MotherSchools Montenegro
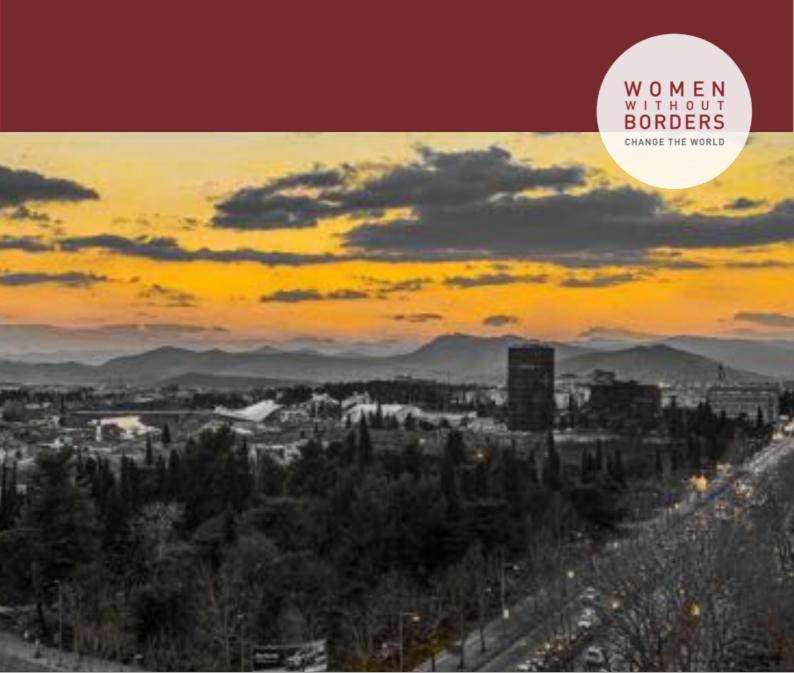## Parenting for Peace in Podgorica, Nikšić, and Tuzi

Women without Borders
Impact Report | 2022

WOMEN
WITHOUT
BORDERS
CHANGE THE WORLD

MOTHERSCHOOLS MONTENEGRO
PARENTING FOR PEACE IN PODGORICA, NIKŠIĆ, AND TUZI

WOMEN WITHOUT BORDERS
Impact Report | 2022

Contact Details
For questions or queries, please contact:
E: office@wwb.org
T: + 43 1 5334551

About Women without Borders
Women without Borders (WwB) is an international non-profit organisation headquartered in Vienna. WwB focuses on Women Leadership, Capacity Building, Gender Based Violence, Intercultural Dialogue, and Preventing Violent Extremism. We commit and apply ourselves to: Working from the bottom up and empowering the women leaders of tomorrow at the individual, community, and global levels; supporting and inspiring women in the process of moving from victimhood towards agency; advocating for a future without fear, suppression, and violence against women; introducing and normalising the idea of mothers as the first line of defence against extremism in their homes and communities; bringing the voices of impactful local leaders to the attention of the world

About Forum MNE
Forum MNE is a non-government organisation that implements projects focused on community youth work and activism, EU values and democracy, and human rights. Forum MNE works towards achieving local-level sustainable development.

ABSTRACT

The threat of violent extremism in Montenegro has remained comparatively low when viewed in a Western Balkan context. Yet the presence of internal drivers that are known to heighten an individual's susceptibility to radicalisation on a domestic level, coupled with the risk of ideological spill-over from more affected nations nearby on a regional level, have made efforts to counter and prevent the spread of extremism a government priority. Given the distinct possibility of a resurgence of toxic ideologies and terrorist recruitment across the region, Montenegro is now in a critical period during which effective prevention efforts could work to reduce the necessity for hard power intervention measures further down the line. In response, Women without Borders (WwB), in cooperation with local implementing partner organisation Forum MNE, introduced its global 'MotherSchools: Parenting for Peace' Model to three Montenegrin communities in 2018. Ahead of convening MotherSchools groups in Podgorica, Nikšić, and Tuzi—all running in parallel—WwB trained a pool of twelve local professionals as prospective MotherSchools Teachers and Notetakers. Six of the qualified Teachers across three groups went on to deliver the Curriculum to three groups of mothers who had joined to develop their parenting and safeguarding skills. Despite numerous challenges and setbacks brought about by the global pandemic, three MotherSchools groups succeeded in graduating from the programme. On average, the mothers as Participants each received at least forty hours of training geared towards becoming role models and prevention stakeholders in their families and communities. This report offers an overview of the MotherSchools project in Montenegro and presents WwB's impact findings with respect to the programme beneficiaries. Applying a qualitative data analysis to the 88 semi-structured Entry (47) and Exit (41) Interviews conducted before and after the programme, WwB identified impact on three levels. On the personal level, the mothers developed their self-confidence, knowledge of threats, and individual capacity to recognise and begin to explore their security role in their homes and everyday environments. At the familial level, mothers began to restructure dynamics and adopt constructive parenting techniques. At the community level, they developed new networks and disseminated their learnings and awareness. Montenegro is now one of sixteen countries to have joined WwB's global effort to equip mothers with the knowledge and skills to become central violence prevention allies in at-risk communities around the world.

ABBREVIATIONS

CT	Counterterrorism
CDT	Center for Democratic Transition
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
LIP	Local Implementing Partner
MPVE	Mothers Preventing Violent Extremism
MS	MotherSchools
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
P/CVE	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
QDA	qualitative data analysis
SAVE	Sisters Against Violent Extremism
WwB	Women without Borders

GLOSSARY

MotherSchools Model

Developed by WwB in 2012, and implemented across sixteen countries since, to reduce the spread of extremist ideologies by training mothers and activating their potential to intervene in the radicalisation process of their children. Each MotherSchools programme typically graduates a total of sixty mothers across three MotherSchools groups running in parallel.

Women without Borders

In charge of overall project and programme development, project management, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. As the project lead, WwB is responsible for the entire project lifecycle and the development and refinement of all programmatic elements for the implementation of the MotherSchools.

Local Implementing Partner

Tasked with coordinating local project management, mobilisation process, logistics, and implementation. LIPs are local non-profit organisations with an understanding of the challenges on the ground, and the capacity and capability to partner with WwB to deliver and scale MotherSchools locally.

MotherSchools Trainers

Trainers are part of the WwB team and deliver the MotherSchools Training of Trainers (ToT) Workshop in the project location to prepare prospective Teachers and Notetakers to deliver the MotherSchools Curriculum.

MotherSchools Participants

Mothers of adolescents and young adults who fear that their children may be susceptible to the lure of extremist groups. Participants each receive an average of forty hours of training across ten MotherSchools Sessions over the course of three months in order to become active MotherSchools Role Models and transfer their learnings to their families and communities.

MotherSchools Teachers

Teachers are local professionals and active members of their communities with a background in psychology, sociology, social work, teaching or similar relevant fields of expertise. The MotherSchools Teachers deliver the MotherSchools Curriculum locally to Participants. They are identified jointly by the Local Implementing Partner, Mobilisers, and WwB. Following the completion of the WwB-run ToT Workshop, they are responsible for running a series of ten MotherSchools Sessions.

MotherSchools Notetakers

Observers in the MotherSchools Sessions responsible for keeping track of group dynamics and supporting the Teachers in the documentation and monitoring of the programme. They also partake in WwB's ToT and receive the necessary training to deliver weekly monitoring summaries.

MotherSchools Mobilisers

Working locally to assist in the process of identifying and mobilising suitable Trainers, Teachers, and Participants. Mobilisers engage with local partners and provide support at the grassroots level.

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. EXTREMISM IN MONTENEGRO | BACKGROUND AND RESPONSES

Within a broader Western Balkan context, Montenegro has been less gravely impacted by the phenomenon of recruitment, radicalisation, and violent extremism than most of its neighbouring countries.[1] A total of twenty-six nationals are known to have departed to Syria and Iraq since the beginning of the conflict, seven of whom were killed abroad.[2] This makes up only a small portion of the over one thousand departures from across the region since 2012, but governments and stakeholders have been concerned about the potential risk of violent extremism and possible spill-over effects to Montenegro from more affected countries nearby. Beyond external forces and influences, a consideration of internal factors only reinforces how Montenegro can by no means be considered immune to future waves of radicalisation. Contemporary developments and local-level grievances reveal how its more vulnerable communities are exposed to a wide array of push and pull factors that could drive youths and whole families down the path of extremism once again.

