MULTIDIMENSIONAL ASPECTS OF DEMOCRACY AND IDENTITY: YOUTH DIALOGUE AND LEARNING IN THE TIME OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC
MULTIYOU

Montenegrin Pan-European Union

Project: "Multidimensional aspects of Democracy and Identity: Youth Dialogue and Learning in the time of COVID-19 pandemic (MULTIYOU)"

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Partners: Observatory for Children and Youth Rights (Albania),
Pan-European Union of (Bosnia and Herzegovina), and
Centre for Foreign Policy (Serbia)

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Preparation of this brochure is based on the conducted questionnaire and the organized Regional summer school for Youth**.**

Podgorica, July 2021

CONTENT

I. INTRODUCTION

The general objective of the fourth Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) Open Call for Project Proposals co-financed by the European Union, in 2020, is to support civil society in the Western Balkans to foster reconciliation and regional youth cooperation, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. In line with that context, the general objective of this project - "Multidimensional aspects of Democracy and Identity: Youth Dialogue and Learning in the time of COVID-19 pandemic" (MULTIYOU), is to challenge youth issues related to democratic and identity inherited narratives in the time of COVID-19 pandemic by providing safe environment for intercultural dialogue, learning and cooperating among diverse peers from multicultural communities within named Contracting Parties from the Western Balkan region.

The MULTIYOU project is supported by the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) and the European Union (EU), realised by the Montenegrin Pan-European Union (Podgorica, Montenegro) in partnership with the Centre for Foreign Policy (Belgrade, Serbia), The Observatory for Children and Youth Rights (Tirana, Albania) and Pan-European Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina). The duration of the MULTIYOU project is from February 18, to September 17, 2021.

The project specific objectives are as follows:
- to collect data and analyse youth reflections and knowledge about democratic processes, principles and their involvement in the decision making process, ethnical distance, COVID19 pandemic consequences and general directions of youth trends in Western Balkans in related matters;
- to include youth in intercultural dialogue, learning and understanding processes related to democratic culture, multiculturalism, differences concerning the region's past and challenge inherited narratives, multidimensional and complex character of cultures as well as the ability to reflect the own cultural context and other;
- to share experiences, i.e. give comparative examples and good practices in improving youth positions (regional and European);
- to foster reconciliation by enabling cooperation, mobility and exchange among peers;
- to foster dialogue between target youth groups, policy-makers, civil society, NGOs, business, media and other;
- to raise awareness of the concept, policies, practices and benefits for young people to engage more in their societies.

This project has four activities: Google survey; Regional summer school; Brochure, and Web and Social networks.

For the needs of our first activity – Google survey, we have developed an online structured questionnaire. The main goal of this survey was measuring the perception and attitudes of young people from Western Balkans (namely Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia) on issues such as:
- DEMOCRACY AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATIONS
- IDENTITY AND TRUST
- MOBILITY, EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Regional summer school was the key event within the MULTIYOU project. The Regional summer school provided a special ambience, a close, intimate and safe environment that directed young people to discussion and cooperation, provided a long-lasting experience and a change in their attitudes, behaviors and capacities. Through diverse sessions the participants had opportunity to learn and understand the complexity and multidimensional aspects of democracy and identity. The unprivileged/marginalized youth in the Western Balkan region forged new connections, friendships and broaden horizons through the intercultural dialogue with diverse stakeholders.

Specific objectives of the Regional summer school were:
- inclusion of youth in learning and understanding processes related to democratic culture, multiculturalism, differences concerning the region's past and challenge inherited narratives, multidimensional and complex character of cultures as well as the ability to reflect the own cultural context and other;
- provision of comparative examples and good practices in improving youth positions (regional and European);
- fostering reconciliation by enabling cooperation, mobility and exchange among peers;
- fostering dialogue between selected youth, policy-makers, civil society, NGOs, business, media and other;
- raising awareness of the concept, policies, practices and benefits for young people to engage more in their societies.

The participants on the Regional Summer School were young people from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro. The School was organized in hotel Princess, Bar, Montenegro from 10th to 15th June 2021.

Key inputs for creation the Brochure are findings of the questionnaire on youth attitudes towards democracy and European values, identity and trust, and mobility, education and employment and findings from the regional summer school.

II. MULTIYOU GOOGLE SURVEY

The main goal of this survey was measuring the perception and attitudes of young people from Western Balkans (namely Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia) on issues such as:

- **DEMOCRACY AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATIONS**
- **IDENTITY AND TRUST**
- **MOBILITY, EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT**

Based on the regional survey conducted in four different areas of the Western Balkans region (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia), we obtained a sample of 500 respondents. The structure of respondents in percentages by areas is as follows: Albania – 21%, Bosnia and Herzegovina – 29%, Montenegro – 30%, and Serbia – 19%. Out of the total number of respondents, 38% are male and 62% are female, out of which 84% live in urban area, and 16% in rural area. The structure by respondents' age in percentage is: from 18 to 23 – 47%; from 24 to 30 – 40%, and from 31 to 35 – 13%.

1. DEMOCRACY AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

1.1 The most important European values

The EU is founded on six core values that form the basis of European society: respect for human dignity; freedom; democracy; equality; rule of law; respect for human rights, including those of minorities.

The EU values are common to all EU countries and ensure a society in which pluralism, tolerance, justice, solidarity, non-discrimination and equality prevail. They are enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty of European Union. Every country that wants to be part of the EU should respect and nurture these values.

Based on the Youth Survey results, average score by countries are the following.

Table 1. The most important European values

On a scale from 1 to 5 (5 means "the most important") grade importance of these European values for you?	ALBANIA	BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	MONTENEGRO	SERBIA
PEACE AND STABILITY	**4.32**	**4.57**	**4.53**	4.48
DEMOCRACY	4.23	4.15	4.19	4.10
RULE OF LAW	**4.21**	**4.42**	**4.36**	**4.28**
FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS	**4.15**	**4.45**	**4.43**	**4.56**
TOLERANCE	**4.08**	**4.35**	**4.33**	**4.09**
ECONOMIC PROSPERITY	**3.98**	4.48	4.39	4.34

Bearing in mind that the societies covered by the questionnaire seek to become members of the EU, young people recognized and highly rated all European values, and the most highly rated are the **peace and stability**, and **fundamental rights**. Respondents from Montenegro and Bosnia and

Herzegovina rated these two values the most. After these values, economic prosperity was rated the highest (from 4.34 to 4.48), except in Albania where it was rated 3.98.

Figure 1. The most important European values
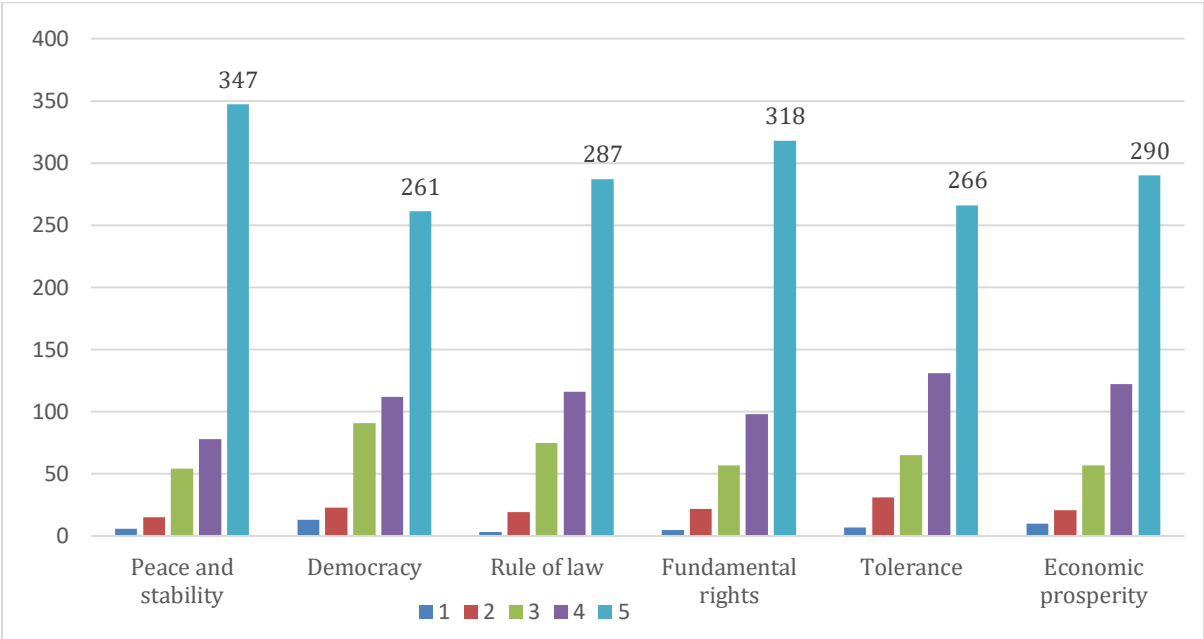
The rule of law (RoL) is one of the very important values when it comes to the process of accession to the European Union. Young people gave the RoL the smallest number of worst scores, while democracy has the lowest number of highest scores. However, the EU accession process seems endless and current member states are doing little to improve that. Indeed some appear to be putting further obstacles in the way and new conditions in the area of democracy and RoL.

1.2. Attitudes on elections

Electoral process is the moment when young people feel the weight and impact that their vote may have.

With regard to their willingness to take part in the electoral process, if it takes place today, almost 80% of respondents stated they would vote.

7% would not go to vote, while about 12% are undecided. According to these data, young people in the Western Balkans are very interested in the election process.

