

# Policy Brief No. 2

## Program Y - Evidence and implications



The Program Y policy brief offers information on the relevance of introducing programs based on the development of life skills and an overview of the key results achieved through the implementation of the comprehensive health promotion and violence prevention program – Young Men Initiative. The results presented in this document are extracted from evaluation studies conducted in Serbia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Kosovo\*.

### Adolescents need life skills

Adolescence is a transitional period of intensive psychophysical development. During this period, adolescents have very pronounced intellectual, physical and other abilities, but also certain antisocial behaviors and unhealthy habits that can diminish these abilities and leave long-term or lasting consequences on them, their lives, as well as the communities in which they grow up<sup>1</sup>. Program Y and Be a Man Clubs contribute to the development of life skills that enable young people to overcome the difficulties they may face, but also motivate young people to expand their influence on their peers outside of school, and thus extend their influence to the communities and society in which they live.

\*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence. It applies to the whole document.  
1 – GESJ: Education Science and Psychology. (2011). Life Skill Education for Adolescents: Its Relevance and Importance

#### It is worth emphasizing:

- 1** Program Y is a science-based educational curriculum tailored to the specific needs of young people that enables young people to cope independently and with adequate skills with the challenges of growing up, making decisions that are of best interest to their health.
- 2** Quality education according to the Program Y methodology, if implemented with systemic support and in a supportive environment, can lead to a change in attitudes and behaviors of young people, motivate them to care about their own health and health of their peers, encourage perseverance in making decisions that are in the best interest of their health.
- 3** Program Y leads to a reduction in physical violence, an increase in gender equality, an increase in tolerance, a reduction in the incidence of digital violence, and an increase in the percentage of young people who would stop the violence they are witnessing.
- 4** Teaching staff and the professional public involved in the audit and implementation of Program Y recognize the methodology as a quality and important educational program.

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According to the definition of the World Health Organization, *Life Skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.* Life skills-based education seeks to offer students strategies for making healthy decisions that contribute to a meaningful life. Life skills as the basis of action are permeated through the curriculum Program Y and the activities of the Be a Man Club.

## What do we know?

Traditional educational approaches to health promotion based on informing students about the risks and consequences of unhealthy lifestyles are not effective and do not serve the needs of the current generation.<sup>2 3</sup>

New trends among young people, social networks and mass media have also influenced the change in attitudes among young people. Virtual space has become a place for gathering, socializing, exchanging information, but also a space where there are new factors influencing the attitudes, values and behaviors of young people that contribute to the emergence of new risk factors.

Using various research methods, CARE International Balkans and its partners analyzed the needs and behaviors of young people, the needs of schools, parents and local communities, and in accordance with the findings, created a comprehensive educational response based on evidence.

Prevention of violence, prevention of unhealthy habits of young people, prevention of HIV and transmission of sexually transmitted infections and protection of mental health are among the top priorities of the countries in the Balkan region. In their efforts to respond to adolescents' health challenges and contribute to preserving the health of young people, the Balkan countries are taking various measures, including programmatic approaches to health and education institutions. Unfortunately, there is a lack of synchronized and comprehensive approaches and system solutions that would offer a synergistic and more efficient response.

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2 – World Health Organization, Geneva. (1999). *Partners in Life Skills Education, Conclusions from a United Nations Inter-Agency Meeting*

3 – Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). *Characteristics of an Effective Health Education Curriculum* web source: <<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/sher/characteristics/index.htm>>

## International recommendations integrated into the youth work model

It is necessary to provide young people with access to participatory programs that place them at the center of learning, and which, in addition to functional knowledge, contribute to the development of life skills that are essential for making decisions that are in the best interest for their health. Skills are abilities, so it is important to enable young people to adopt and practice them in a formal environment. Self-confidence, socialization, and tolerance are not skills, but the acquisition of these qualities is facilitated through learning and practicing life skills such as self-awareness, problem solving, critical thinking, and interpersonal skills<sup>4</sup>.

Schools are the most important environment for young people. Given that more young people attend school, schools are the most relevant place for formal education, building life skills, building relationships with peers and learning about conflict resolution and the problems they may face or face as they grow up<sup>5</sup>.