Historical circumstance and continuities are among the leading drivers of potential radicalisation in the young nation state of Montenegro. The country's visible remnants of political, ethnic, and religious strife in particular are a source of concern. A complex set of co-existing yet competing identities threaten to undermine the political and social fabric. In increasing the likelihood of igniting dormant or nascent forms of extremism, such lingering identity issues create a potentially explosive situation. In effect, these volatilities originate chiefly from enduring tensions at the ethnic and religious levels; between ethnic Montenegrins and minority groups including Serbians and Albanians in general, and between minority Muslims and majority Orthodox Christians in particular.[3] The need to counteract polarisation

---

[1] National Platform for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Leads to Terrorism, OSCE, 2018, https://www.osce.org/mission-to-montenegro/406892?download=true
[2] Montenegro 2019 Report, European Commission, 2019, p. 38, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-montenegro-report.pdf p. 38.
[3] Around three-quarters of the population is Orthodox and about one-fifth is Muslim. Divisions along religious and ethnic lines are especially pronounced, also geographically, with the majority of Montenegro's Muslim population living in relative isolation in the Malesia region along the Albanian border. See D. Simeunović and A. Dolnik, 'Security Threats of Violent Islamist Extremism and Terrorism for South East Europe and Beyond', in Cross S., Kentera S., Nation R.C., Vukadinović R. (eds.), *Shaping South East Europe's Security Community for the Twenty-First Century. New Security Challenges Serie*s, (London, 2013), p. 102.

and prevent new cycles of violence from taking root has accentuated the demand for community-based prevention work in Podgorica and beyond.

Recent fieldwork probing the individual motivations of foreign fighter departures has also identified a series of less country-specific albeit local-level push and pull factors. In 2018, British Council-funded researchers conducting interviews in communities impacted by radicalisation and Salafism in Montenegro concluded that many so-called formers had experienced a mixture of the following: dysfunctional families, psychological issues, economic disadvantages, anti-Western sentiments, and criminal histories.[4] The authors also point to studies revealing how many extremists in neighbouring countries boasted a history of living at the margins of society, which included substance abuse, criminal activities, and street violence. A high number purportedly felt socially excluded and lacked a sense of belonging. Ultimately, as the researchers postulated, 'one gets the impression of solitary individuals, sometimes also estranged from family and friends'.[5]

Policy recommendations in the field advocate treating the root causes of Montenegrin extremism through a whole-of-society approach that goes beyond the hard power security sector by also paying attention to, building up, and harnessing the agency of community members, such as family members.[6] Montenegrin policymakers indeed are now acknowledging the importance of mobilising a wide network of local-level prevention actors. To this effect, the Interior Ministry and the Center for Democratic Transition (CDT), with the support of the OSCE Mission to Montenegro, in 2018 developed the 'National Platform for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Leads to Terrorism'. This platform set out to convene a diverse range of individuals from, inter alia, national institutions, municipalities, the media, political parties, civil society, non-governmental organisations, academia, and religious communities.[7]

Since Montenegro has not reached a tipping point where hard power becomes the necessary response, it follows that local-level prevention work ought now to be both prioritised and pursued with greater vigour. Despite a widespread acknowledgement of the importance of

---

[4] The researchers also write: 'Interviewees from the security sector routinely characterised former fighters as having "criminal histories and drug addiction," or "dysfunctional families," and noted that they often hail from the economic margins'. See Edina Bećirević, Tatjana Šuković, and Aner Zuković, 'Extremism Research Forum: Montenegro Report', April 2018: 15.

[5] Van Ginkel, B. and Entenmann, E. (2016) The Foreign Fighter Phenomenon in the European Union: Profiles, Threats & Policies. The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 26.

[6] Edina Bećirević, Tatjana Šuković, and Aner Zuković, 'Extremism Research Forum: Montenegro Report', April 2018: 26.

[7] 'National Platform for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization That Leads to Terrorism', OSCE, 2018, https://www.osce.org/mission-to-montenegro/406892?download=true

rolling out community-based strategies, family members—and thus those closest to the issue—tend still to be overlooked. In general, there is demand for more programming that revolves around building up the necessary awareness, confidence, and practical skills of family members to become prevention actors in their homes and communities. Authoritarian parenting styles as well as communication gaps among family and community members, for instance, are central push factors that can further isolate children and may motivate them to emulate or adopt violent methods. In the absence of addressing these root causes in at-risk communities, structures and dynamics strengthening the youth's vulnerability to recruiters inevitably are sustained across generations.

1.2   WHY MOTHERSCHOOLS? | PARENTING FOR PEACE IN MONTENEGRO

In view of the abovementioned extremist drivers and policy directives, Women without Borders (WwB) brought its global 'MotherSchools: Parenting for Peace' prevention programme to Montenegro. Between 2018 and 2020, WwB cooperated with the local organisation Forum MNE to convene a total of three groups in Podgorica, Nikšić, and Tuzi. This roll-out was part of the broader WwB 'MotherSchools 2020' project, supported by the US Department of State and comprising implementations in Bangladesh, Kosovo, and North Macedonia.

By introducing the MotherSchools Model to at-risk countries across the Western Balkans, WwB brought into the fold security allies who had been missing from contemporary security strategies: concerned and affected mothers of adolescents and young adults whose environment had made them prone to various forms of extremism. This community-based resilience building approach, which to date has been implemented in sixteen countries affected by terrorism, positions mothers as role models and the first responders to burgeoning signs of extremism in their homes and neighbourhoods.

The MotherSchools Curriculum employs developmental psychology, self-confidence training, and theoretical sessions to define radicalisation and prevention at the individual, family, and community levels. The Sessions allow mothers to re-visit, re-evaluate, and re-shape their notion of parenting by learning about the psychological dynamics and stages of childhood and adolescence. In refining their communication skills in the familial context, the programme equips mothers to react to early warning signs and grievances that can lead to radicalisation. Mothers also learn how to introduce and develop alternative narratives that foster a positive youth culture and strengthen resilience.

In so doing, MotherSchools empower women to demonstrate leadership and promote family and community tolerance, forgiveness, and cohesion. The programme guides Participants through a process of gradual awareness-building in three successive stages: starting with the self, moving on to the family and community, and finally arriving at the individual's role in security. Sessions include exercises that facilitate dialogue, information exchanges, and critical reflection using context-based techniques that apply to the mothers' everyday lives.

In the case of Montenegro, where ethno-religious tensions and geopolitical circumstance are chief concerns, the MotherSchools sought in particular to support the process of moving vulnerable families and communities towards a culture of resilience and tolerance. For this purpose, the programme provided confidence and competence training to three groups of mothers to build up their potential to prevent their children and communities from engaging with toxic ideologies. Beyond creating actionable networks of women prevention stakeholders, the integrated and comprehensive nature of the Model ensured that local capacity was advanced in tandem.

1.3   MOTHERSCHOOLS IMPLEMENTATION | AN OVERVIEW OF ACTIVITIES

The MotherSchools project's end-to-end deployment in Montenegro entailed the following five steps: Programming & Local Assessment; MotherSchools Trainings; MotherSchools Roll-Out; Graduation Ceremony and Social Outreach; and Monitoring and Evaluation. The following section provides a high-level, chronological overview of the main operative activities carried out during the project.

The project commenced in 2018 with initial programming preparation and desk research on radicalisation dynamics, followed by the consolidation of WwB's formal relationship with local implementing partner Forum MNE. In early 2019, three members of WwB's team delivered the multi-day kick-off workshop to Forum MNE project staff in Podgorica. This helped to prepare Forum MNE for effective implementation of the MotherSchools programme as a LIP, and to guarantee a deeper understanding of the Model's

methodology and philosophy. During the trip, WwB also met with various stakeholders.[8] This exchange of ideas helped to advance WwB's local network, gain deeper insight into radicalisation dynamics, and develop a more nuanced sense of possible implementation challenges in Montenegro.

Following this initial visit, Forum MNE and WwB commenced the mobilisation process of suitable Teachers to deliver the MotherSchools Curriculum, and of Notetakers with the necessary degree of conceptual awareness to observe and record changing dynamics during the MotherSchools Sessions. Ultimately, nine Teachers and three Notetakers were chosen for the WwB Training of Trainers (ToT) Workshop. The mothers who would make up the Podgorica, Tuzi, and Nikšić groups were identified, all of whom agreed to partake in the programme and fit the target group criteria.

WwB returned to Montenegro in March 2020 for the intended ToT Workshop delivery and Entry Interviews. The interviews provide the baseline context and thus also the 'point of departure' of Participants in terms of their confidence, awareness, knowledge, and competence levels prior to starting the programme. The Training of the Teachers and Notetakers is made up of intensive sessions that include skills training, team-building activities, and education in child and developmental psychology as well as on radicalisation and recruitment processes.