Figure 2. If elections for the national parliament were to be held and you would be eligible to vote, would you go to vote?
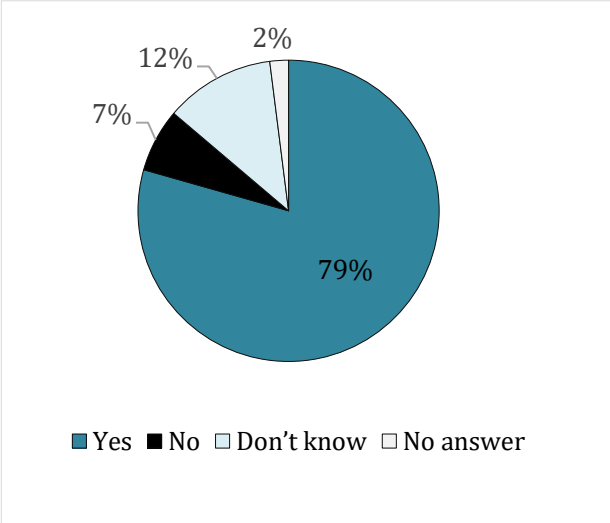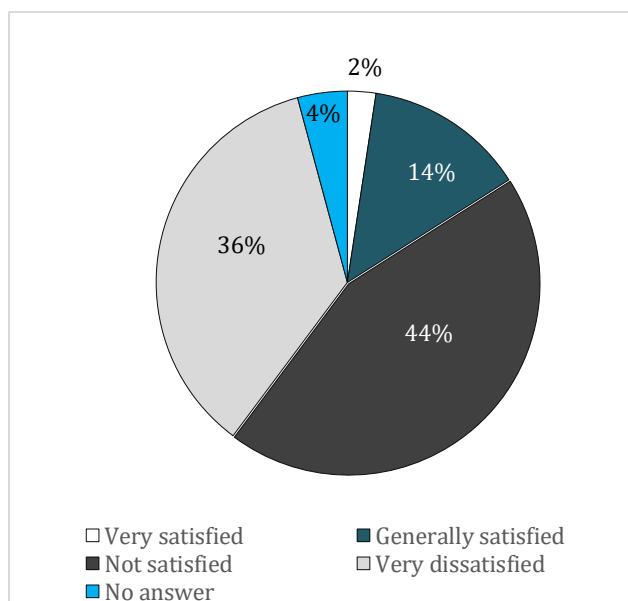
1.3. Attitudes towards state of democracy in the Western Balkans

According to some regional analysis, the degree of democracy in the societies of WB decreases with the strengthening of populism and anti-liberalism, primarily because of the reform fatigue and political polarization, but, above all, as a result of the intensive promotion of the national patriotism.

There is very low level of satisfaction with the state of democracy in the Western Balkan societies (only 2% of respondents are satisfied). 80% of young people are not satisfied or very dissatisfied (88% in RS, 87 in BA, 77% in AL and 70% in ME). Only 16% of respondents are satisfied with the state of democracy in their societies.

Figure 3. In general, how satisfied are you with the state of democracy in your society?

Average scores by societies are the following:

Table 2. Attitudes towards state of democracy in the society

In general, how satisfied are you with the state of democracy in your society? On a scale from 1 to 5 (5 means "the most important")	ALBANIA	BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	MONTENEGRO	SERBIA
Very satisfied	6%	4%	0%	0%
Generally satisfied	12%	7%	**24%**	9%
Not satisfied	**42%**	**44%**	**54%**	**31%**
Very dissatisfied	35%	**43%**	16%	**57%**
No answer	6%	2%	6%	3%

The most positive additutes are in Montenegro – 24% generally are satisfied with the state of democracy in their society. From the other side, the most of very dissatisfied are from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, 57% and 43% respectively.

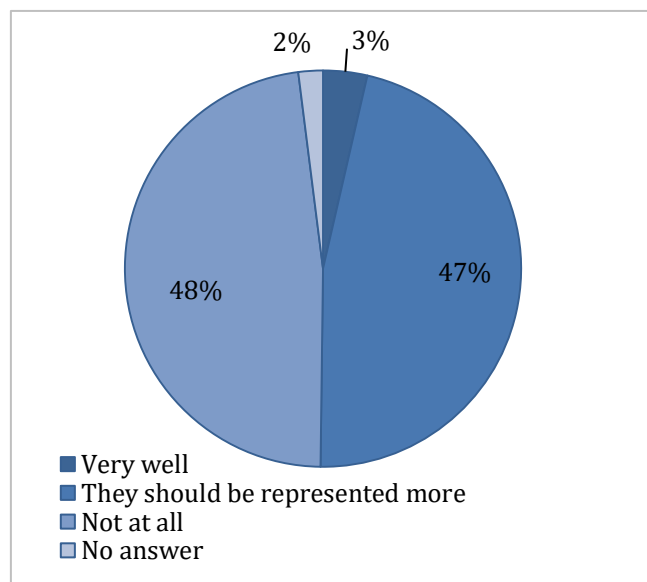## 1.4. Representation of young people's interests in national politics

With regard to youth representation in politics, 48% of young people feel they are not representet at all, while 47% believe they should be represented more. Only 3% of respondents think their interests are very well represented, and 2% didn't answered on this question. In general, young people are dissatisfied with the level of representation of their interests in national politics.

For political systems to be representative, all parts of society must be included. To make a difference in the longer term, it is essential that young people are engaged in formal political processes and have a say in formulating today's and tomorrow's politics. Inclusive political participation is not only a fundamental political and democratic right but also is crucial for building stable and peaceful societies and developing policies that respond to the specific needs of younger generations.

Figure 4. How do you think young people's interests are represented in the national politics?

For young people to be adequately represented in political institutions, processes, and decision-making, and in particular in elections, they must know their rights and be given the necessary knowledge and capacity to participate in a meaningful way at all levels.

When there are obstacles to participating in formal, institutionalized political processes, young people can rapidly feel disempowered. Many tend to believe that their voices are not going to be heard or that they will not be taken seriously even if they are heard. The problem becomes circular as politicians may lose interest in responding to the aspirations of young people if they cannot win their votes. This in turn leads to young people being increasingly excluded from taking part in decision-making, or in debates about key socio-economic and political issues, despite their sensitivity to the demands for social equity and justice, environmental protection and cultural diversity. In new and emerging democracies, the inclusion of young people in formal political processes is important from the start.

1.5. Attitudes towards the EU integration: Do you think your society should join the EU?

An overwhelming majority of respondents (73%) believe that the societies of the WB6 region should join the EU, while 13% are eurosceptics. 12% of young people answered that they don't know, and 2% didn't answered.

The main issue with asking average citizens/young population whether they support integration in the EU is **whether they know what the process of EU integration means and what has to be done in order to achieve** progress.

Young people and citizens often give their opinion not based on knowledge of the process of EU integration and its costs/benefits, but rather on daily politics and other, to this issue, irrelevant influences.
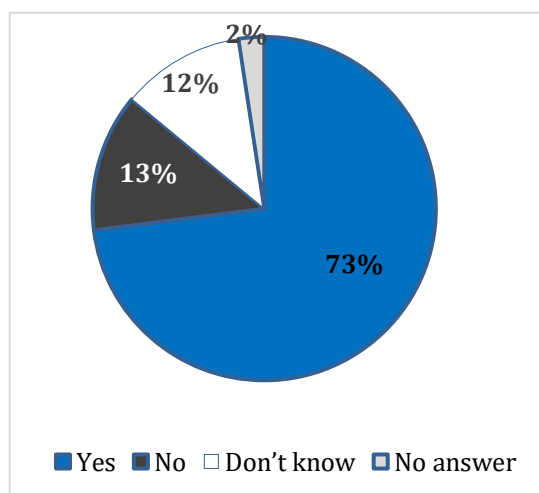
Figure 5. Do you think your society should join the EU?

Legend: ■ Yes ■ No □ Don't know ■ No answer

Table 3. Additutes by the societies in the Western Balkan region

Do you think your society should join the EU?	Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Montenegro	Serbia
Yes	**76%**	**76%**	**85%**	**46%**
No	10%	12%	7%	**29%**
Don't know	11%	10%	6%	**24%**
No answer	4%	2%	3%	1%

The highest level of support for the EU integration is expressed in Montenegro – 85% of young respondents believe that Montenegro should join the EU. Also, respondents from Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina are euro-enthusiasts, 76% of them respectively. When it comes to the attitudes of young respondens from Serbia, situation is significantly different, which raises some concerns since its the bigest society in the region, crucial for both regional and economical stability. Only 46% of them beleive that Serbia should join the EU, while the percentage of those who were against joining is 29.

Table 4. Attitudes by the level of education

Do you think your society should join the EU?	Highschool	Undergraduate student	University degree	Masters or Doctors degree student	MSc or PhD
Yes	**60%**	**72%**	**74%**	**77%**	**83%**
No	18%	11%	14%	15%	5%
Don't know	18%	16%	8%	7%	13%
No answer	5%	1%	3%	2%	0%

When we look at the table 4, we can see that young people with higher education (especially those who holds MSc or PhD) support integration to the EU. It is interesting that more than half of high school students support the EU integration path. Despite these good indicators, it is necessary to further educate young people about the EU integration process.

Do you think your society should join the EU?	Female	Male
Yes	**77%**	69%
No	10%	17%
Don't know	10%	14%
No answer	3%	1%

We can observe in the table 5 an interesting phenomenon that there is difference in attitude towards integration, where although both genders share positive attitude, with females more positively orientated towards EU integration. Even the percentage of respondents who are against joining the EU is lower for females than for males.

