EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: SOCIAL INCLUSION SURVEY IN KOSOVO[1]

August 2020

This report is produced based on an survey as a part of the project "Promoting Social Integration and Reconciliation" funded by the British Embassy Pristina and implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

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Cover image: Mural in Kamenica, SIP art project, 2018.

[1] References to Kosovo[1] shall be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As is observed in many countries throughout the world, the multi-ethnic character can be a quality of strength, contributing to creativity, resilience and socio-economic growth. However, it may also lead to certain tensions and challenges that run along ethnic lines, resulting in social and political instability that threaten to hamper investment and economic growth, and leading to further ethnic tensions. Academic evidence shows that a critical issue that often limits inter-ethnic trust and cooperation is the limited levels of social interactions that take place between members of different ethnic communities, a result at times of geographic divisions, limited language abilities and scarce programmes or events that are designed to promote inter-ethnic interaction and cooperation.

IOM's social cohesion programming in Kosovo is based on inter-group contact theory (IGCT). Decades of empirical research on IGCT[1] indicate that, within the appropriate conditions, programmes that facilitate and encourage contact and engagement between members of different groups within a community can significantly improve participants' perceptions and attitudes towards other groups and enhance inter-group trust and cooperation.

The Social Cohesion project, supported by the British Embassy in Pristina, and implemented by IOM in close collaboration with civil society organizations and local communities aims to contribute towards a more inclusive society for all communities in Kosovo* by supporting their language rights, fostering cooperation and joint initiatives, as well as impartial media reporting, thus building confidence between communities and addressing points of friction for long-term reconciliation. In order to promote positive interaction between   youth of different ethnicities, a variety of social and educational activities were conducted including, inter alia, public art projects, sports activities, IT workshops, and outdoor activities.

With the aim to capture the impact of the social cohesion activities carried out within the project and also to gauge public perceptions on social cohesion, a comprehensive surveying exercise was designed and carried out both with beneficiaries and the general public. In total 222 respondents participated in the survey, aged between 15 and 24, members of different ethnic communities. Out of them 101 were project beneficiaries, and 121 respondents from general populations.

Here are the key findings of this assessment:

— Participants in the Social inclusion project were less likely than the general public to know persons from another ethnic community. Only 53% of K-Albanian participants knew someone from another ethnic group, compared to 74% for the general public. This indicates that project approach is reaching the intended target group: those with less experience of inter-group contact.

— In keeping with IGCT expectations, persons who have greater levels of interaction with members of different ethnic groups also tended to have a more positive perception of these groups. Other Non-Majority Ethnic Groups, a group which indicated the highest rates of interaction with other groups and knowledge of Albanian/Serbian, also tended to have the most positive opinions of other groups, with 77% of respondents in the general public expressing a positive opinion, in comparison to 54% and 46% for K-Albanian and K-Serbian respondents respectively. K-Albanians and K-Serbians who indicated communicating with other ethnic groups on a daily or weekly basis also tended to think more positively of their experiences than those who communicated with other groups only on a monthly basis or less.

— Upon completion of the activities, participants tended to express greater optimism for the future of inter-ethnic relations, compared to the general public. 68% of K-Albanian participants believed that inter-ethnic relations would improve, compared to 40% within the general population; the figures for Other Non-Majority Groups were 62% and 31% respectively, while the majority of K-Serbian participants (58%) believed that relations would remain the same.

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1   https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/engineering/intergroup-contact

— Other non-majority ethnic communities were more likely to report higher interaction frequencies with other ethnic communities. This can be explained by common group dynamics, **smaller communities will have to engage with larger ones more for basic needs/ services** whereas larger communities (in this case K Serbian/ Albanian) do not need to interact with other groups as their own community may be self-sufficient in terms of needs and services. Similar results were produced by the Social Cohesion Survey conducted in Turkey with Turkish host community and Syrians.

— Participants confirmed that the programme's activities encouraged inter-group communication with 92% of K-Albanian participants, 72% of K-Serbian, and 94% of other non-majority groups, indicating that the activities required some to a lot of inter-group interaction, with the vast majority of participants indicating that these interactions were positive.

— Supporting evidence from activities: Even though only few K-Serbians and K-Albanians reported being proficient in each other's language, the survey shows that the **perception** of languages is a higher barrier in communication. The K-Albanian participants stated that they would not be able to communicate with Kosovo Serbs because of the language, yet they said they were fluent in Bosnian. Their refusal/unawareness to acknowledge the fact that knowledge of Bosnian language would facilitate communication in Serbian confirms that **perceived obstacles based on prejudice and misinformation might be greater than actual issues preventing communication**.