While WwB completed the bulk of the Entry Interviews in Montenegro, the team had to return to Austria ahead of the ToT Workshop considering imminent border closures, flight cancellations, and restrictions on movement due to the breakout of the Covid-19 pandemic. In light of the ensuing period of uncertainty _(e.g. successive lockdowns, new waves of infections, and strict travel restrictions to the Western Balkans), WwB ultimately decided to conduct the Training of the Teachers and Notetakers online between 12 and 13 September 2020. This was the first MotherSchools ToT that WwB had conducted virtually. Through careful preparation and research into effective methods and techniques of online training delivery, WwB successfully completed the two-day workshop and trained eleven prospective Teachers and Notetakers. Ultimately, WwB assessed the capabilities and commitment of the Teacher

---

[8] WwB's met with the following stakeholders: Center for investigative Journalism, Executive Director, Milka Tadic Mijovic; Womens' Rights Center, Executive Director, Maja Raicevic; Government of Montenegro, Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, Head of Department, Biljana Pejovic; Weekly Monitor (WM), Director, Milena Perovic; The US Embassy in Montenegro, INL Program and Outreach Assistant, Violeta Camaj; Ministry of Interior, State Secretary and National CVE Coordinator, Dragan Pejanovic; De Facto Consultancy, Executive Director, Stevan Kandic; Dean of the faculty for Montenegrin language and literature, Adnan Cirgic; Municipality Office Capital city Podgorica Secretary for Social Care, Ivan Terzic; The Austrian Embassy in Montenegro, Rainer Sulzberger, Counsellor and Consul.

candidates and six candidates were selected as the primary MotherSchools Teachers, three as the primary MotherSchools Notetakers, with the remaining trainees acting as substitutes.

With the ongoing pandemic in mind, WwB continuously adapted to shifting circumstances by developing virtual ToT material and a Covid-19 implementation guide for the Teachers and Notetakers. To allow for continued implementation despite restrictions and lockdowns, WwB and Forum MNE devised a three-tier online/hybrid/offline approach in collaboration with the Teachers. Taking municipal regulations into account, these guidelines allowed the Nikšić group to convene online while the Podgorica and Tuzi groups started off by meeting in person.

Three groups of mothers graduated from the MotherSchools programme. Each participant completed ten sessions and received an average of forty hours of training between October and December 2020. Throughout this period, the Teachers guided the mothers through the MotherSchools Curriculum. The Notetakers observed the process and held weekly one-hour monitoring calls with a WwB project staff member who transcribed the conversations in real time. As part of the monitoring process—and beyond regular calls with Forum MNE—WwB staff conducted thirty monitoring calls and collected sixty monitoring reports from Notetakers and Teachers. For the final MotherSchools assessment exercise, WwB completed forty-one in-depth, one-on-one Exit interviews online, each lasting between one and two hours. The project impact was subsequently evaluated based on the Entry and Exit interviews through a qualitative data analysis (QDA) process by WwB, as presented in the main body of this report.

To mark the conclusion of the MotherSchools programme, WwB and Forum MNE hosted the virtual Graduation Ceremony on 12 March 2021. As with North Macedonia and Kosovo, WwB and Forum MNE decided to pursue an online graduation due to the ongoing global pandemic restrictions. The event was organised via a professional studio that specialises in virtual forums, allowing several MotherSchools Participants, Teachers, and Notetakers to gather at a film venue for a panel discussion while other speakers and audience members joined remotely. In addition to contributions from the first MotherSchools Montenegro generation, the ceremony included remarks from the Montenegrin Ministry of the Interior, US Department of State, the OSCE, and the Austrian Embassy to Montenegro.[9] To illustrate the importance of connectivity across borders in the Western Balkans, the Graduation Ceremony also featured

---

[9] Rade Milosevic, State Secretary, Ministry of the Interior; Irfan Saeed, Acting Deputy Coordinator for Terrorist Detentions and Prevention, Bureau of Counterterrorism, US Department of State; Georgia Holmer, Head of the Action against Terrorism Unit at the OSCE Secretariat and WwB Advisory Board Member; and Ambassador Anna Jankovic, Austrian Ambassador to Montenegro.

voices from other MotherSchools leaders and partners in Kosovo and North Macedonia.[10] The interventions and diverse profiles of attendees from around the world were a powerful testament to the global and interconnected nature of the MotherSchools movement.[11]

As part of the program's public outreach component following the MotherSchools graduation in Montenegro, WwB additionally developed a speakers' campaign to disseminate key messages and contributions. This resulted in a series of social media posts over two weeks, highlighting the successes of the programme and the impact it has had on the communities of implementation.

1.4   TARGET GROUPS | AREAS OF IMPLEMENTATION

The MotherSchools locations from which MotherSchools participants were mobilised—Podgorica, Tuzi, and Nikšić—were identified in the early stages of the project. For this purpose, WwB drew on desk research, discussions with Forum MNE, and insights from local and international stakeholder meetings. Whereas recruitment propaganda has been particularly prevalent in north Bosniak communities as well as along the Albanian border, Forum MNE and WwB deemed that communities lacked the necessary infrastructure and trusted CSOs to support a first-generation roll-out in Montenegro. As in MotherSchools implementations across Austria, Germany, and North Macedonia, less accessible MotherSchools communities were targeted in second and third generation iterations. This is to ensure that sufficient local capacity is built and stakeholder buy-in is secured ahead of any expansion to especially challenging environments, and thus typically to places where other P/CVE projects do not exist or have fallen short of reaching their objectives.

Podgorica and Tuzi are the first two areas that WwB and Forum MNE chose for the roll-out. The capital had two cases of foreign fighters, with one joining ISIS and being killed and another leaving for Ukraine. The municipality of Tuzi, by contrast, is far more isolated and has a higher concentration of ethnic Albanians. Forum MNE's own research also showed that extremism in Tuzi has been steadily on the rise. Since this has been true among both Catholic and Muslim communities in general, WwB decided to convene groups that had the ability to

---

[10] Meral Musli Tajroska, MotherSchools Alumnae Ambassador and Executive Director at Pleiades; Drenusha Marku, MotherSchools North Macedonia Teacher; and Brikena Avdyli, MotherSchools Kosovo Local Partner and Executive Director at Jahjaga Foundation.

[11] Over 75 individuals attended, including MotherSchools actors and individuals from the U.S. Department of State, the Austrian Development Agency, the UN Foundation, the OSCE, the Austrian Embassy in the Philippines, the Hannah Arendt Institute, and stakeholders and supporters from the WwB global network in Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Zanzibar.

reach individuals from both sides. Aside from this, mobilisation in Podgorica proved more challenging than anticipated. WwB and Forum MNE thus adjusted the plan of mobilisation by shifting one of the two planned Podgorica groups to another municipality.

Based on a number of conversations with Forum MNE and other relevant stakeholders, Nikšić was selected as the third municipality of implementation. Forum MNE had recently completed a research study on 'Youth Resilience to Radical and Extreme Behaviours' that alerted them to how right-wing extremist groupings were exacerbating tension in Nikšić by misappropriating Orthodox imagery. 'The research', Forum MNE put forward to WwB in their rationale, 'showed the high level of prejudices, ethnic distance, and lack of tolerance to differences among young people in Nikšić. The research also showed high levels of permissiveness to violence among young people and an environment to which young people are exposed to bad role models. At the same time, Nikšić has been known by various criminal, hooligan groups, and high rates of various forms of violence. It has high unemployment rates, and many citizens are facing a difficult economic situation. The major concern of partners is how to keep their children distant of various extreme and violent groups which are often misused for political purposes'.

1.7   CHALLENGES, GAPS, AND DATA LIMITATIONS

This section briefly considers possible and established shortcomings—including external and internal factors—relating to the community and country contexts, and to MotherSchools-related activities.