1.6. Attitudes towards the EU integration: When do you think your society will join the EU?

Montenegro and Serbia are deeply in the process of European integration. Montenegro has been negotiating for nine years and Serbia for seven years. Albania has the EU candidate status, while Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to implement many reforms until it receives the status of a potential candidate.

In addition to the fact that Western Balkans societies are implementing reforms and harmonizing their acquis with the EU acquis, it is also necessary to inform citizens about the process itself, and what it represents for each society.

It is often assumed that young people have more optimistic attitudes towards the EU, but the findings obtained from this questionnaire do not support this.

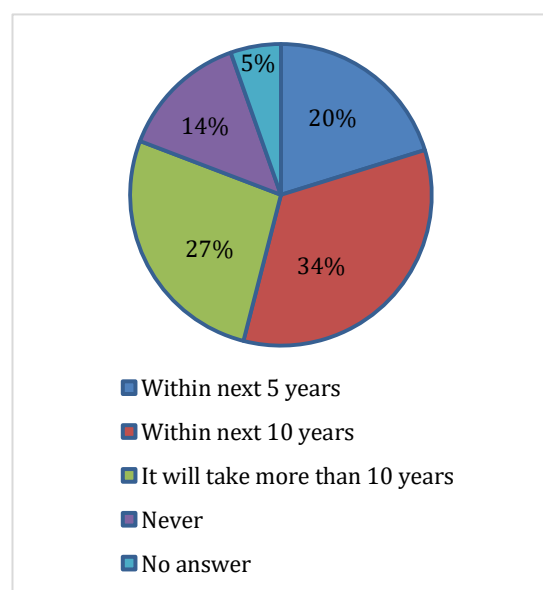**Figure 6. When do you think your society will join the EU?**

- Within next 5 years
- Within next 10 years
- It will take more than 10 years
- Never
- No answer

When do you think your society will join the EU?	Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Montenegro	Serbia	Total average
Within next 5 years	26%	8%	38%	5%	20%
Within next 10 years	30%	25%	47%	30%	**34%**
It will take more than 10 years	26%	**48%**	8%	26%	27%
Never	13%	14%	3%	**31%**	14%
No answer	5%	5%	5%	8%	5%

Regarding dynamic of the EU integration, average respondents are not so optimistic. When it comes to the realization of this process and their belief in the success of this long path, young people are not so much in favor of the process and supportive. Bearing in mind 2025 as the year when Montenegro and Serbia should complete the negotiation process and become members of the EU, the attitudes of young respondents are different than expected. The 38% of Montenegrins
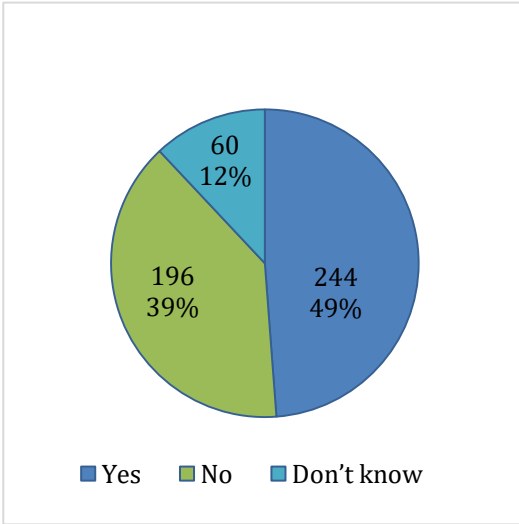
expect this to happen within 5 years, while only 5% of Serbians believe this will happen within 5 years. On the other hand, it is worrying that 31% of respondents from Serbia believe that their society will never be a member of the EU. 47% of Montenegrins believe that Montenegro will join the EU within 10 years. The majority of respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina (48%) are realistic about the chances of joining the EU because they expect this to happen in about 10 years. The 30% of young Albanians believe it will take 10 years and that is a fairly optimistic approach. On average, 34% of all respondents believe that Western Balkan societies will join the EU in the next 10 years, with only 14% of them being totally pessimistic.

Apart from being the tool that will make understanding the process of EU integration more inclusive and build genuine support, having politically educated and well informed citizens is also a cornerstone for a democratic process in one society. This is the only way by which the opinion on the EU integration process could generate the necessary enthusiasm and push forward the process of reforms and harmonization with the EU acquis communautaire.

1.7. Attitudes towards the EU integration: Do you think that you are well informed about the process of European integration of your society?

The Figure 7. shows that almost half of the respondents think that they are well informed about the EU integration process of their society. 39% feel that they do not have enough information, and 12% that they are not familiar with their society's European integration process.

The only way to achieve a successful process of EU integration is to have politically educated and well informed citizens.

What could state administration but also NGO's, the academic and business community and individuals do to achieve a better level of understanding of the EU integration process? Having in mind that average citizens are still not well and properly informed about the EU integration process, although the region has declared joining the EU as its strategic goal almost 20 years ago, the question remains whether there is something to be done to tackle this problem? Having

Figure 7. Do you think that you are well informed about the process of European integration of your society?

in mind duration of the EU integration process - it will be really hard to sustain any support for the EU integration without campaigning and explaining to the broadest public all the steps along the way – communication to the citizens is a necessary ingredient in the integration process.

Governments can naturally do a lot and must take a lead in this process, but also a lot can be done by NGO's and citizen's initiatives and universities, through informal education, seminars, conferences, blogs, better coverage of the EU affiliated topics in the media, etc. Having a more decentralised approach in spreading information on the EU enlargement process will reach more citizens, and will hopefully create a bigger impact in the community. This can also be achieved by a grassroot advocacy campaign and by dispelling any myths or prejudice about the EU. The State itself has to cooperate more with NGOs and create a better climate for understanding the process of EU integration. Both government and organization of civil society have to work hard on raising awareness about the EU integration process of the WB but informing citizens, to motivate public to learn more and to show to the public that the entire process of integration is important for the
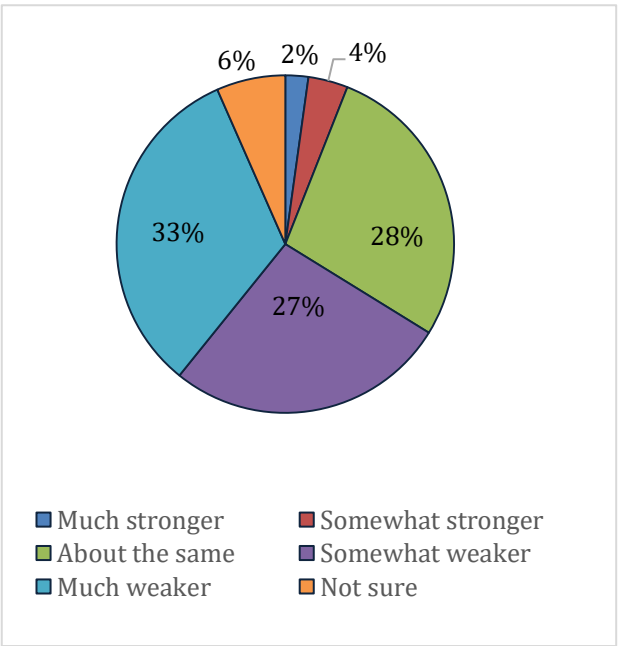
citizens. Many things were done with success, but this is not enough to endure the marathon of integration, the whole society has to do a lot more if we want to avoid some last minute surprises. Asking questions is a great step, but only the first one to take.

1.8. Democracy during the COVID-19 pandemic: Has the condition of democracy in your society become stronger, weaker or stayed about the same during COVID-19 pandemic?

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Democracy, Rule of Law, and Good Governance is the following:

Figure 8. Has the condition of democracy in your society become stronger, weaker or stayed about the same during COVID-19 pandemic?

- the pandemic has underlined and even exacerbated some pre-existing institutional deficiencies in the Western Balkan societies. These include among other things side-lined or blocked parliaments with insufficient checks over the executive, ineffective judiciary, and the lack of coordination between different levels of government;
- executive dominance in the wake of the pandemic and the side-lining or inactive nature of parliaments constitute a dangerous trend in the region, especially since the legislatures were weak before the crisis;
- the delay of court proceedings in the wake of the pandemic can result in an even higher backlog of cases and thus further hamper judicial capacity. At the same time, the overturning of certain executive decisions by constitutional courts (for instance in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro) were positive signs;
- continued political polarization during the crisis is hampering adequate responses to the pandemic and shows a lack of willingness to compromise, even in an emergency;
- in some societies, the media disseminated mainly pro-government content during the pandemic, with Serbia being the most prominent example. Further, citizens oftentimes had difficulties accessing important information regarding the state of emergency;
- independent media outlets and civil society organizations are increasingly facing financial problems in the wake of the pandemic.

Potential positive developments arising out of the crisis include the following:
- increased digitalization could facilitate public consultations and participation in the decision-making process, resulting in more digital literacy;
- increased visibility of the dangers of disinformation in the wake of the pandemic could raise awareness among stakeholders and the public of the importance of this issue;
- The crisis may have raised awareness among citizens of the importance of a functioning state and independent institutions and has sensitized the public to excessive use of power. [1]

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[1] Source – Economic and social effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Western Balkans, 2020.
(https://www.aspeninstitute.de/wp-content/uploads/2020-The-Covid-19-Pandemic-in-the-Western-Balkans.pdf)

As the Figure 8. shows, 60% of respondents believe that conditions for democratic life in the the society deteriorated during the COVID-19 pandemic, while only 6% believe they have been improved, furthermore 28% of respondents estimate that the pandemic did not affect the conditions for democratic life in their society, while only 6% of respondents do not have an opinion on this issue.