Although adolescents are a generally healthy population, habits and behaviors during this period can significantly affect their health and quality of life in later life. Violence, injuries, alcohol and drug use, impaired mental health and sexually transmitted infections are the most common health problems of young people<sup>6</sup>, both in the world and in the Balkan countries. Schools and formal education provide significant opportunities and opportunities to reach a large number of young people through health education and healthy lifestyles, which cannot be achieved within health facilities that young people rarely attend.

4 – World Health Organization. (1999). Partners in Life Skills Education, Conclusions from a United Nations Inter-Agency Meeting

5 – World Health Organization. (2020). Life skills education school handbook Prevention of noncommunicable diseases

6 – World Health Organization. (2018) Adolescents: health risks and solutions, more information at: < <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescents-health-risks-and-solutions>>

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Program Y and Be a Man Club represent a comprehensive model of working with high school participants, and in areas identified through Balkan research and international recommendations as the most relevant for this age group. Both models provide young people with the opportunity to adopt and practice skills in a safe and positive environment. To be effective, life skills development programs must have clearly defined outcomes, the educational process must be participatory, and social aspects of health integrated into lessons<sup>7</sup>.

Guided by the principles of application of scientifically based approaches in working with young people, within the Young Men Initiative program, a curriculum for work in secondary schools, Program Y, and a complementary program, Be a Man Clubs, have been developed. Both programs have been developed in collaboration with high schools, local and international experts, local and international educational institutions and NGOs.

#### Effects of education according to Program Y methodology and activities of the Be a Man Club:

1. Changes in attitudes towards violence and the adoption of attitudes leading to lower tolerance towards various forms of violence
2. Reducing the occurrence of physical violence
3. Reducing the occurrence of digital violence
4. Reducing the occurrence of sexual violence
5. Increasing the level of gender equitable attitudes
6. Increased percentage of young people who would stop the violence they are witnessing
7. A larger number of young people who would seek help
8. Increased knowledge about violence, health and healthy lifestyles

7 – World health organization. (1999). Partners in Life Skills Education, Conclusions from a United Nations Inter-Agency Meeting

## The Impact of Program Y and Be a Man Clubs on Youth Health and Well-Being

Education based on the Program Y methodology, in young people can lead to a change in attitudes and behavior, affect the perception of young people about the importance of care and decision-making about their health and the health of their peers. A comparative analysis<sup>8,9,10</sup> of the attitudes, knowledge and behavior of young people before and after participating in the activities of the Young Men Initiative program, gathered evidence and implications that emphasize the importance of introducing Program Y and activities of the Be a Man Club in formal education.

### Building healthy relationships and opposing the negative influences of peers

Given that young people in adolescence are strongly influenced by peers, it is important to emphasize that Program Y contributes to understanding the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships, and by acquiring negotiation and communication skills, young people are able to build healthy relationships and oppose potentially harmful influences of peers and peer groups. By developing critical thinking and adopting information and attitudes about personal responsibility in the context of decision making, the evidence shows that young people develop a greater degree of responsibility for the decisions they make and a greater degree of responsibility related to health and health care is noticeable.

### Reducing peer violence

Violence is a public health problem that is present in all countries in the Balkans, and violence prevention is at the top of the strategic priorities of Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\* and Albania. Young people are a particularly vulnerable category, and the violence they are exposed to at school, in the community and in the virtual environment can have a destructive impact on their physical and mental health. Exposure to violence affects the motivation of young people to attend school, affects the achievement of results and

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8 – CARE International Balkans. (2016). Boys and men as allies in violence prevention and gender transformation in the Western Balkans – Young Men Initiative, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo\*, Albania

9 – CARE International Balkans. (2017). Promoting healthier lifestyles among youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina by challenging gender stereotypes, Bosnia and Herzegovina

10 – CARE International Balkans. (2020). Men and boys as partners in promoting gender equality and prevention of youth extremism and violence in the Balkans, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo\*, Albania