Covid-19 presented a serious external challenge, resulting in the temporary suspension of all MotherSchools programming, including the MotherSchools Teacher and Notetakers ToT and MotherSchools Roll-out. The situation in Montenegro was extremely serious. To sustain the positive momentum that had been created, WwB and Forum MNE worked closely with Teachers and Notetakers to keep mothers engaged in the meantime. While the pandemic acted as a severe obstacle in terms of consistent attendance and reaching the highest possible number of mothers, mothers were offered support to become sufficiently familiar with online platforms, and to attend the graduation ceremonies, which was held virtually. As part of the preparation phase for resuming MotherSchools, WwB developed a comprehensive Teacher Covid Guide and a three-tier implementation strategy (offline, hybrid, and online) to ensure a smooth and continuous rollout of MotherSchools and to avoid any further delays or pause in activities. A

strategy session was held by WwB with Teachers and Notetakers to address challenges and discuss concerns and mitigation strategies before roll-out. Yet some groups did not withstand the half-year hiatus, making it necessary to re-mobilise new groups of mothers in some cases. Adding to this, where lockdowns prohibited in-person meet-ups, some mothers were hindered due to a lack of technological know-how or equipment, and some felt less ready to speak openly presumably due to factors including but not limited to high domestic violence rates in the communities of implementation and fears of being overheard. Despite setbacks, WwB, Forum MNE, and the Teachers succeeded in addressing these challenges in a timely and efficient manner, thus ensuring that ultimately the MotherSchools programme persevered, and that all objectives were met.

Moving beyond external factors, the data collection and interpretation process conducted by WwB through Entry and Exit interviews with all Actors and Participants demands scrutiny; it must be critically examined since even the most laborious efforts and meticulous approaches result in discernible, inherent, and even hidden data limitations and gaps. This final part of the section therefore serves to caution and remind the reader that the insights and impact findings presented in the subsequent chapter offer qualitative interpretations of the participants' personal views and insights based on all 88 interviews conducted.

A noteworthy data limitation stems from the fact that the bulk of all interviews were conducted with the support of Forum MNE staff, Teachers, and Notetakers who translated WwB staff questions. On the one hand, the benefits of employing trusted interpreters arguably tend to outweigh the shortcomings, as they can offer valuable background context, they understand and have access to the interviewee's community, and may thus be a source of trust that helps to evoke more open and honest responses. On the other hand, culturally defined linguistic differences as well as translations and individual interpreter styles, inevitably lead to a degree of questions and answers being 'lost in translation'. Beyond this, working with non-professional interpreters can result in a higher probability that some of the nuances or cultural context is lost, especially when the local interpreters possess limited knowledge of concepts like radicalisation and violent extremism. This challenge was further compounded by the fact that Exit interviews could not be held in person and had to be conducted by phone due to pandemic-related international travel restrictions.

That WwB staff are foreign to Montenegro may have had an impact on the readiness of interviewees to open up. Yet being 'foreign' to a community where notions of honour and reputation inhibit many from speaking freely also can prove to be an advantage. The

authenticity of answers may have been further skewed by factors such the interviewee's possible perception of the Entry and Exit interviews as a formal means of assessment, which can prompt respondents to concentrate on what they may deem to be expected of them in such a situation, such as seeking 'the correct' rather than offering 'the truthful' answer. There are plenty of other data limitations to consider, such effects of an inherent chain of individual biases through which information passes in sequence: from interviewer to translator to interviewee, and vice versa. Or the biases of interviewers who pose questions and follow a line of enquiry that inevitably will at times fall short of taking into account cultural norms and practices that are not theirs.

With the aforementioned as well as other apparent and conceivable limitations in mind, readers of this report should be aware that quoted statements as well as WwB's interpretations and conclusions ought to be considered with some degree of critical assessment. Not all responses on the part of the interviewees and not all resulting conclusions based on the QDA method can be taken entirely at face value. It is important for readers to ask themselves critical questions, and to consider other data limitations. Nevertheless, when coding against certain themes, one can determine whether other mothers who were not part of the same group may have remarked similar changes. That is to say, the impact evaluation and conclusions put forward in this report are based on a series of statements, typically referred to as 'clusters'. Statements or 'telling stories' can therefore be viewed as representative of such clusters.

Finally, the reader of this report should bear in mind that an inherent bias in Exit data may be the result of the so-called 'Hello-Goodbye-Effect'. In the context of this programme, the ecstatic rush that often accompanies a mother's graduation from this education programme can lead to exaggerated expressions in terms of personal, familial, and community changes. To ensure that purported improvements have not been exaggerated and with a view to understanding longer-term impact, this would require a return to communities of implementation for targeted follow-up interviews with programme beneficiaries in one or more years down the line, which would however be beyond the scope of this project.

2. BASELINE CONTEXT

The following chapter serves to provide an overview of the participants' baseline point of departure before the MotherSchools sessions. This helps to contextualise the subsequent impact chapters, and to gauge how the programme has advanced the mothers' readiness and ability upon graduation to understand and in some cases address toxic ideologies to which the families and communities are exposed.

2.1 AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE OF EXTREMISM | BASELINE INSIGHTS

> *When it comes to extremism, mothers were quiet at first, they were not comfortable talking about this. But after a few sessions, they realised that this is their safe space, and that they can talk about everything on these sessions, so they became more open. Some of them were not even aware that extremism is a big problem and that it is so close to us. They realised that they have to start talking more with their children about this if they want to teach them well and to notice any signs on time.*
>
> *– MotherSchools Notetaker, Tuzi, Notetaker Report, Session 10*

Prior to the start of their MotherSchools education, few participants appeared particularly concerned about possible manifestations of extremism in their communities or country. Where the future participants did identify signs, their knowledge tended to be relatively shallow and at times prejudiced; examples could generally be categorised as hearsay. A small number of mothers nevertheless thought it conceivable that radicalisation had the potential to reach their communities.

That most programme candidates were not particularly concerned about the prospect of violent extremist recruitment in their neighbourhoods aligns with the reality that foreign fighter departures from—and indeed returns to—Montenegro over the past decade proved comparatively low in the broader Western Balkan context. Likely owed to a lack of community exposure and limited visible violent extremist manifestations, the mothers' awareness and knowledge of the threat mostly did not go beyond a rudimentary level. One of the prospective participants nevertheless found that the government's emphasis on P/CVE in the wake of EU accession talks had succeeded in spreading a degree of awareness and prevention preparedness.[12]

---

[12] (200313 MNE MSP EnLK 2 | Podgorica)

The problem of extremism, when the topic was broached, tended to be externalised; it existed either outside of or in other parts of Montenegro. A Tuzi mother suggested that although her community was free of extremism, she had heard that women in the north of Montenegro had been paid to cover up, which she took to be a sign of religious extremism. Economic incentives, she thought, were the biggest risk factor.[13]

Upon closer inspection, the Entry Interviews revealed that Montenegrin citizens have been exposed to many of the underlying preconditions that typically lead to community polarisation and render individuals more prone to radicalisation. Examples provided by the future Participants, Teachers, and Notetakers pointed to an enduring legacy of ethnic strife and religious tension that risks being further exacerbated and exploited by the political elite, and by right-wing and Islamist extremists alike.

Heightened polarisation in Montenegrin society, particularly along religious and ethnic lines, was a chief concern among interviewees across the three groups during the baseline interviews. This likely is owed at least in part to the shifting political landscape, with the government that had been in power for thirty years being replaced by one boasting pro-Serbian leanings in August 2020. While mothers generally were not open to discuss possible manifestations of extremism, two of them offered clear examples of politically and religiously-motivated violence. Two weeks prior to the Entry interviews, a future Tuzi group member recounted how in her town, physical fights resembling 'a small street war' had broken out between two opposing political factions after members loyal to the opposition party apparently painted a national flag on a wall. After the police arrived at the scene, however, the ruling party's flag remained while the other was removed. 'At the end of the night', the woman recalled, 'we had a completely destroyed street'. To her mind, this example shows how quickly situations can escalate and 'explains the kind of extremism' her country faces, which she saw as rooted in individuals feeling 'just very disappointed and unhappy and unsuccessful'.[14] Furthermore, albeit linked to the political sphere, a mother from Podgorica said, 'we have national extremism' and 'we have religious extremism too … Orthodox people fighting for Church'. She saw that the failures of politicians were responsible for this development. Upon being asked to elaborate on the activities of these extremists, however, she swiftly withdrew from the conversation: ('I do not want to talk about it').[15]

---

[13] (200311 MNE MSN EnMO 1 | Tuzi)
[14] (200311 MNE MSN EnMO 1 | Tuzi)
[15] (200313 MNE MSP EnMO 1 | Podgorica)

Whereas the other interviewees were even less inclined to speak about religious and political tensions, most expressed concern over the culture of violence to which their children were being exposed. A few of the mothers suggested that killings were a common occurrence. One of the Podgorica mothers, who had only just witnessed a bombing, expressed her concern as follows: 'I am worried about the safety of our children; there is a lot of danger in this city. The other day, a car exploded right next to me'. She thought it the work of the mafia, and likely contract killers motivated by money.[16] A mother from Nikšić, also mentioning the incident, suggested that this violence was the product of clashes between two cartels.[17]