Table 7. Democracy during the COVID-19 pandemic

| Has the condition of democracy in your society become stronger, weaker or stayed about the same during COVID-19 pandemic?	Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Montenegro	Serbia	Average
Much stronger	4%	1%	3%	0%	2%
Somewhat stronger	3%	3%	7%	2%	4%
About the same	30%	26%	32%	23%	28%
Somewhat weaker	27%	25%	32%	23%	27%
Much weaker	32%	36%	19%	49%	33%
Not sure	5%	9%	8%	3%	6%

When we separate results by societies, we can make more precisely observations. Percentages within the option that says that democracy actually managed to become stronger (somewhat or much) during the pandemic were very low in every Western Balkan society observed in this study. Answer that democracy stayed on about the same level had from 30% in Albania to the lawest 23% in Serbia. And when we talk about weaker condition of democracy in the Western Balkans during the pandemic, results are that 19% of Montenegrins believe that democracy is much weaker, and on the other side we have respondents from Serbia, who believes in percentage of 49% that democracy in their society is much weaker. Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina are somewhere between, 32% and 36% respectively. Negative answers dominated within this question, with Serbia having almost 50% on opinion that democracy vastly regressed. Overall, respondents believe that the pandemic has nevertheless negatively affected democracies in the society.

2. IDENTITY AND TRUST

2.1. Highly valued items

For respondents the most important thing is to complete the educational process and build a successful business career (50%), and taking responsibility (26%). Young people are very optimistic about the future of their lives putting priority to the education (26%), business carrier (25%), and taking responsibility (25%).

**Figure 9. How much are the following items important to you?**
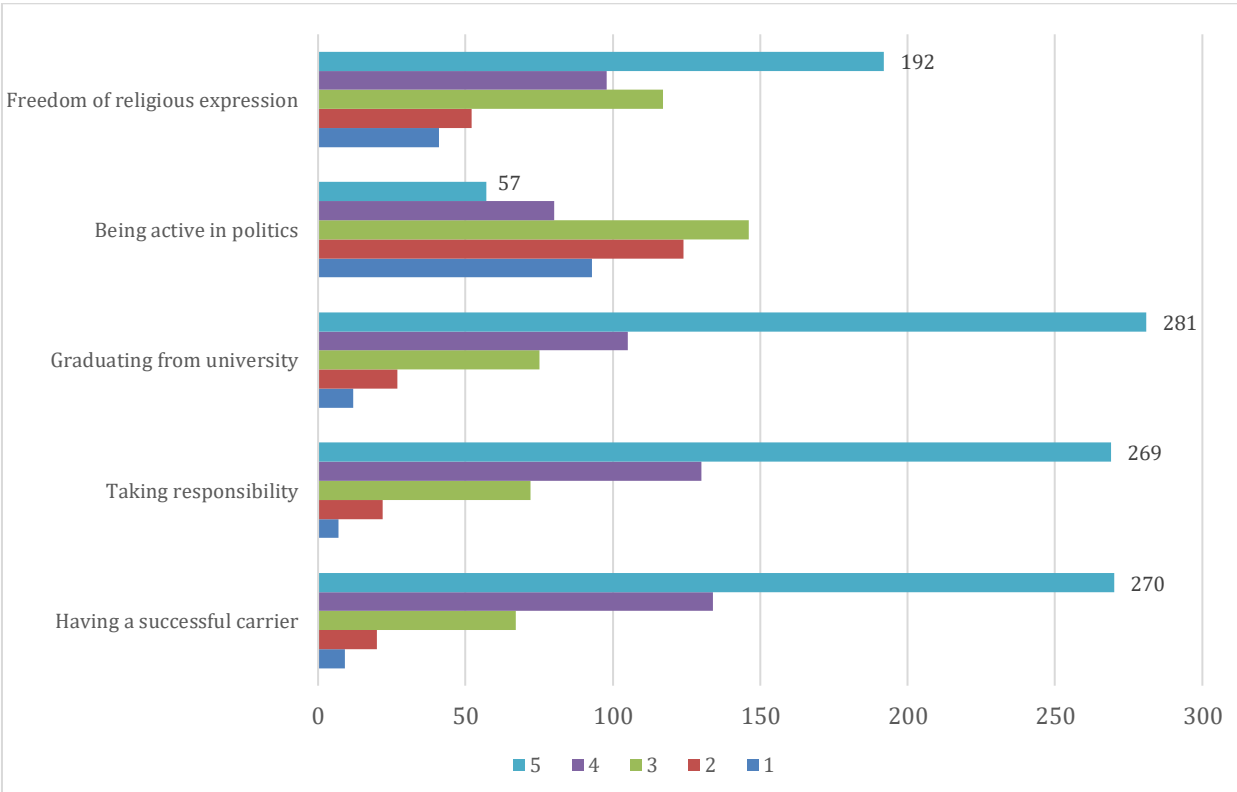
Other thing that they value highly is freedom of religious expression (18%). Unfortunately, being active in politics is ranked last (5%) in this hierarchy of important things by young people, indicating their lack of interest in, and disenchantment with the public scene as a whole.

Some recent surveys show that young people in our region identify themselves with one of the key religious confesions and God has a special place in their lives (5-60%). However, religion is still an aspect of identification and spirituality rather than a practice, since small % of young people attend religious rituals regularly.

2.2. Things that concern young people

When considering the biggest fears young people cite, the most serious concerns relate to their living standards and more concretely to their economic situation. Being unemployed, affected by corruption and to live in society with increasing poverty and social inequality – are the three main concerns voiced by young people. In all three cases, more than half of the respondents reported being very fearful of these scenarios. These are followed by fears relating to physical and physiological violence, and social injustice. Also, young people are very concerned about human trafficking.

Figure 10. To what extent are you concerned on the following things?
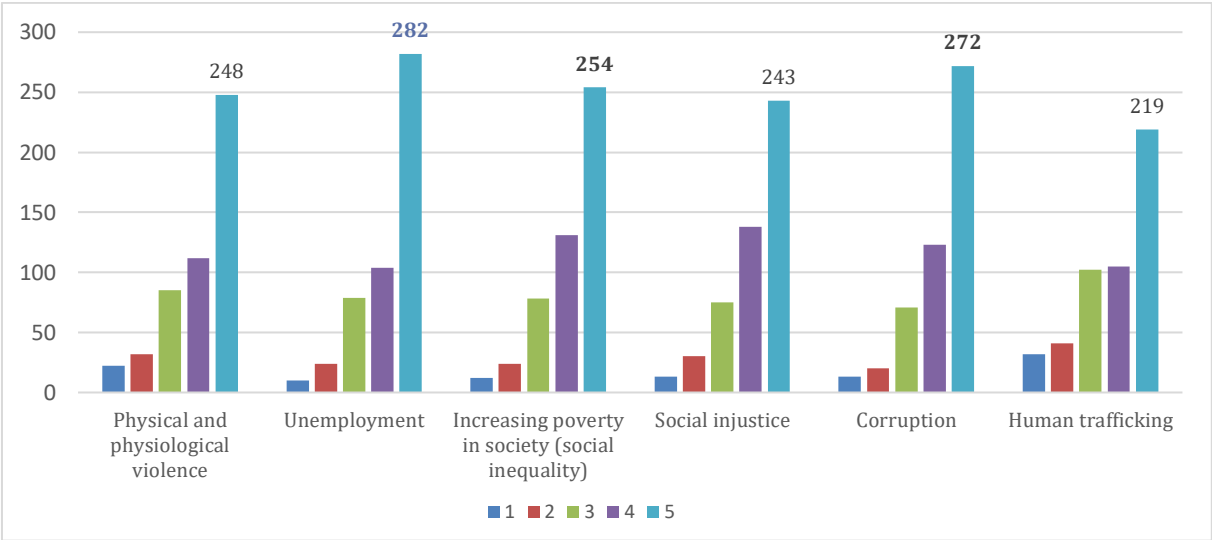
We can compare this with last table and realize that unemployment is biggest issue and with more people having university degree, more pressure is on the governments in the region to provide the environment where we shall see exponential growth of jobs for higher educated people.

2.3. Acceptability of a specific things

Young people were asked to point out whether various behaviours and actions were acceptable on a scale with 5 indicating complete acceptability (on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means "Never" and 5 means "Always" or acceptable).

Figure 11. In your opinion, do the following behaviors can be justified or cannot be justified?