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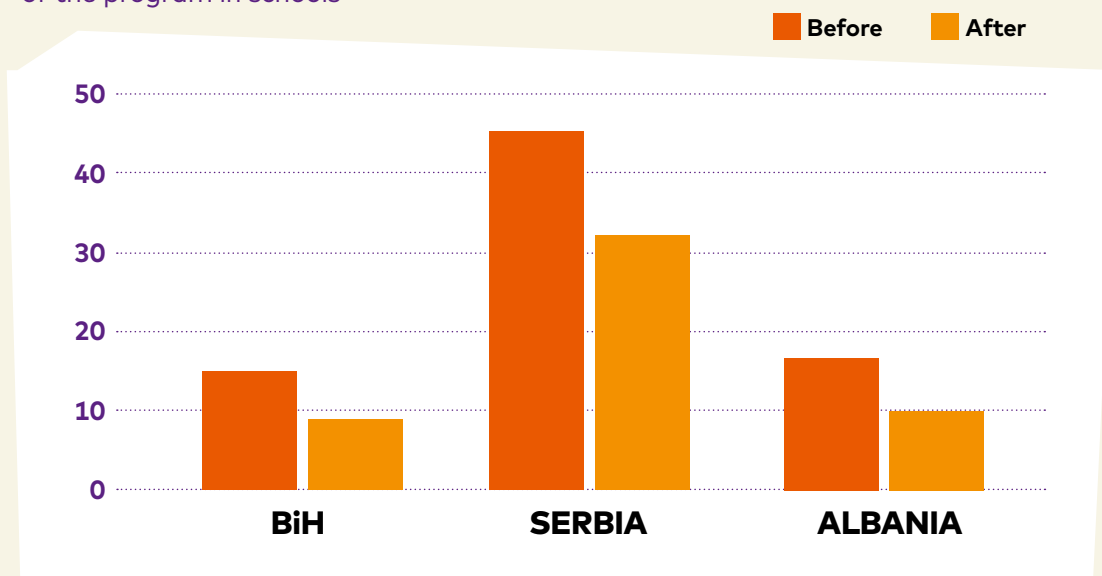
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Impact on the occurrence of physical violence before and after the implementation of the program in schools



setting higher academic goals. The conducted evaluations show that Program Y contributes to the reduction of physical violence, psychological violence, sexual and digital violence, and it is especially important to emphasize that young people who have passed the educational program based on the development of life skills according to the Program Y model have more capacity, readiness and self-confidence to stop and oppose the violence they witness or seek/offer help if they or their peers need it. In this way, Program Y contributes to the development of a culture of nonviolence at the level of the class, school and local community, and this type of prevention according to global research has implications for the most effective impact.

### Elimination of gender stereotypes and increasing the level of gender equality

Prevention of domestic violence, violence against women and girls are also part of the national programs of the governments of the countries where Program Y is implemented. A very important aspect in prevention is the **elimination of gender stereotypes and increasing the level of gender equality**. Program Y and Be a Man Clubs directly contribute to increasing the level of gender equality, which is also the most common result observed during many years of monitoring the impact of the program on youth. By adopting life