In contrast to the prospective participants, their future Teachers were able to provide more context and clarity. One of the Tuzi Teachers pointed out how divisive religious differences were, even among ethnic groups: 'In one way you have Albanian Catholics and in another way, you have Albanian Muslims—and they don't socialize at all together'.[18] Her Podgorica counterpart shed light on the extent of the problem: 'We have a lot of far-right groups—actually all groups in our country are Right groups'. Further, she explained how these tensions and divisions were being fanned and instrumentalised by political parties: ('It is like a joker they play').[19]

---

[16] (200313 MNE MSP EnRK 1 | Podgorica)
[17] (200312 MNE MSP EnGN 2 | Nikšić)
[18] (200311 MNE MST EnUK 1 | Tuzi)
[19] (200313 MNE MST EnLK 1 | Podgorica)

2.2 GENDER INEQUALITY AND BARRIERS TO SECURITY POTENTIAL | BASELINE INSIGHTS

Women need to be good and silent; women need to be good for the family and not for herself. If children are bad, it is the mother's fault. If children are bad at school or in any other aspect of life, it is her responsibility. ... I think that the mental health of women in our families is not good. ... [I]n our country being brave [as a mother] is considered to be quiet and be good for everyone, and not to ask for help. [20]

– MotherSchools Teacher, Podgorica Group, Entry Interview

The baseline discussions with prospective participants revealed how the dreams and aspirations of many mothers had been dampened by factors relating mostly to their position as women and mothers living in a deeply patriarchal society. This unequal standing appeared to be reinforced by their adhering to societal pressures, paying insufficient attention to self-care, and failing to seriously reflect on and challenge the status quo.

To be sure, women whose lives are dictated by traditional gender norms tend to be more prone to social isolation, which in turn can place increasing downward pressure on their confidence and competence levels over time. The barriers included restrictions on their movement and being confined to the domestic sphere, as the above interview extract reveals. The effects of these hurdles tended to be a deep sense of isolation and lack of perceived strength. Merely being asked personal questions laid bare the extent of their neglect. As a Tuzi group member noted, 'It is hard to speak about myself, because there is a lot of time since somebody asked me to talk about myself—it's just about work, kids, work, kids, and school. It makes me think how it's been a long time that I did not think about myself'. Any sense of self-care often amounted to a more distant memory: ('I used to like reading; that was my hobby. When I had time, going out with friends. Having a coffee alone or so').[21] Considering the many duties mothers felt they had to fulfil, it is not surprising that a lack of personal time indeed ranked among the most common responses: ('I don't have time, I don't have time for hobbies, just for raising my child and that is it—I didn't read books for two years'; 'I would be more satisfied, better as mother, as woman, if I have time for myself'; 'I don't have a lot of time for myself, I know that it is a mistake that I don't have a lot of free time for myself'). Early marriage appeared also to be a significant factor cementing their traditional role in that, in the words of

---

[20] (200313 MNE MST EnLK 1 | Podgorica)
[21] (200311 MNE MSP EnRK 1 | Tuzi)

the future Nikšić Notetaker, '[women] don't have time to be a girl before marriage'.[22] One of the Tuzi mothers broke into tears during her interview when she related how being married off at sixteen and giving birth shortly thereafter had a negative impact on her personal development and self-worth: ('I am strong on the outside, but on the inside it is not like this').[23] On the one hand, some mothers revealed a willingness to take steps towards improving their situation ('I was very young when I got married and had children so now, I am going back to myself and trying to balance out work and having children and making sure that none of these aspects in life are lacking').[24] For the most part, however, the notion of 'daring to dream' and acting on one's aspirations was not a conceivable reality. Diminished feelings of self-worth and a repressed sense of agency have wide-ranging, tangible consequences, including adversely affecting peoples' readiness and ability to advance and act on their prevention potential.

A chief issue looks to be that women with children in Montenegro tend to be reduced to their child-rearing and domestic roles. Far from breaking up these traditional gender norms, prospective participants accepted or even reinforced this notion, suggesting that their identity centred first and foremost around motherhood. In the absence of critical reflection, these attitudes and expectations are passed down from generation to generation.

In formulating their identity through the lens of motherhood, the future participants placed themselves within a traditional gender framework. This resulted in a rather homogenous picture; their multiple roles as individuals with diverse and divergent skills and interests were thus difficult to ascertain. Across all groups, the most common source of pride and sense of accomplishment revolved around their families and children ('I am very proud of my family; the other things are less important to me'; 'Proud of in life? My children. The fact that I raised them right and they are good humans'; 'I am proud of my kids, because they are good kids'; 'Well, I am proud of myself for being a good mother, I think, because … they are behaving in society').[25] This logic also denotes that highest order for women as mothers is to raise 'good children', which in turn raises two concerns. First, it places unrealistic expectations on them, to the extent that '[w]hen the kids do something bad, the mother is the responsible one; it's her

---

[22] (200313 MNE MSN EnMO 1 | Nikšić

[23] (200311 MNE MSP EnGN 1 | Tuzi)

[24] (200312 MNE MSP EnLK 1 | Nikšić)

[25] (200312 MNE MSP EnGN 4 | Nikšić); (200311 MNE MSP EnMO 1 | Tuzi); (200311 MNE MSP EnRK 1 | Tuzi); (200311 MNE MSP EnES 1 | Tuzi).

fault'.[26] Second, it accentuates archaic perceptions and confines women to the domestic realm, resulting in a narrow and homogenous identity construct. Along these lines, and as a mother from the Nikšić group explained, 'Cleaning, washing and cooking—I don't do nothing more than that … [and] we feel that the children are a part of ourselves. … Kind of we lose our personality'.[27] Moreover, these one-dimensional expectations and conceptions of woman- and motherhood have been inherited by each successive generation of women. One of the Tuzi Teachers elucidated that this was a product of parental attitudes that children simply adopted in the absence of alternative role models: 'Husbands … they learned from their mothers that woman is a robot, woman is a server, because they—their mothers—were like that. Women should be home when he is there; he needs to have lunch'.[28]

The myriad of barriers and pressures the mothers had faced throughout their lives gravely inhibited their self-confidence and hindered them from making choices on their own terms. This left mothers prone to isolation, unwilling to open up about their problems, and unable to make choices on their own terms

Levels of perceived self-confidence among future MotherSchools participants were strikingly low, as evidenced by statements to the effect of 'I am not so self-confident' and 'That is my big problem: self-confidence'. Many expressed feelings of defeat and helplessness in this regard, and even outright despondency ('I can't be confident because I'm too emotional. … I'm sad. Sad. Sad. Sadness. … I don't think I will ever get there').[29] Traditional gender norms once again emerged as a leading factor in diminishing the participants' confidence. This could in some cases be attributed to a lack of support. A Nikšić mother, for instance, found that the male figures in her life had negatively impacted her dreams, aspirations, and trust in herself: 'As a child I seemed to have more expectations, bigger goals. And during that period everyone around me tried to suppress that and that is the reason why I feel less confident with myself. … Actually, the main male figures in my life were my father and ex-husband, and whenever I tried to create or suggest or propose something I wouldn't have found the support from their side'.[30]

---

[26] (200313 MNE MSN EnMO 1 | Nikšić)
[27] (200312 MNE MSP EnES 1 | Nikšić)
[28] (200311 MNE MST EnGN 1 | Tuzi)
[29] (200312 MNE MSP EnUK 3 | Nikšić)
[30] (200312 MNE MSP EnMO 2 | Nikšić)

3. MOTHERSCHOOLS IMPACT

The following chapter serves to provide in three parts an overview of the impact the MotherSchools has had on participants upon graduation. This helps to gauge their 'distance travelled'—attitudinal and behavioural changes—at the individual, familial, and community levels. The first of our three impact sections will explore how the mothers of Montenegro worked on themselves—the Self—through a group process, and how, in so doing, graduates succeeded in advancing their self-confidence and competence levels as the basis and first step on the road to becoming role model security allies in their homes and communities. Individual interview extracts—included as block quotations and in the main body of the text—serve to illustrate this broader, evolving dynamic in various stages. This process culminated in elevated levels of self-confidence, a strong support network, and a sense of empowerment among mothers.