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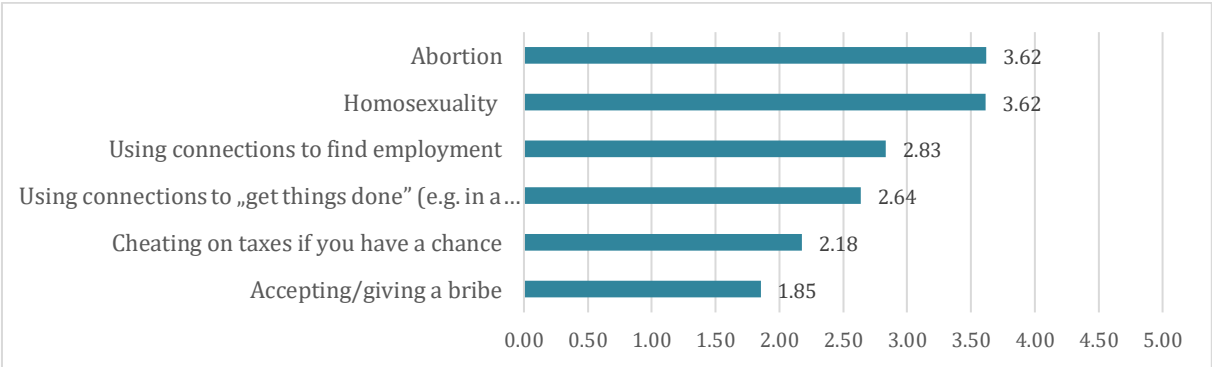
We've put some ethical dilemmas in front of our respondents, and we've got results showing that homosexuality and abortion assigned the same average score of 3.62. The informal practice of using connections to find jobs, receive better treatment at hospitals and beneficial handling by government authorities is widespread in the region, where so-called petty corruption is very spread, as part of ways and habits. Especially when it comes to finding a job, as much as 25% of all young people said it is almost always justified to use connections to secure employment (4 and 5). The least accepted things for young people is classical case of a corruption - accepting/giving a bribe, as part of perception of serious concern related to high level/political corruption.

Table 8. Acceptability of a specific things

| Do the following behaviours can be justified or cannot be justified?	AL	BA	ME	RS	Average
Accepting/giving a bribe	2.24	1.75	1.81	1.67	1.85
Cheating on taxes if you have a chance	2.38	2.01	2.02	2.46	2.18
Using connections to „get things done" (e.g. in a hospital, at different office, etc.)	2.83	2.49	2.61	2.71	2.64
Using connections to find employment	3.06	2.63	2.86	2.87	2.83
Homosexuality	3.18	3.88	3.46	3.93	3.62
Abortion	3.46	3.85	3.34	3.88	3.62

If we look at the survey by Western Balkan societies, the research shows that Albania has the greatest level of tolerance towards bribe and cheating on taxes, with the biggest average score 3.06 considering using connections to find employment. This is also expressed in other societies, which shows certain pattern of unwanted behaviour in the region.

When it comes to accepting people of different sexual orientations and abortion, the biggest score was recorded in Serbia (3.93 and 3.88). Bosnia and Herzegovina is right behind Serbia on these two issues. Albania and Montenegro also justify this in the high score. It is interesting that all societies highly justify abortion, which means that religious influence on this matter is not strong like in some parts of the world.

2.4. Trust and community

This figure shows the level of trust within young people of Western Balkans region towards different people. According to the survey, respondents show the highest level of trust towards femily members and friends, i.e. people of the Western Balkan region are still holding to those traditional values of puting their trust to family members the most. The lowest level is towards political leaders.

Figure 12. To what degree do you trust the following people?
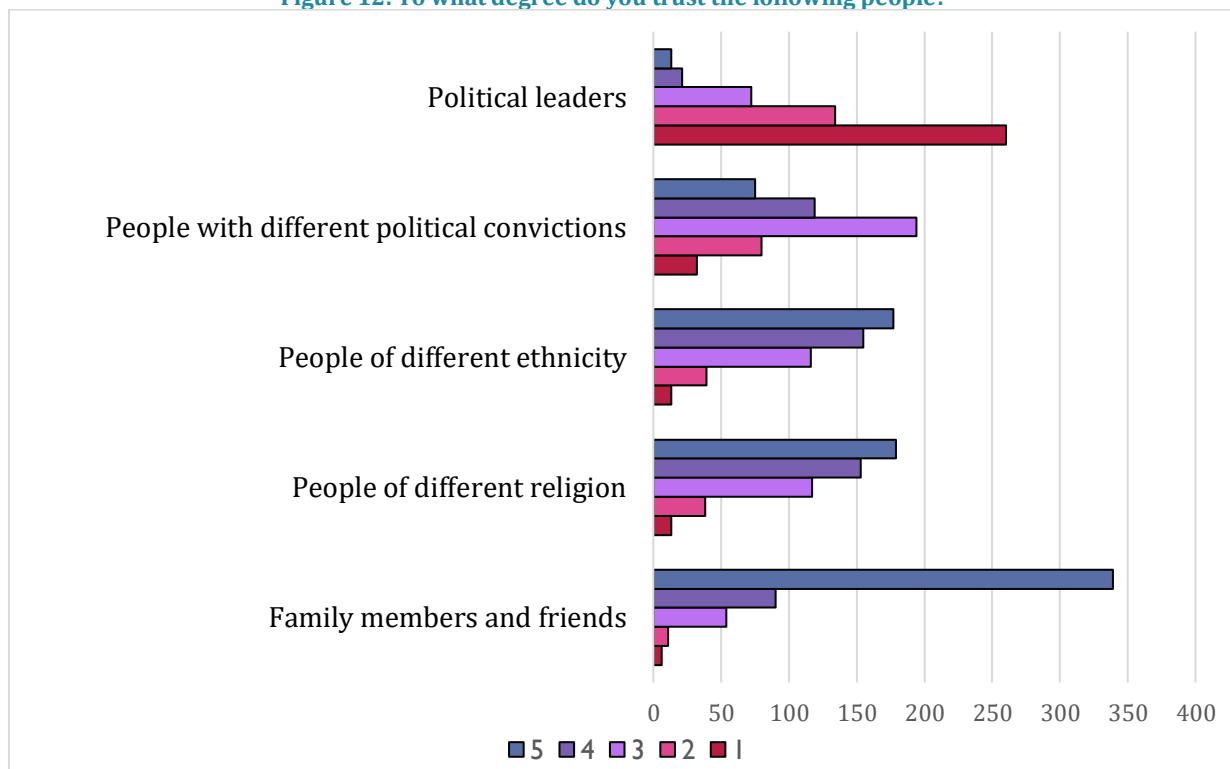
Family members are the people most trusted by youngsters, receiving a score of 4.49 out of a maximum of 5. All other categories display a significant difference. People of different religions come in at a second, although distant, 3.89 – same to people of different ethnicity. It is slightly less than trust in people with different political convictions.

People with different political convictions receive a score of 3.25, indicating a general scepticism held by young people towards them. Last in the category are political leaders, who receive a score less than 2. This is also in line with the first question „How much are the following items important to you?", where only five percent of respondents said active participation in politics was important to them. This reflects the disenchantment and scepticism of young people towards their leaders in the political arena.

Table 9. Trust towards different groups of people

To what degree do you trust the following people? (On a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 means "very much")	AL	BA	ME	RS	Total average
Family members and friends	4.36	4.42	4.58	4.60	4.49
People of different religion	3.63	4.07	4.01	3.73	3.89
People of different ethnicity	3.62	4.10	3.92	3.81	3.89
People with different political convictions	3.40	3.32	3.21	3.04	3.25
Political leaders	1.92	1.74	1.93	1.47	1.79

When we divide table by gender we can see that differencies are not big on this particular matter, with women putting slightly higher trust towards different etnicities.

Table 10. Trust towards different groups of people by gender

To what degree do you trust the following people? (On a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 means "very much")	Female	Male
Family members and friends	4.51	4.46
People of different religion	3.94	3.83
People of different ethnicity	3.96	3.77
People with different political convictions	3.27	3.22
Political leaders	1.78	1.79

2.5. Making friendships

The prejudice and historical syndromes and, as a consequence of it, the mistrust among nations and nationalism in the region, today are our reality. Reconciliation between the Western Balkan societies is still out of reach. Legacy and misunderstandings need to be put aside, and the normalization of bilateral and regional cooperation in all areas of common interest has to be the goal.

In order to gauge stereotypes, young people were confronted in the survey with the question of making new friendships with the people who have different background to their.

Figure 13. Mark presented groups of people you have no problem making new FRIENDSHIPS with even though
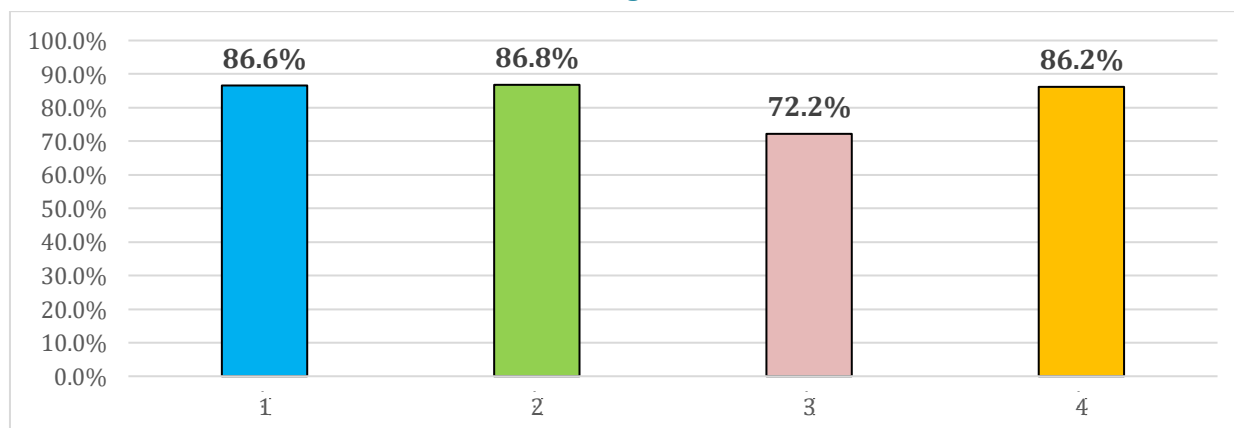
This figure shows that cumulatively, respondents have some stereotypes about making new friendships with people of different sexualities.