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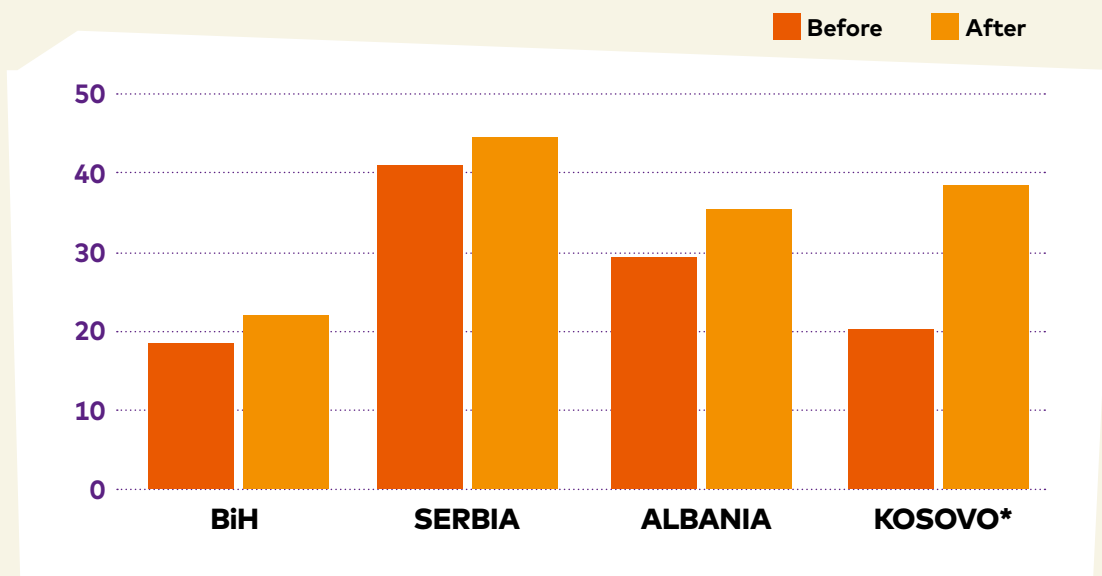
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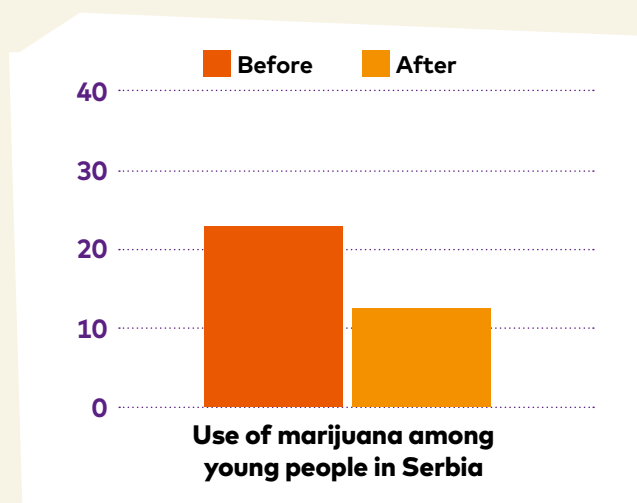
## GENDER EQUALITY INDEX



skills, especially critical thinking, young people gain a better understanding of the impact of gender inequality on them and their peers and become key allies in transforming the environment by promoting equality and equity in all spheres of life.

## Reducing the use of psychoactive substances

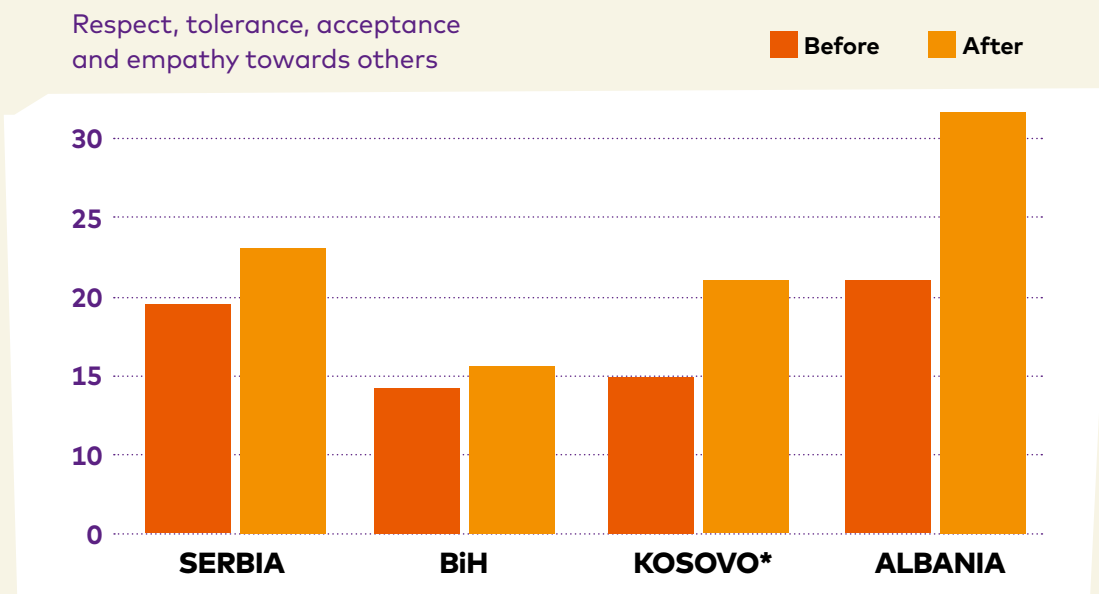
The use of illegal psychoactive substances during adolescence can leave unforeseeable consequences on mental and physical health. On the other hand, the use of these substances also affects the behavior of young people at this age. Therefore, it is encouraging that the three-year program has reduced the percentage of young people who have used psychoactive substances.



