



# Young Men Initiative

Promoting gender equality, violence free relationships and the healthy development of adolescent boys in the Western Balkans

## Background

The Yugoslavian Wars of 1991-2001 were based on national and ethnic tensions that resulted in numerous cases of gender-based violence, including mass rapes of women and sexual abuse against men and boys in prison camps. Currently, an emerging culture of violence is visible in the Western Balkans and the consequences of violence within the family and the community severely affects the development and health of young men and young women. Youth is a critical moment when young people develop and rehearse gender equitable attitudes and related violent behaviors. Researchers and youth programmers have recognized the importance of working with young men to cultivate gender-equitable attitudes and reduce violence. Yet youth service agencies (YSA) in post-conflict countries in the Balkans do not have context-specific information about how constructs of masculinity and violence operate in young men's lives.



**Project Sites:**  
Zagreb, Belgrade, Prokuplje, Podgorica, Banja Luka and Sarajevo.

**Project Goal:** Male youth aged 13-19 hold attitudes and demonstrate behaviors which support more gender equitable social norms and discourage violent behavior against women and peers.

## Masculinity and Violence in the Western Balkans - Project Research

This participatory, learning and action (PLA) research sought to answer: How do current social constructs and experiences of masculinity for young men in the Western Balkans relate to young men's violent use of power? What influences young men's decisions not to use violence? And what opportunities exist to support young men's more gender-equitable constructions of masculinity, especially alternatives to the violent use of power?

The project hypothesizes that by understanding constructs of masculinity and violence, YSA can better address personal attitudes about gender equity and a broader definition of sexuality for young men to foster changes in gender norms that contribute to violent behaviors.



**Findings:** The PLA research highlights several important contexts where young men negotiate constructions of masculinity and the violent use of power. One context young men identified is widespread fighting and bullying among their male peers that begins in primary school where violence is perceived as mandatory. Moreover, young men reported that most fathers expect and exhort their sons to use violence in fights.. Other young men identified the following successful strategies in avoiding the use of violence: (1) their own internal reserves like an ability to withstand being marginalized and the value in individual pursuits such as reading or music; (2) finding other peers who rejected the use of violence; and (3) becoming involved in sport teams where coaches promoted cooperation and teamwork.



**Project Partners**



PERPETUUM MOBILE  
Centar za razvoj mladih i zapošljavanje



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## Project Methodology and Activities

### YMI Project Partners

Building strong local partnership and ownership is a key strategy of CARE International. CARE has focused on building the capacity of 6 key youth serving organizations who are working in the field with young men. In addition, other local expertise is engaged within the project, including for the lifestyle campaign development, training and research.



### Baseline / Endline (Quantitative and Qualitative Research)

International Center for the Research of Women (ICRW) has been working with CARE and its partners on the research, monitoring and evaluation component of the program. Measuring impact of the program is important for working on policy focused on young men and scaling up of YMI.

### School Based Interventions

Lifestyle Campaign Masculinities	Educational Workshops Program Muski (M)	Regional Young Men Forum
A school based lifestyle campaign will focus on confronting rigid norms of masculinity as the overall theme, with sub themes focused on violence against women, peer violence and sexual health /healthy relationships. Through school based "real man" clubs, messaging and school activities using different forms of media, young men and young women are engaged.	An educational workshop program based on the Promundo Program H methodology for work with young men, has been field tested and adapted for the Western Balkan context. Education and skill development is the focus, covering topics such as gender based violence, conflict, sexuality, fatherhood and gender roles, sexual health, HIV/AIDS, emotions and conflict resolution.	A forum of young men from the four countries targeted within YMI. The forum is a vehicle to give young men a voice in the project, to support interested volunteers to gain new skills and to promote young men as role models and peer educators. The regional young men forum has been active in the lifestyle campaign development.



Improving Policy and Practice – Through Research and Learning

**Young Men Talking: Experiences of Conflict** is a partnership between YouthAction Northern Ireland and CARE International in the Western Balkans to build youth work capacity around engaging young men around issues of conflict, violence, masculinities and healthy lifestyles. A summer program for young men from both regions implemented by youth workers took place in 2008. Addition exchanges planned, youth worker internships/exchanges, training and joint research

**IMAGES and the Men and Gender Equality Policy Project**, a component of the YMI implemented by Center for Education, Counseling and Research (CESI) focused on Croatia is part of a Global Research Initiative led by Promundo and ICRW focused on policy analysis and a quantitative survey on masculinities, men and gender.

#### Additional Information:

John Crownover  
CARE International  
Simeuna Djaka 4  
Banja Luka 78000  
Bosnia and Herzegovina  
[jcrownover@carenw.org](mailto:jcrownover@carenw.org)  
+38751211309



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