Table 11. Making new friendships with people of different background

Mark presented groups of people you have no problem making new friendships with even though they have different background to yours.	Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Montenegro	Serbia
People of different ethnicity	78%	90%	87%	91%
People of different religion	79%	90%	88%	88%
People different sexuality	54%	81%	72%	79%
People of different social status	75%	90%	87%	91%

This table shows attitudes towards making new friendships with people of different background in the region. Respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia gave the most positive feedback regarding friendships with people of different ethnicities, which is positive outcome of this survey.

Least amount of trust into new friendships with people of different ethnicities is in Albania, but still at pretty high percentage (78%). Regarding this issues, Montenegro is somewhere in the middle (87%).

When it comes to people of different sexualities there we encounter a bit lower results, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia with 81% and 79% are holding up high, with Montenegro slightly weaker at 72%, and Albania being poralized on this matter at only 54%. Even though acceptance of LGBT population is generally strong, when we get to actually making friendships with them we can see certain distrust and distance.

**Table 12. Making new friendships with people of different background by education**

Mark presented groups of people you have no problem making new friendships with even though they have different background to yours.	High school	Undergraduate student	University degree	Masters or Doctors degree student	MSc or PhD
People of different ethnicity	79%	91%	81%	91%	90%
People of different religion	79%	90%	86%	89%	85%
People different sexuality	67%	76%	70%	72%	75%
People of different social status	84%	93%	80%	84%	93%

On the table 12, we can see how people of different education level in the region look on the same question, We can see that generaly least trustful to new friendships are people with high school degree. What is interesting is that undergraduate students, are more open to new friendships on almost every group, and that results either steeply decline or stay the same which shows us that education is not so important on this matters. It looks like it's more stage of life we are in that makes difference and everything that happens in-between. Again, we can see that people of different sexuality have the least amount of trust, but still, percentages are not so low, (not below 50%) which is still promising, since this region as somewhat undeveloped, and backwards on matters like this in some old traditional sence is starting to raise its attitude towards differencies and liberties of the others.

2.6. Religion

Out of a total of 500 respondents, 36% say that they belong to the Christian Ortodox denomination, while 35% belong to the Muslim denomination. Christian Catholic and other communities are third and fourth at 13% and 9%. Also, there are respondents who do not have answer on this question (7%).
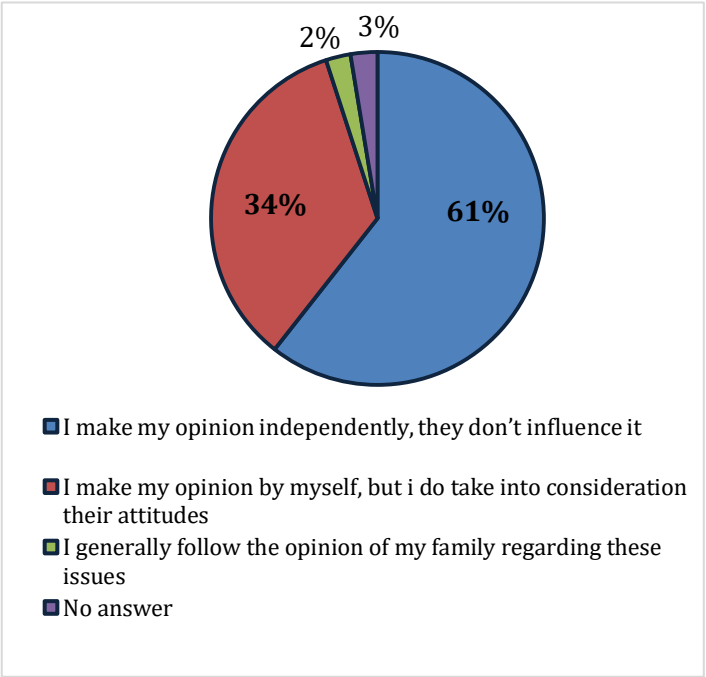
Figure 14. Which religion denomination do you belong to?

Christian Catholic ■ Christian Orthodox ■
Muslim ■ Other ■
No answer ■
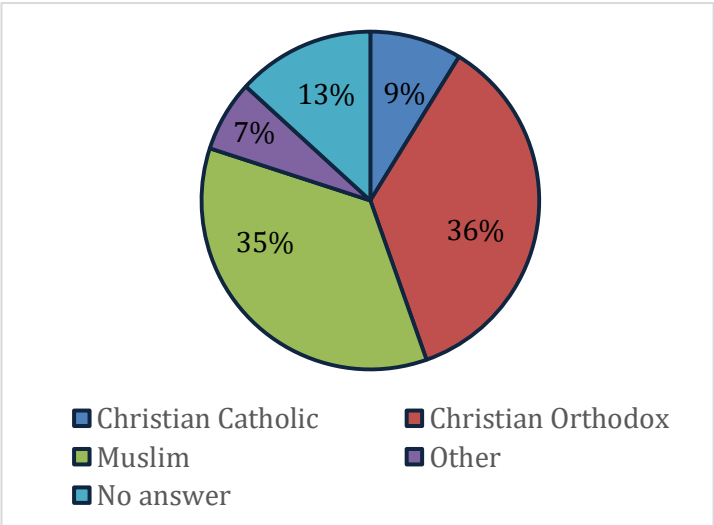
2.7. Parents' influence on young people attitudes

Even though young people in the region have the most trust in the family, on the Figure 15 we can see that they are generally independant on taking their own opinions regarding people of other religion, culture or ethnicity. The majority of young respondents stated that they make their opinion independently on this issue (61%). 34% make their opinion by themselves, but they do take into consideration parents attitudes. Just 2% generally follow the opinion of their parents, while 3% of them did not declare/state on this issue.

Figure 15. Do your parents influence on your opinion regarding people of other religion, culture or ethnicity ?

■ I make my opinion independently, they don't influence it

■ I make my opinion by myself, but i do take into consideration their attitudes

■ I generally follow the opinion of my family regarding these issues

■ No answer

2.8. Importance of Religion

Figure 16. How important is God in your life?

Asked about the importance of God in their lives, 38% of young people say that God does not hold any importance for them, while 5% say that God is less important for them (total 43%). On the other side, for 17% of respondents, God is very important, while for 18% and 13%, God is generally important and somewhat important respectively (total 48%). Finally, 9% of total respondents did not answer on this issue.

Figure 16. How important is God in your life?

- Very important
- Generally important
- Somewhat important
- Less important
- Not important
- No answer
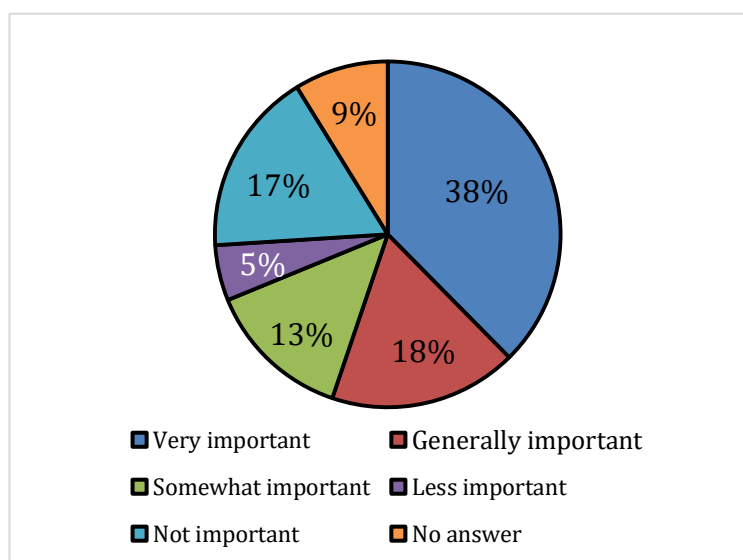
Table 13. How important is God in your life?

How important is God in your life?	Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Montenegro	Serbia
Very important	42%	46%	42%	12%
Generally important	19%	22%	11%	20%
Somewhat important	12%	10%	13%	23%
Less important	8%	1%	7%	6%
Not important	7%	12%	16%	37%
No answer	13%	8%	11%	2%

Observed by Western Balkan societies, we can see that religion is pretty important (Bosnia and Herzegovina leading with 46% plus 22%, in total more than 2/3 respond that Gad is very important for them). On the other side, in Serbia, around 1/3 answered that God is important for them, and 43% answered that God is less important or not important for them. In Albania, only 15% of respondend anwered that God is less or not important for them. Generaly speaking, this answer indicates the growth of religiosity among young people.

As it was already mentioned, young people in our region identify themselves with one of the key religious confessions and God has a special place in their lives (5 and 4 - 60%, Figure 9). However, religion is still an aspect of identification and spirituality rather than a practice, since small % of young people attend rituals regularly.

Table 14. Importance of the God by education level

How important is God in your life?	Highschool	Undergraduate student	University degree	Masters or Doctors degree student	MSc or PhD
Very important	39%	41%	38%	26%	55%
Generally important	18%	16%	18%	22%	10%
Somewhat important	16%	11%	15%	15%	13%
Less important	7%	5%	3%	8%	0%
Not important	14%	20%	18%	15%	18%
No answer	7%	8%	8%	13%	5%

People with the highest level of education have expressed that God is very important to them (55%), which is a bit surprising. Generally observed, according to the levels of education, God is important for young respondents of our region. The people of the Western Balkans still have high faith in God and traditions and customs play an important role in their lives.