## Respect, tolerance, acceptance and empathy towards others

Lack of empathy and understanding of the needs of others can be a crucial factor in the occurrence of verbal and physical violence. On the other hand, the lack of empathy also contributes to the lack of tolerance towards others and the different. The analysis of the impact of Program Y and activities of the Be a Man Club identified a significant increase in the levels of tolerance, empathy and acceptance of minority groups. The research also confirmed an increase in empathy for the status of women, especially when it comes to rights and exposure to violence.

Respect, tolerance, acceptance and empathy towards others



## Preservation of reproductive health

Children and adolescents with and without chronic health conditions and disabilities will benefit when they are provided with accurate and age-appropriate information on the biological, sociocultural, psychological, relational and spiritual dimensions of sexuality<sup>11</sup>. Although there is clear evidence that education on topics such as sexuality does not encourage young people to have sex and actually prolong young people's decisions<sup>12</sup>, there is still some resistance in the Balkans to this and similar topics. As a result, young people remain deprived of quality education and are most often provided with information and approaches that have been shown to be ineffective and have no impact on young people's attitudes and behavior.

11 – Cora C. Breuner, Gerri Mattson, Committee on adolescence and committee on psychosocial aspects of child and family health. (2016). *Sexuality Education for Children and Adolescents*

12 – Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA), (2016). *Sexuality education, Policy brief No. 1*



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Evaluations show that after education according to the Program Y methodology, young people have more information about sexually transmitted infections, more understanding of how their decisions can positively or negatively affect their reproductive health, and acquired skills enable them to cope more effectively with social impacts that are a key factor in preserving their health. It is important to emphasize that international evaluations show that quality and age-appropriate reproductive health education prolongs the decision to have sex, does not encourage young people to be sexually active and enables young people to be responsible for their reproductive health.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Health and violence prevention education policies should be in line with national and international policies and make life skills-based education programs more accessible.
- By conducting evaluation activities, countries can analyze the impact of the program and compare the effects in relation to the practices in the implementation of the program and identify the most effective approaches and factors that contribute to greater effectiveness.
- With the support of the ministries of education and the participation of representatives of these institutions, schools can be encouraged to implement school programs with higher quality and commitment.
- In order for the program to be successful in achieving the expected results, it is necessary to conduct training of teaching staff, in order to develop competencies for the implementation of a comprehensive prevention program based on the development of life skills.
- Expect and offer answers to parents, teachers and students about their concerns or ambiguities regarding the implementation of the program.
- Teaching staff in schools, regardless of whether they are directly involved in the implementation of the program, should be familiar with the importance of life skills-based education, and teaching staff involved in the implementation of workshops should gain access to training that further improves the level of competencies needed to implement education based on life skills.
- Affirm the participation of students in the activities of the Be a Man Club, with special attention to the inclusion of young people who come from dysfunctional families, young people at increased risk.
- Establish cooperation with local organizations, institutions, parents and coordinate school activities in parallel with activities in the local community and enable young people to propose topics and activities that are complementary and can be implemented within the activities of the Be a Man Club.

