultaneously, economic dissatisfaction acts as a catalyst for frustration and discontent, creating fertile ground for radicalisation as individuals seek alternative solutions beyond established systems. Conversely, dissatisfaction with the administration plays a crucial role in eroding trust in institutions, potentially amplifying susceptibility to radical ideologies that promise alternative forms of governance.



Recommendations

NATIONAL AUTHORITIES

- a. Invest in capacity-building and transparency measures to bolster public trust in state institutions, including the enhancement of E-governance across all countries in the region.
- b. Prioritise economic reforms that foster job creation, entrepreneurship, and equal economic opportunities, addressing concerns voiced by respondents across all countries.
- c. Integrate education on religions and their history into education curricula to enhance mutual understanding, religious tolerance, and cohabitation.
- d. Formulate policies aimed at strengthening the secular character of states, with the objective of preserving religious pluralism, safeguarding individual freedoms, and preventing religious tensions and extremism.
- e. Develop education policies to mitigate religious, ethnic, and political militantism, with the goal of mitigating the potential for conflicts, promoting tolerance, enhancing social cohesion, and bolstering the protection of human rights and societal security.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES

- a. Formulate policies aimed at addressing urban-rural socioeconomic disparities and territorial inequalities at the local level, promoting inclusive development, and ensuring equal opportunities for all citizens.
- b. Develop cultural and sports infrastructure while providing opportunities for extracurricular and innovative activities essential for nurturing holistic development, fostering community engagement, promoting youth development, reducing delinquency, and strengthening social inclusion.
- c. Facilitate interfaith dialogues and collaborations to enhance understanding and cooperation among religious leaders of different faiths. Encourage joint initiatives that promote shared values, peace, and tolerance, while urging religious leaders to promote positive narratives countering extremist ideologies.

CIVIC COMMUNITY

- a. Implement initiatives that promote youth volunteering, political and social engagement, facilitating their participation in decision-making processes at both national and local levels, with a focus on rural areas, leveraging digital tools for enhanced outreach.

- b. Establish educational programmes targeting youth to counteract religious, ethnic, and political militantism, utilising digital tools as effective resources for this purpose.
- c. Involve religious leaders and leverage their influence for promoting peace and tolerance among their congregations.
- d. Establish youth-friendly startup incubators, providing the necessary infrastructure and support to facilitate young entrepreneurs' access to capital and professional resources.
- e. Design programmes to expose youth to a diverse range of career options, particularly in the green economy, vocational skills, and artificial intelligence.
- f. Formulate comprehensive strategies and plans to engage the private business sector, national and local authorities, and international donors in supporting and fostering these programmes.



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What drives youth to violent extremism? How can they turn from being “the problem” into “the key” for a solution? By engaging youth in the research, CONNEKT will raise young voices to become stakeholders in the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism.

CONNEKT is a research and action project which analyses seven potential radicalisation factors among youth aged between 12 and 30: religion, digitalisation, economic deprivation, territorial inequalities, transnational dynamics, socio-political demands, and educational, cultural and leisure opportunities and evaluates them on three levels: transnational/state, community and individual.

Its aim is to establish a multi-dimensional map of drivers of extremism among youth in Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Bulgaria, and to identify the interplay between them. Based on the empirical research findings, the project will end up recommending tools and measures for the prevention of violent extremism from a social and community perspective both for the regions of study and the European Union.

Under the coordination of the European Institute of the Mediterranean, (IEMed), the project gathers a multidisciplinary Consortium involving 14 partners from MENA, the EU and the Balkans.



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