— The second most popular reason for respondents to participate in the social inclusion activities was to socialize, indicating the **desire for inter-group interaction** and the need for building such environments. During the focus group discussion in Mamusa, participants stated they mostly stayed at home after school. Their only exposure to the outer world was through TV and internet. This is further proof that **youth lack opportunities to meet their peers and participate in multi-ethnic events**.

— Supporting evidence from activities: One of the participants who used inflammatory language against Kosovo Serbs conflictingly stated that "love and friendship recognized no boundaries including ethnicity. His conflicting statements show that **he may not be aware of the graveness of the opinions he reflected based on his exposure to media coverage and his social environment** concerning other ethnic communities. This type of lack of critical thinking may potentially lead to violent extremism and therefore should be addressed through facilitating and cultivating multi-ethnic interpersonal interactions and discussions.

— "Before participating in IOM's social cohesion activities, I thought all (K.) Serbians looked angry and hostile."[2]

— The most difficult topic for the majority of respondents was the conflict in 1999. This is especially significant due to the fact that most of the respondents included in this assessment were born after 1999. This demonstrates **a level of inherited/taught conflict though generations**. It is promising however that youth finds topics such as ethnic, religious and language differences as relatively easier to talk about. Constructive discussions on these topics could potentially build bridges to improve social inclusion.

— Supporting evidence from activities: even though most of the respondents reported that they would not want to marry a person from another community, during the focus group discussions, participants stated that **they would be more concerned about the reaction from their communities and future implications regarding their inter-ethnic families** such as children's schools rather than the idea of marrying someone out of their ethnic community. **Association with other ethnic communities would mean disapproval or rejection from their communities**, which would be especially hard for youth who depend on community support and guidance.

— Contrary to the hypothesis and existing evidence of social inclusion programming, non-existence/lack of inter-ethnic interaction was not commonly reported as an obstacle for reconciliation in either of the assessments. This indicates that **the impact of interaction on reconciliation is not well understood by communities for its positive potential**.

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2   K-Albanian and K-Serbians were less likely to rate their interaction with each other as positive. Quote was taken during the FGDs, when asked about perceived differences between K. Serbs and K. Albanians. The statements of this young girl show the severity of the media coverage fueled by political discourse feeding on conflict dynamics and the lack of interaction amongst communities, particularly K-Serbian and K-Albanian.

— Inter-personal distrust as a result of the conflict was seen by all groups as the single greatest obstacle for reconciliation, indicating that opportunities for positive inter-group interaction are critical as a trust-building tool.

— There are strongly contrasting opinions regarding groups' treatment in Kosovo, with 49% of K-Albanians stating that all ethnic communities enjoy equal rights, whereas only 15% of K-Serbians shared this opinion. These groups also tend to believe that each group has different wishes for the future of Kosovo.

RECOMMENDATIONS

CREATE SAFE ENVIRONMENTS FOR REGULAR INTER-GROUP CONTACT AMONG YOUTH

— Support continued engagement to enable meaningful interaction among youth

— Develop and implement multilingual extra-curricular activities complementary to school curriculum in cooperation with central and local level authorities, schools, NGOs and International Organizations:

— Regular after-school intercultural events (arts, sports, journalism, etc.) facilitated based heavily on interdependence methodology

— Regular after-school soft skills and vocational skills courses (IT, crafts, leadership, conflict mediators, etc.)

— Pilot cross-school cooperation in form of multilingual summer schools for children from all represented ethnic groups

— Identify the agents for change and support them to mobilize wider community

— Create positive messages

— Monitor and evaluate the impact of activities implemented

INVEST IN TRAINING OF EDUCATIONAL STAFF

Investment in training teachers, parents and groups within communities are vital:

— Provide teachers with language courses in the official languages of Kosovo

— Provide future and current teachers with trainings on non-discrimination, conflict-sensitive thinking and unconscious bias

— Support teachers and trainers with curricula for socially cohesive methodology and activities to be incorporated in the regular curricula

— Pilot "inclusive weeks" in schools with different ethnic composition and monitor the impact on outgroup perception

Additional recommendations for wider community engagement will be developed through a series of meetings and workshops planned with diverse stakeholders at both local and central level.