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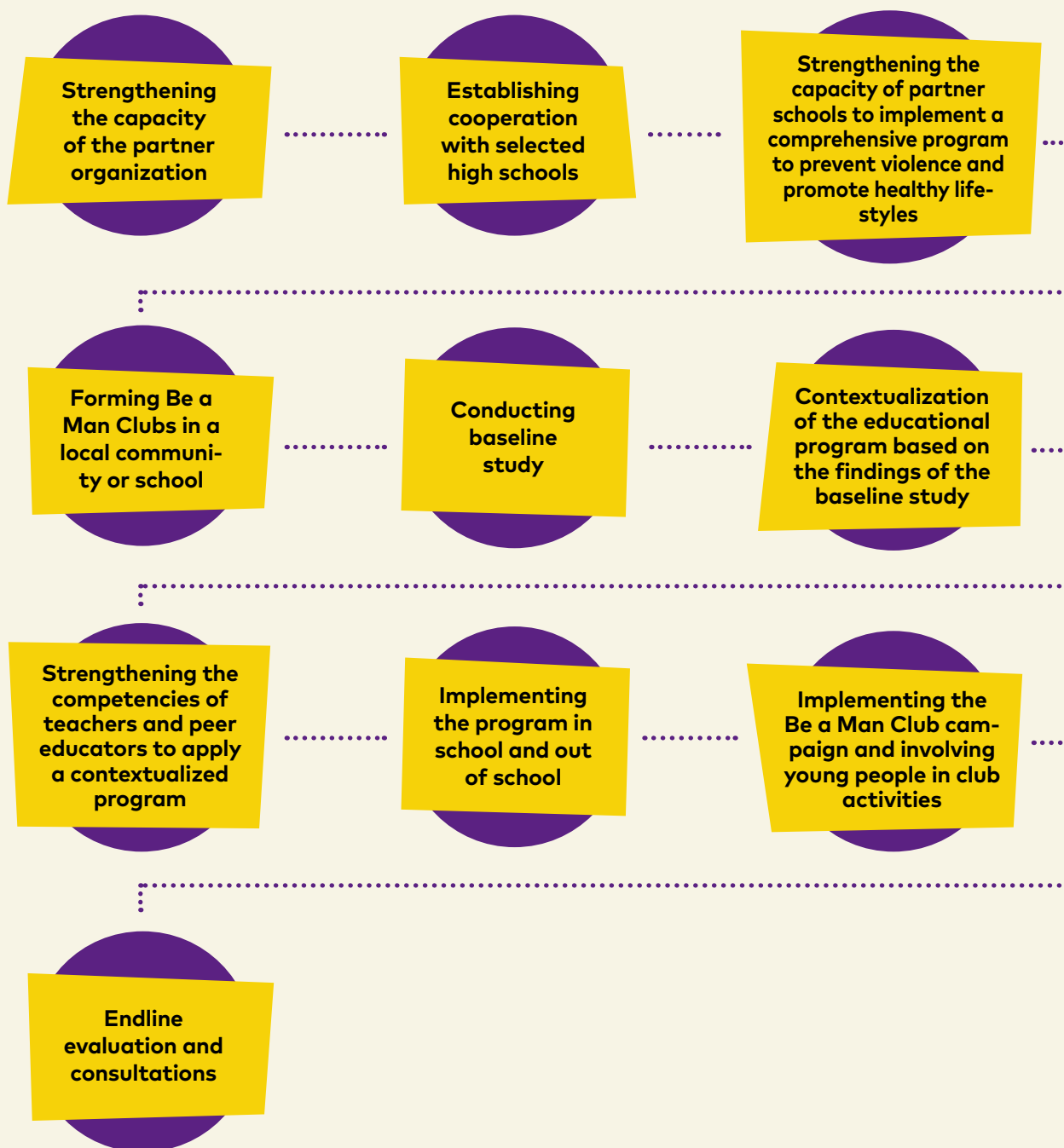
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Scheme 1: Establishment and implementation phases of the Young Men Initiative program



Find more information at

<https://youngmeninitiative.net> and <http://www.program-y.org>.