3.1 BUILDING CONFIDENCE & COMPETENCE

I introduced myself to me—if you know what I mean. We learned how to talk to each other, and to share painful things. The teachers gave use direction how to talk to our families and our children. ... And I think this will be precious as my daughter grows older. ... I think something like this MotherSchools should be done again and again ... every mother and every father should be involved with something like this. We learned some things about ourselves that we did not know until we started with this school.[31]

– MotherSchools Participant, Nikšić Group, Exit Interview

In the MotherSchools we could talk about different topics. We could take something from the sessions for the training of children—education about the wrong paths a child could go down. We shared a lot of stories of how a mother can support her children not to go such a way. ... I was secure there, because when you're alone you have to think about all the threats that can come to your family, and you need to prevent it and you need to fight it as well. So I have to think of all of the situations and how to react, but in the school I felt secure to talk about all those things.[32]

– MotherSchools Participant, Tuzi Group, Exit Interview

Individual identity work through a group process marks the beginning of the MotherSchools education. In the context of the Parenting for Peace mission, this translates into supporting

---

[31] (201211 MNE MSP ExRK 2 | Nikšić)
[32] (201216 MNE MSP ExJK 3 | Tuzi)

mothers to assume an effective and informed role in security at home and beyond by means of self-confidence and competence training. These foundational building blocks support the process of identity development and work in unison to ultimately make prevention work at the individual level both feasible and possible. This approach aims to ready mothers to detect and act on warning signs as and when they arise. Confidence and competence, it ought to be reiterated, are inextricably linked. Possessing one while lacking the others can have adverse effects. For example, mothers or indeed fathers can implement counterproductive parenting styles with conviction. Conversely, mothers who are familiar with effective parenting techniques but have low levels of confidence likely will not apply their knowledge in everyday life. This display of cognitive dissonance in the latter case means individuals may indeed understand that their approach is having an isolating effect on their children, and that these counterproductive parenting methods could be classified as a push factor. Ultimately, low self-esteem and confidence levels as symptoms of identity shortcomings often are at the root of this dilemma. As discussed in the previous insights chapter, many mothers are exposed to factors that negatively impact their confidence; many will adhere to societal expectations of women and mothers and fail to critically reflect on or dare to challenge traditional approaches. With the above in mind, confidence and competence training is thus the foundation of the MotherSchools journey.

The consolidation of a safe space across all MotherSchools groups ushered in a climate of trust, cooperation, and open dialogue, which in turn helped to break up the paralysing trinity of silence, fear, and isolation that mothers had been enduring. The MotherSchools ground rules command that groups operate on the principle of the 'safe space', whereby mutual trust is built over time and largely by sharing experiences and stories that are not passed on to anyone external to the group. A clear and positive knock-on effect can in all cases be discerned from this process of community building among mothers, starting with uncovering their like-mindedness and ultimately leading to strategising together and acting as each other's support network.

At the early stages of trust-building, the **participants overcame their sense of isolation** by discovering that regardless of any possible differences, demographic or otherwise, they were not alone in their concerns and challenges: ('I always thought that problems that I had happened only to me, but I saw that we basically all go through similar things and realised that I am not alone').[33] The unification of the group over time helped to build a foundation of

---

[33] (201211 MNE MSP ExMO 3 | Nikšić)

solidarity and trust. Speaking for her group, one graduate from Tuzi noted how important it is for women to have a platform and time to 'talk to each other, share their experience, talk about things they never talked about that they had kept in themselves'.[34] This dynamic was corroborated by mothers from the other groups in strikingly similar terms, with one pointing to a how 'the influence of the group' had led them to feel 'secure enough to let the "new me" out'.[35]

The security of **this judgement-free environment led mothers to broach taboo topics and share personal issues and traumatic experiences for the first time** in their lives. The social stigma attached to speaking about one's problems to friends and family members made seeking professional support even less thinkable ('It is taboo to go to a psychologist').[36] MotherSchools clearly provided an opportunity to challenge the status quo, and to work through trauma in a close-knit group setting as a form of therapy. The interviews highlighted how sharing stories without the fear of potential repercussions can counteract feelings of paralysis. One mother, for example, recounted how she had never been able to talk to her family about how her previous husband had killed their unborn child during pregnancy by beating her. In lifting the veil of silence and sharing her story with the group, she noted, 'I could gain self-respect and trust'.[37]

With trust deepening session by session, **the groups transformed into local-level women's empowerment and support networks**: a platform for the exchange of ideas, storytelling, and problem solving. This string of networks had several key characteristics in common, with the most evident being the notion that participants perceived to have gained strength through this group bond. A Tuzi participant recounted, for instance, how this like-mindedness and support 'puts more strength in you, and it gives you even more strength for any future roles that are on the way'. Seeing how this bolstered her self-confidence, she expressed being 'more empowered as a woman' due to sharing experiences with other mothers 'and becoming close, becoming partners in crime, having the same goal'.[38] As a first-hand witness to this development in her group, a Nikšić Teacher defined the importance of building a support network in especially succinct terms: 'MotherSchools showed them that complete

---

[34] (201216 MNE MSP ExMK 2 | Tuzi)
[35] (201211 MNE MSP ExLK 1 | Nikšić)
[36] (201211 MNE MSP ExLK 1 | Nikšić)
[37] (201216 MNE MSP ExJK 3 | Tuzi)
[38] (201216 MNE MSP ExRK3 | Tuzi)

strangers can become a network of persons who share beliefs and perspectives toward a problem or a social issue'.

Speaking to how **heightened awareness and knowledge has led mothers to explore new concepts and perspectives**, the Teacher went on to highlight that this **put in motion a process of questioning assumptions and reimagining the limits of individual agency**, also with respect to their prevention role. Participants would make statements such as, "'I mustn't be the one that society asks me to be or demands me to be". So, they became aware of their role and the link between "what I think that I am and what actually I can be, if I only know how"'.[39] The collective awareness-building process allowed graduates to remove deep-seated feelings of helplessness and make the previously unthinkable more conceivable. In other words, it prompted some to 'dare to dream'. In the subject-specific context of the MotherSchools, this extends a newfound confidence in the safeguarding capacity of mothers ('We realised it [radicalisation] could happen to regular families; we had some fear. It just opened our eyes wide open to protect our children').[40] The exit data also reveals how graduates have been more willing to assert themselves within their families, especially towards their husbands. One of the mothers, as a Tuzi Teacher recalled, asserted herself when her husband did not see the point of educating the children about the dangers of extremism: 'She said, "Preventatively I will talk with my children about this"'.[41]

The group process ultimately led graduates to grow their awareness that personal identity development is essential to recognising and acting on one's agency and unrealised potential. Taking care of others, let alone assuming a safeguarding role, is unfeasible without first tending to oneself; this is a natural first step on the path towards becoming an effective grassroots security ally further down the line. This milestone, as the Exit Interviews suggest, was clearly achieved across all groups, as evidenced by statements to the effect of 'now I realise I have to take also time for myself' and 'I learned how to focus on myself'.[42] In bolstering their analytical framework through deeper reflection, mothers honed their awareness of how self-respect and personal well-being correspond. Applying this lens allowed participants to rebalance their priorities accordingly. In an exemplary fashion, one of the graduates from the Tuzi group captured the transformative power of embarking on introspection and building confidence: 'My emotions are more open; my communication is more open … I was

---

[39] (201211 MNE MST ExES 1 | Nikšić)
[40] (201216 MNE MSP ExRK1 | Tuzi)
[41] (201216 MNE MST ExRK1 | Tuzi)
[42] (201211 MNE MSP ExJK 1 | Nikšić); (201211 MNE MSP ExES 1 | Nikšić).

overthinking everything, about what other people said, but now I'm more relaxed because I realised my children and I come first'.[43] Communicating her newfound awareness to the outside world demonstrates a clear ability to lay claim to personal agency to overcome detrimental external pressures and expectations.

3.2. IMPROVING FAMILY DYNAMICS

MotherSchools is all about preventing things before it gets too late. I have the example of this in my family. My brother was a part of a horrible group of people when he was in his puberty years; he almost went down the wrong path with a radical group. A lot of them are not even alive now. My mother prevented it from happening, so she is a great role model for me. And now he is a successful basketball player. ... That is definitely one of the biggest reasons why I am afraid of that happening [to my son]. Because my mother always told me that I am raising him until he was in high school, and then after that society is raising him.[44]

– MotherSchools Participant, Nikšić Group, Exit Interview

Mothers through communication with their children can stop radicalisation. Every mother can have a positive impact. The mother is the initiator of this topic, and she can talk with children all the time. Really, I am very fearful about this. ... But only when I started in this school I started to talk with my children about this topic.[45]

– MotherSchools Participant, Tuzi Group, Exit Interview

The essence of the Parenting for Peace programme is to strengthen mothers to ultimately assume a safeguarding role at home and beyond. As the previous section has illustrated, the graduates worked collaboratively on their confidence and know-how, with a view to recognising and developing their security potential. Some highlighted how previously they had been lacking the courage to implement more advanced parenting techniques that they had nevertheless already been cognisant of in theory. This impact chapter explores how mothers drew on their new (or indeed pre-existing) knowledge and heightened self-confidence to address concerns about their children, improve family dynamics at home, and remove possible familial push factors.