2.9. Social networks and fake news

In the world of social media and easy access to information, fake news is a phenomenon that is increasingly prevalent. We come across fake news every day, but the question is whether we can recognize it and how often. Young people, as part of a population that is much more online are a suitable target for those who want to spread fake news.

"Fake news" is a term that has come to mean different things to different people.

Fake news[2] is false or misleading information presented as news. Fake news can reduce the impact of real news by competing with it; specially during the elections. At its core, we are defining "fake news" as those news stories that are false: the story itself is fabricated, with no verifiable facts, sources or quotes. Sometimes these stories may be propaganda that is intentionally designed to mislead the reader, or may be designed as "clickbait" written for economic incentives (the writer profits on the number of people who click on the story). In recent years, fake news stories have proliferated via social media, in part because they are so easily and quickly shared online.

The universe of "fake news" is much larger than simply false news stories. Some stories may have a nugget of truth, but lack any contextualizing details. They may not include any verifiable facts or sources. Some stories may include basic verifiable facts, but are written using language that is deliberately inflammatory, leaves out pertinent details or only presents one viewpoint. "Fake news" exists within a larger ecosystem of mis- and disinformation.

Figure 17. How often do you recognize fake news on social networks?
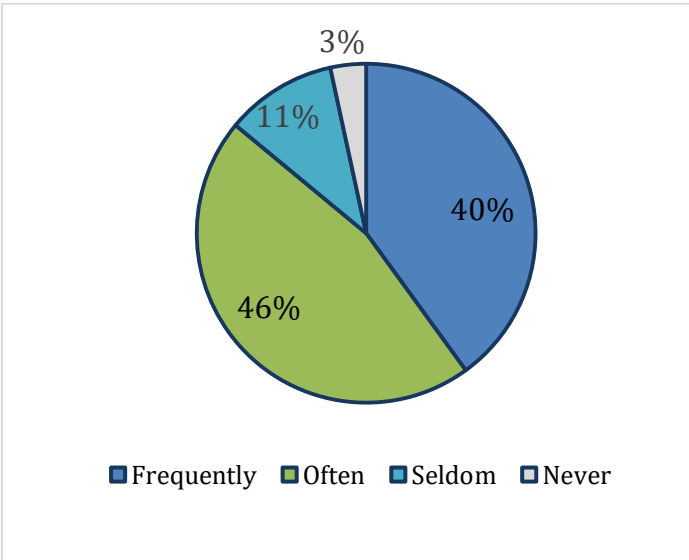
Young people of the region are pretty confident that they can successfully detect and recognize fake news on social media. 46% stated that they frequently recognize fake news, which is a fairly

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[2] https://guides.lib.umich.edu/fakenews

high percentage. 40% of young people often recognize fake news. Only 3% of respondens do not know to recognize fake news. In general, young people are good at recognizing fake news.

2.10. A way of recognizing fake news

71% of young respondents from the region know how to recognize fake news, which gives us a picture that young people in the region are quite digitaly literate and they think that they have the means to figure out how to detect fake or misleading news.

Figure 18. Do you know how to recognize fake news on social networks?
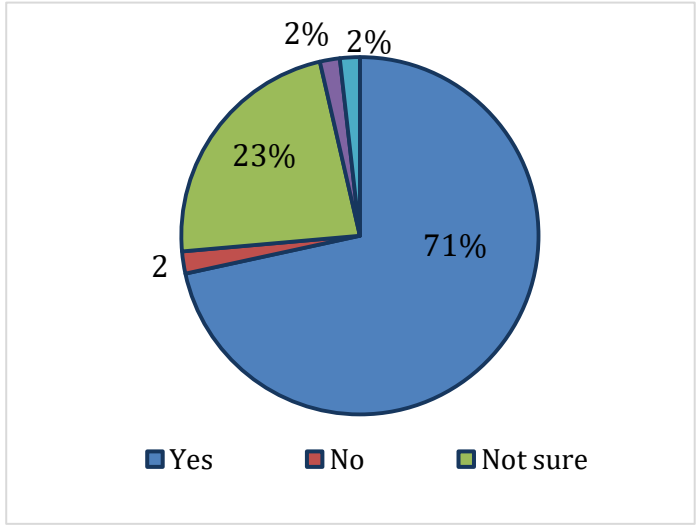
Only 2% do not know how to recognize fake news, And the same percentage of respondents aren't sure if they know how to recognize fake news when they come across it. Respondents who are not sure how to recognize fake news still can work on improving their knowledge abouth this topic.

During a discussion at the regional summer school within the "Fake news" workshop, young participants recognized some steps in spotting fake news. Those steps are:

- considering the source
- reading beyond
- checking the author
- supporting sources
- checking the date
- checking is it a joke
- considering biases
- asking the experts

By following these steps, young people can more easily recognize fake news, if they have uncertainties about the accuracy of a news.

3. EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND MOBILITY

3.1. Education

When it comes to the quality of education in the region, 49% of youth claim that education system is not enough specialized and that more focus is put on wider area of knowledge.

Figure 19. In general, how satisfied are you with the quality of education in your society?
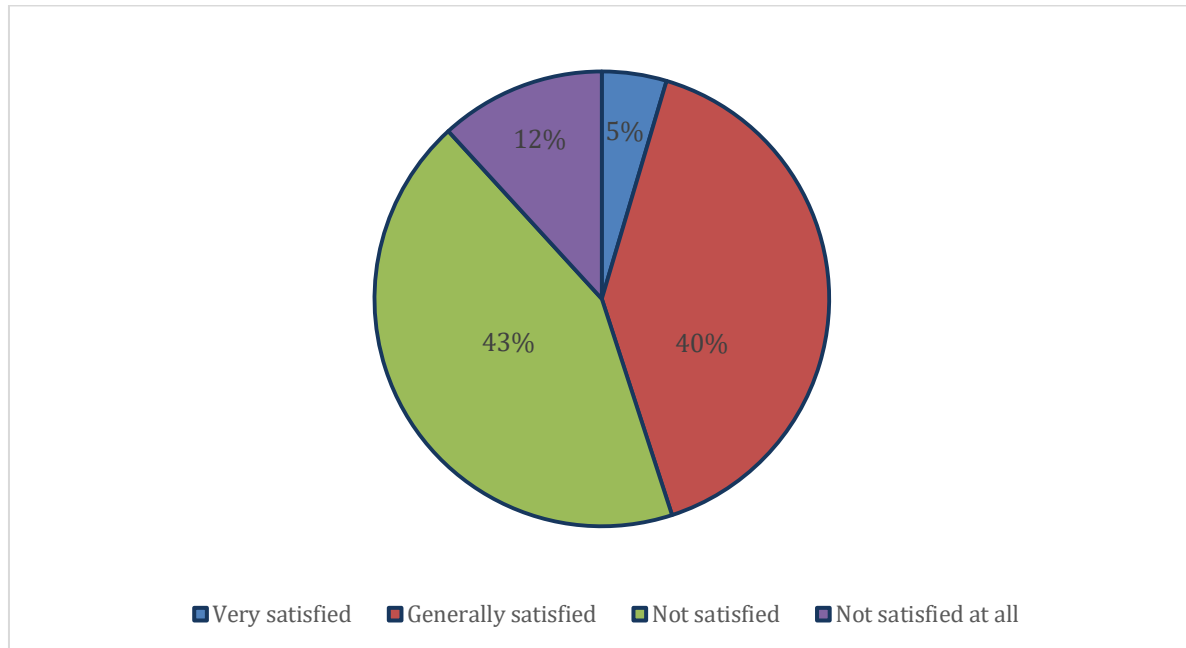
Other 45% claim that there is a significant gap between world of education and world of labour market, which mean that throughout studis education system does not prepare enough students for labor market and business challenges in the real life. Only 6% of young respondents claim that quality of education system is well adapted to the labour market.

Table 15. Adaptability of the educational system in the Western Balkan societies

Do you think that in your society education system are well adapted or not well adapted to the **labor market**?	Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Montenegro	Serbia
Well adapted	10%	4%	7%	5%
Moderately adapted (our education is not enough specialized, propagating general knowledge and wider education)	41%	46%	51%	58%
There is significant gap between world of education end world of labor market	49%	50%	42%	37%

Regarding results on the same question in different Western Balkan societies in the region we can observe that the only double digit answer on well adapted quality of education to the labor market is in Albania at barely 10%. Moderatly adapted is slightly above the middle in Montenegro and Serbia, and answer that there is significant gap between world of education and world of labor market gave half of the people that took part in the survey, in both Albania and Bosnia and Hezegovina.

Table 16. Adaptability of the educational system by the education level of young respondents

Do you think that in your society education system are well adapted or not well adapted to the labor market?	Highschool	Undergraduate student	University degree	Masters or Doctors degree student	MSc or PhD
Well adapted	9%	8%	5%	7%	5%
Moderately adapted (our education is not enough specialized, propagating general knowledge and wider education)	49%	59%	44%	47%	43%
There is significant gap between world of education end world of labor market	42%	40%	51%	47%	53%

This table shows that even no matter the education level, results are pretty similar and equal with most educated (MSc or PhD) leading on opinion that there is a significant gap between world of education and world of labor market. On the other side, 59% of undergaraduate students claim that education system is moderately adapted to the labor market. Also, it is interesting that highschool students believe in the largest percentage, but still under double digit (9%), that education system is well adapted to the labor market.

As we are aware, compatibility between job positions and educational background among young people remains a common challenge in day-to-day reality.