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### Literature to read

**Young Men Initiative** - A program to promote gender equality, nonviolence and healthy lifestyles, CARE International Balkans, 2018. Web link: <[https://youngmeninitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/YMI\\_PROGRAM-Brochure-BIH.pdf](https://youngmeninitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/YMI_PROGRAM-Brochure-BIH.pdf)>

**Be a Man, change the rules!** Findings and lessons learned during the seven-year Young Men Initiative project organized by CARE International Balkans, CARE International Balkans, 2017. Web link: <https://beta.youngmeninitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Nalazi-i-lekcije-nau%C4%8Dene-to-kom-sedmogodi%C5%A1n-eg-projekta-inicijativa-mladi%C4%87a-u-organizaciji-CARE-International-Balkan.pdf>

**Men and Boys as Partners in Promoting Gender Equality and Prevention of Youth Extremism and Violence in the Balkans**, Endline Evaluation Report available at <<http://www.careevaluations.org/evaluation/men-and-boys-as-partners-in-promoting-gender-equality-and-prevention-of-youth-extremism-and-violence-in-the-balkans/>>

**Promoting Healthier Lifestyles among Youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina by Challenging Gender Stereotypes**, Young Men Initiative Project, Endline Evaluation Report available at <<http://>

[www.careevaluations.org/evaluation/promoting-healthier-lifestyles-among-youth-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina-by-challenging-gender-stereotypes-in-young-men-initiative-project-ii-yimi-ii/](http://www.careevaluations.org/evaluation/promoting-healthier-lifestyles-among-youth-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina-by-challenging-gender-stereotypes-in-young-men-initiative-project-ii-yimi-ii/)>

**Program Y (Youth)** – Innovative approaches in the prevention of gender-based violence and the promotion of healthy lifestyles among boys and girls, CARE International Balkans, 2016, available at : <<https://beta.youngmeninitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Program-Y-BIH.pdf>>

**A Narrative Systematic Review Of Life Skills Education: Effectiveness, Research Gaps And Priorities**, Aishath Nasheeda, Haslinda Binti Abdullah, Steven Eric Krauss & Nobaya Binti Ahmed, International Journal Of Adolescence And Youth, Volume 24, 2019 - Issue 3

**Life skills education school handbook** Prevention of noncommunicable diseases, World Health Organization, 2020. Web source: <<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331948/9789240004849-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>>

**Characteristics of An Effective Health Education Curriculum**, Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020. Web source: <<https://www.Cdc.Gov/Healthyschools/Sher/Characteristics/Index.Htm>>

**Empowering Adolescents with Life Skills Education in Schools** – School Mental Health Program: Does It Work? P-834 - Effect of Life Skills Education on Academic Achievement of First Year High School Male Students

**Life Skills Education for Children and Adolescents in Schools** - Introduction and Guidelines to Facilitate The Development and Implementation of Life Skills Programmes, WHO/MNH/PSF/93.7 A.Rev.2 Web source: <[https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/63552/WHO\\_MNH\\_PSF\\_93.7A\\_Rev.2.Pdf?sequence=1](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/63552/WHO_MNH_PSF_93.7A_Rev.2.Pdf?sequence=1)>

**Sexuality Education**, Policy Brief No. 1, Federal Centre For Health Education (BZgA), 2016.

**Partners in Life Skills Education**, Conclusions from A United Nations Inter-Agency Meeting, World Health Organization. Geneva 1999.

**Life Skills Education School Handbook** Prevention of Noncommunicable Diseases, World Health Organization. 2020.

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In the Balkan region, **CARE International** has over 25 years of experience in program implementation. During the '90-es wars and conflicts, CARE responded to the destruction, traumatization, displacement and inter-ethnic distrust with its massive humanitarian and life-saving work all over Balkans. From year 2000, CARE's orientation shifted to developmental work and its aim in the Balkans today is to ensure that social, economic and political rights of vulnerable and marginalized groups are recognized and fulfilled, contributing to sustainable peace in the region.

**CARE Program Strategy** is based on two pillars a) Socio-Economic Inclusion and b) Gender Equality of vulnerable and marginalized groups by promoting the values and practices of gender equality, diversity and non-violence, strengthening the capacities of local, national and regional human rights and social justice actors and creating opportunities for innovation, participation, learning, cooperation and advocacy. CARE nourishes partnerships with local civil society sector and governments dedicated to contributing positive changes in the societies.

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