The majority of mothers report to have transitioned towards an increasingly open discourse with their children, especially with respect to broaching taboo topics including but not limited to radicalisation. Many of them had never spoken about extremism or terrorism with their children in the first place, nor had other sensitive issues typically been

---

[43] (201216 MNE MSP ExJK 2 | Tuzi)
[44] (201211 MNE MSP ExMO 3 | Nikšić)
[45] (201216 MNE MSP ExRK2 | Tuzi)

addressed. A graduate even found that tackling previously unaddressed taboos marked a decisive turning point in family dynamics: 'I never talked about those delicate topics before; that was kind of a new moment in my family, when it comes to my children'.[46] This transition in discourse was most evident among Nikšić graduates, with another mother, for example, recounting how the MotherSchools lessons had become a weekly discussion in her home.

Implementing progressive parenting techniques contributed to plugging communication gaps, paved the way to improving the child-mother relationship, and thus also deepened trust within the family unit. To arrive at this heightened level of family cohesion, mothers trialled new communication approaches. Refining their listening techniques vis-à-vis their children proved particularly effective ('And now, when they are trying to tell me something, I say to them, "Okay, let's sit down", and then I really pay attention to them … and they feel that what they are telling me is important').[47] Signalling that a child's concerns are important is a central component of the parental safeguarding framework, as it reduces the sense of being misunderstood and alone. Listening, for instance, is a well-known tool used by recruiters, who tend to prey on those who feel isolated, neglected, and unheard. Mothers likewise managed to recognise the value in acknowledging the viewpoints of their children, all the while conceding that these changes are gradual and ongoing ('Sometimes I get back to the old me … but I'm trying to put myself in her shoes, just to see things from her perspective. I learned to listen to my daughter now, and to listen what her expectations are, and not to only give answers to my own questions').[48] In exchanging rather than dictating perspectives, mothers also supported their children in developing their identities and interests, rather than inhibiting their progress in this regard.

The programme embedded in the **mothers the understanding that parents by virtue of counterproductive, authoritarian parenting styles can come to embody a pivotal push factor in the youth radicalisation journey**. Graduates who purport to have implemented this awareness suggested that their new methods are having a liberating effect on them and their children ('My children are telling me that I have changed after the school … I used to be really nervous through some external factors, and then when I come back home, I started for example yelling at my children for no reason').[49] Removing the factors that negatively impact the mother-child relationship also extended to lifting undue restrictions and pressures. 'Before, I

---

[46] (201211 MNE MSP ExES 2 | Nikšić)
[47] (201211 MNE MSP ExES 1 | Nikšić)
[48] (201214 MNE MSP ExJK 3 | Podgorica)
[49] (201211 MNE MSP ExES 1 | Nikšić

felt that I am suffocating them … Even though I trusted them, I was controlling them … And this school helped me to loosen this pressure towards them', a Podgorica graduate noted.[50]

True to the MotherSchools philosophies that 'peace starts at home' and 'mothers are the first teachers in the lives of their children', the **graduates of Montenegro are leading by example in addressing the grave push factor of normalised family violence.** 'Because if you are experiencing violence at home and you as a mother are being quiet about it', as a Podgorica graduate astutely explained, 'then you teach your son that being violent is ok, and you teach your girls that it is ok to be suffering'.[51] The exit data points to how the groups have critically reflected on this generational dimension in parenting, and that mothers are opting for a contextualised approach, which is to say: embracing constructive traditions while breaking with harmful ones. Indeed, graduates across all cohorts reported feeling strongly towards removing violence directed against girls and women in particular: 'I mean, [it goes] generations, generations, generations back … we need women that will teach their sons that it's not acceptable to be violent towards anyone'.[52] Any insecurities of their safeguarding potential appear to have been replaced with measured optimism and confidence that, to quote a Nikšić graduate, 'we are the most important chain in our family, because we can influence our children to think reasonably, and to raise another generation of people who will probably think in a more open way'.[53]

---

[50] (201214 MNE MSP ExRK1 | Podgorica)
[51] (201215 MNE MSP ExLK 2 | Podgorica)
[52] (201211 MNE MSP ExLK 1 | Nikšić)
[53] (201211 MNE MSP ExES 2 | Nikšić)

3.3 STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

I thought the role of the mother is closely related only to the family, and now through these sessions I realised we have a much bigger role in society. Not only in our families but in society as well. … I realised that I have a responsibility because when I raise my children it doesn't affect only me and them but also the society we live in and everyone else … The security role of mothers and women is definitely bigger than I thought.[54]

– MotherSchools Participant, Nikšić Group, Exit Interview

I saw a great possibility for us women to get united and change something in our environment; to make some positive changes. I think that this NGO we would like to now establish is a great continuation of the project. This is a great way of ensuring sustainability. … If we had not had the MotherSchools, this would not have happened. It was an opportunity to realise we have great women with a lot of potential who can implement. We all have different strengths … And when we work together, we can make a great change.[55]

– MotherSchools Participant, Tuzi Group, Exit Interview

This final impact section looks at how mothers transcended the safe space of the group and familial context by gaining awareness of threats and responding to early warning signs and grievances originating from within the community. While the Entry Interviews revealed little in the way of the mothers' awareness of their potential community role and responsibilities, a consideration of the Exit conversations points to a notable transition. The concluding part of the findings highlights how far the MotherSchools graduates have come from their baseline point of departure. It shows how many women are now eager and ready to translate their newfound confidence and competence into action and uproot context-specific drivers in their homes and communities

At the community level, one of the most evident findings from the analysis points to the graduates' **heightened awareness of their broader security role and responsibility**. While participants initially had not contemplated the notion of a community safeguarding role, their readiness to contribute to the security of their neighbourhoods matured significantly in the course of their MotherSchools education. 'I would say that if you asked me before', a Nikšić mother postulated, 'would I react if I saw the violence in front of my home, in the neighbourhood? Probably I wouldn't. But now, since the MotherSchools, I can surely say that I would definitely react'.[56] For many, this shift in perception signifies a marked departure from viewing their responsibilities purely within the confines of the domestic sphere.

---

[54] (201211 MNE MSP ExMO 3 | Nikšić)
[55] (201216 MNE MSP ExRK1 | Tuzi)
[56] (201211 MNE MSP ExES 2 | Nikšić)

A central indicator of sustainability is when graduates report to have **shared MotherSchools experiences and spread session learnings beyond their family context**. Bringing the lessons deeper into the community ensures that the Parenting for Peace philosophy is not only amplified; it also promotes the type of people-to-people messaging that makes other individuals more receptive to joining possible iterations of the programme in the future.[57] Indeed, some mothers who were not partaking purportedly sought to learn from the participants in an informal setting. 'After MotherSchools evenings, when I would drink coffee with my friends' a graduate from Podgorica noted, 'I would really explain and share how the impact of the MotherSchools was, and I promised to keep informing them about what I learned'.[58] A graduate from Nikšić went one step further, explaining how she challenges the community's counterproductive attitudes, namely that 'nobody talks about anything; everything is a secret, and everything is a taboo, and it does not happen to us'. She talked about how she has begun to 'spread the word' about early warning signs, and to talk to her 'friends and colleagues of what they should be careful'.[59]

The Exit Interviews also reveal that some of the mothers have already **proven a readiness and ability to intervene in violence in their neighbourhoods**. Among those who have assumed and exercised their newfound role, one participant stands out for having intervened directly in a neighbourhood case of domestic violence. During the sessions, a mother from Podgorica revealed how her neighbour was being beaten by her husband, and that her other neighbours were turning a blind eye to the situation. Her MotherSchools group went on to discuss how she could intervene in the process. 'This was the first time she talked about that with somebody', one of the Teachers said, recalling the moment the group broke the silence over the taboo topic of domestic violence in their community and discussed their obligation to take action: 'We have this responsibility for our community, for our neighbours, for our families. We cannot see only what happens in our families; we must see what is the society that we are living in and where our children are'.[60] The story shows the intervention potential of mothers and their newfound conviction to turn bystanders into upstanders. By removing the silence from normalised forms of violence against women in neighbourhoods and

---

[57] A Teacher reinforced this point, suggesting that while many participants across all groups reported to have shared their learnings, stigma and the 'taboo behind the idea of sharing and motherhood' held many of their friends and colleagues back. She nevertheless saw that other mothers may have become more open to joining possible MotherSchools in the future. See (201211 MNE MST ExES 1 | Nikšić)
[58] (201214 MNE MSP ExJK 1 | Podgorica)
[59] (201211 MNE MSP ExLK 2 | Nikšić)
[60] (201214 MNE MST ExES 1 | Podgorica)

communities, MotherSchools networks are also working to disarm hidden familial push factors like domestic violence.