3.2. Labour market

Employment status among young people remains a persistent problem. 56% of respondents are not employed, 43% are currently in education process and 13% of those interviewed claim they are not employed.

Figure 20. What is your employment status?

- Employed
- Not employed
- I am currently in education process
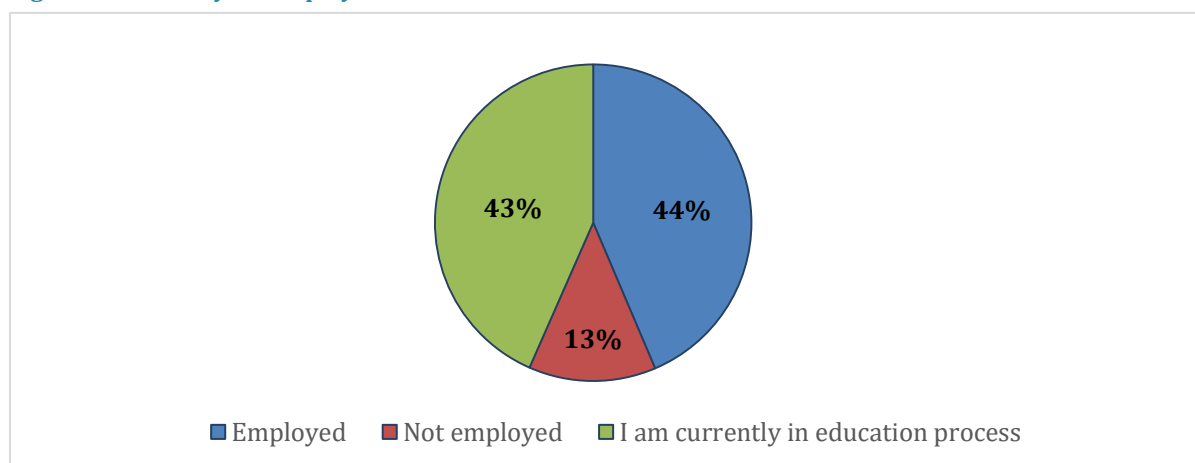
At the same time, 44% of young people of the region is employed (respondents).

Connection with the people who are in power is rated on a scale from 1 to 5 points with the 4.72, which means that this factor is one of the most important in youth employment. The relation between employment and membership in a political party has long since become a social cliche. Respondents rated with the 3.89 points that party membership plays a very important role in the employment of young people. Luck as another element young people value as a relevant factor in employment. Respondents rated luck with 3.58 points. On the other hand, young people rated with 3.50 points that proffesial skills and level of education are important in getting hired. Right behind this is impression on interview. The least important factor in employment for young respondents is part of the society they are coming from (3.11 points).

Table 17. Importance of the following factors when it comes to finding a job for a young persons

In your opinion, how importan are each of the following factors when it comes to finding a job for a young person in your society?	Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Montenegro	Serbia	Total average
Connections with people who are in power	4.19	4.31	4.30	4.26	4.27
Party membership	3.76	3.97	3.88	3.95	3.89
Luck	3.41	3.73	3.51	3.66	3.58
Level of education or work experience from abroad	3.74	3.31	3.61	3.39	3.50
Impression on interview	3.49	3.31	3.43	3.47	3.42
Part of the society you're coming from	3.26	3.20	3.00	2.97	3.11

Connections and social ties remain among the most important factors in youth employment. Connections with people who are in power are rated the highest from the respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, 4.31 and 4.30 points, respectively. Also, this factor is very important for respondents from Albania and Serbia. Party membership is also highly rated. Respondents from Albania largely believe that the level of education and professional experience is important for getting a job (3.74 points). Respondents from all Western Balkans societies observed in this study equally rated the impression on the interview as a relatively important factor in employment. Part of the society is the least important factor in employment for respondents from Serbia (2.97 points).

3.3. Mobility

Youth unemployment in Western Balkan (WB6) is pressing, with youth unemployment rates that are among the highest in the world. [3] The youth unemployment 2020 rate was above 26% in all WB economies (compared to just 17.5% in the EU-27[4]) reaching almost 55.4%[5] in Kosovo*[6] The youth unemployment rate has increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in the 4th quarter of 2020, reaching as high as 46.5% in Montenegro with sharp increases also in North Macedonia (to 39.2%) and Serbia (to 32.4%). Long-term unemployment affects almost two-thirds of unemployed youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia, and two thirds of unemployed young women in Montenegro from 28.9%.

Figure 22. Would you be willing to move to another WB place if you had some job or educational opportunity?
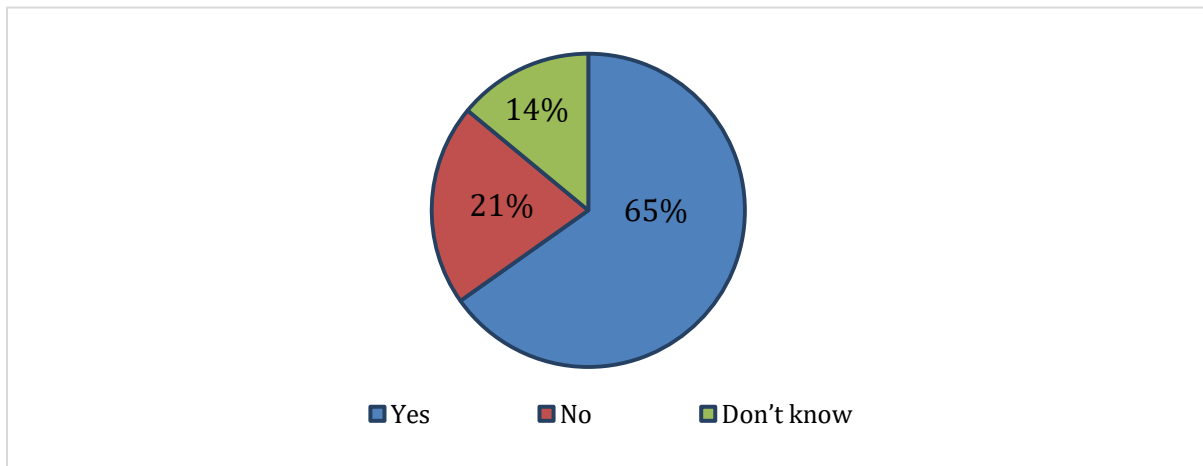
This figure indicates that almost 2/3 of young people are willing to move to another WB place for job or educational opportunity. Young people's desires and preferences for employment are closely linked to their perception of the labour market.

Figure 23. To what extent does the COVID-19 pandemic affect the mobility and cooperation of young people in the Western Balkans?

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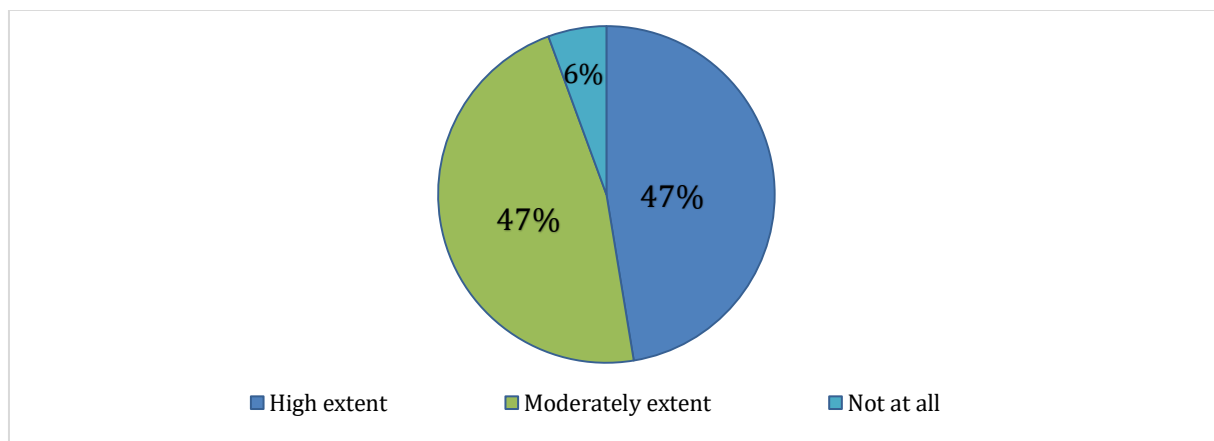
[3] https://www.rcc.int/docs/573/study-on-youth-employment-in-the-western-Balkans
[4]https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/portlet_file_entry/2995521/3-02122020-AP-EN.pdf/3b4ec2e2-f14c-2652-80bd-2f5e7c0605c2#:~:text=Youth%20unemployment,respectively%20in%20the%20previous%20month.
[5] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2019-2024/varhelyi/announcements/eu-boosts-youth-employment-western-balkans-eu10-million-small-and-medium-enterprises_en
[6] *This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

The WB6 region, just as the rest of Europe and the world, was strongly hit by the COVID-19 pandemic due to lockdowns and restrictions on travel and mobility. Job retention schemes have been put in place in all economies to a varying extent and wage subsidies have been used as a key measure to limit the potential reduction in employment. The mitigation measures had some effect in reversing the initial hit of the COVID-19 pandemic, but they are not sufficient for effective post-Covid 19 economic recovery programme.

The proportion of young people neither in employment nor in education or training (NEET) averages 23.7% in the Western Balkans ranging from 15.9% in Serbia to 37.4% in Kosovo*, compared to just 11.1% in the EU27.

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