Also exemplifying a newfound **willingness to enlist security allies in tackling drivers of extremism**, the mother from Podgorica went on to mobilise her husband to intervene: 'My husband saved her from being beaten up. All the neighbours knew about it and did nothing. She was too embarrassed to admit what she was dealing with. I am proud of what I did'.[61] This is a success story that highlights a process of change through multiple layers of involvement: the mother was concerned about her neighbour, broke the taboo topic over domestic violence, strategised within a trusted environment, coordinated with her husband to act, and stood by her decision undeterred in a neighbourhood of bystanders. This is an example of role model behaviour that helps to challenge the way communities view normalised forms of violence.

An even wider-reaching indicator of anticipated long-term impact is a group's ability to band together and build on their MotherSchools education by creating larger prevention networks that promise to erode networks of radicals. The Tuzi group's **plan to launch a women-led civil society organisation** is a prime example of such a sustainable community resilience building endeavour. During the sessions, the participants decided they would set up 'the first NGO in Tuzi devoted to women's rights' to 'wake up women here' and 'empower women in every sense' ('Creating the NGO came up during the sessions because we saw we have these great women and all this potential; we just needed a push'). The emphasis will rest on a wide range of skill trainings to help women in Tuzi seek employment, afford them a safe space, and secure their rights.[62] This exemplifies how graduates are ready to take matters into their own hands by positioning themselves as community leaders and supporting other mothers to break the cycle of isolation that has been keeping them from reaching their safeguarding potential.

When viewed as a whole, the impact findings provide a strong evidence base of the mothers' preparedness and willingness to create networks of prevention actors, apply individual and coordinated group action to confront manifestations of common drivers that can lead to violent extremism, and strengthen community resilience in the process. These are promising early indicators of sustainability, demonstrating how the graduates have begun to disseminate the Parenting for Peace learnings and philosophy outside of their homes and respective MotherSchools groups.

---

[61] (201214 MNE MSP ExRK1 | Podgorica)
[62] (201216 MNE MSP ExRK1 | Tuzi)

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

With a view to the future, WwB considered the monitoring data and compiled the graduates' feedback to gauge how future engagement could build on the momentum of Montenegro's first MotherSchools iteration. As detailed below, the three main recommendations comprise: implementing follow-up activities; deepening and expanding engagement through new rounds of MotherSchools in current and new communities; and bringing fathers into the fold by bringing WwB's FatherSchools model to Montenegro.

1. **Follow-up activities to record and/or deepen impact**

   Like many other educational programmes, the MotherSchools education concludes with a graduation ceremony. This marks the anticipated point of departure; graduates go on to implement their new knowledge in a contextualised manner. Armed with certificates, networks of likeminded women, and a set of new skills and concepts, graduates are trained to apply their learnings and experiences to their everyday lives, and thus within their family, community, and work environments. Inevitably, lasting impact tends to take time to emerge, especially when viewed through a generational lens. While the programme itself has been built with long-term sustainability in mind, future iterations may benefit from additional resources to allow for follow-up conversations and 'refresher' activities. During the Exit Interviews, a Nikšić group graduate suggested 'a follow-up in a couple of months' to get a sense of 'how participants are implementing that in their real lives'. 'Maybe', she continued, 'you could organize something like follow-up sessions, one or two, just for us to tell you how we implemented and used the information and knowledges that we gained'.[63] Worthwhile and possible would be to consider including targeted follow-up focus groups that make it possible to conduct a verbal 'member check', thus creating an additional layer to capture the group's overall 'distance travelled' with respect to knowledge retained, changes in family and community dynamics effected, and direct individual and coordinated group action taken.

2. **Programme expansion to more isolated and at-risk communities**

   First generation MotherSchools iterations in new countries of implementation typically focus on establishing the programme by, inter alia, ensuring contextualisation, securing stakeholder buy-in at all levels, building trusted relationships on the ground, and developing the necessary local capacity to expand to more at-risk or affected communities in the future. Over the past decade, we have observed that a first country iteration's success tends to make the expansion to especially vulnerable communities more feasible. Therefore, considering the successful roll-out in Montenegro, an expansion to less accessible communities would be a logical next step, as we have done in Austria, North Macedonia, Germany, and Zanzibar, where WwB Parenting for Peace programmes have been running to date for between five and ten years. 'Maybe in the

---

[63] (201211 MNE MSP ExLK 1 | Nikšić)

future', a Podgorica graduate proposed, 'you can have some programmes in the north of Montenegro, because the situation there is like fifteen years ago and no step forward. … it's good to keep the workshops here but also to expand especially to the North'.[64] This is especially true of communities with a history of recruitment propaganda, including north Bosniak communities living in towns such as Rozaje and Bijelo Polje within the Serbo-Montenegrin Sandžak region. For the purpose of awareness raising, mobilising, and scaling up, one graduate suggested: ('I feel like it would be good if this school was promoted in high schools and elementary schools to tell them about the significance of this school … to reach out to these mothers and encourage them to talk about their problems').[65]

3. **Implementation of FatherSchools**

WwB's work with close to three thousand mothers around the world has shown that husbands can have a dampening effect on the safeguarding potential of women. In this respect, Montenegro is no exception, with patriarchal structures and violence against women still being an everyday reality for many mothers. In response, WwB developed a complementary FatherSchools programme that currently is being rolled out in Austria, Belgium, and Germany. Future WwB-led Parenting for Peace programming in Montenegro could therefore see MotherSchools and FatherSchools running in parallel. Indeed, the interview data sets indicate that such a programme would be a welcome addition. While one of the Podgorica Teachers said, 'I think here we need FatherSchools. Fathers are so closed here; I think in their relationship between father and child, the relationship is very traditional',[66] a Nikšić mother noted, 'I would like to have more support from my husband and I'd like if support would also be organised for him and for male partners as well. … I'd really like him to understand the other side and to learn how to approach these kinds of issues'.[67] The Teacher also recounted that the younger mothers had been more optimistic than their older peers that their husbands would join if such a programme was offered. Despite this ambivalence, WwB's pioneering study on the prevention potential of fathers coupled with various implementation rounds in Europe has proven that the fathers' unwillingness to attend such a programme is rooted more in prejudice and assumption.[68] As such, WwB also views fathers as the final puzzle piece in whole-of-community prevention approaches.

---

[64] (201215 MNE MSP ExMO 1 | Podgorica)
[65] (201214 MNE MSP ExRK1 | Podgorica)
[66] (201216 MNE MST ExRK1 | Tuzi)
[67] (201211 MNE MSP ExJK 2 | Nikšić)
[68] For WwB's Father Study, see 'Can Fathers Challenge Extremism? Studying the Violence Prevention Potential of East African Fathers' (research study, Women without Borders, Vienna, 2019), https://wwb.org/activity/can-fathers-challenge-extremism-publication/

Mothers have long presented a missing link in preventing the spread of violent extremism. Their unparalleled physical and emotional proximity make them witnesses of every stage in their child's development. While mothers have the potential to intervene in the initial stages of the radicalisation process, often they lack the essential knowledge and self-confidence to recognise and address the warning signs in their sons and daughters. Women without Borders (WwB) began introducing the notion of Mothers Preventing Violent Extremism (MPVE) in the context of its SAVE (Sisters Against Violent Extremism) network of projects and initiatives from 2008. Responding to its research study findings from surveys and interviews with 1023 mothers across five countries, WwB developed and designed the pioneering 'MotherSchools: Parenting for Peace' Model. When put into practice, this bottom-up prevention approach positions concerned and affected mothers as the first line of defence in at-risk communities. The curriculum strengthens the participant's individual capacity, capability, and emotional literacy, and heightens her awareness of radical influences. WwB has been advancing local and regional security through contextualised iterations of the programme, and to date has engaged over two thousand mothers in sixteen countries across Western and Eastern Europe; Central, South, and Southeast Asia; the Middle East; and Sub-capacity by providing civil society stakeholders in at-risk regions with the essential structures, tools, and skills to address and counteract extremist ideologies. Owing to its proven track record, WwB's MotherSchools Model has emerged as a recognised good practice and contributed to rethinking and reshaping countering and preventing violent extremism (P/CVE) policy worldwide.

WOMEN
WITHOUT
BORDERS
CHANGE THE WORLD