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QENDRA SHQIPTARE PER POPULLSINE DHE ZHVILLIMIN  
ALBANIAN CENTER FOR POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT



REPUBLIKA E SHQIPERISE  
MINISTRIA E SHENDETËSISË  
DHE MBROJTJES SOCIALE



UNITED NATIONS  
ALBANIA



Needs Assessment on the Situation of  
**Gender Equality** with Focus on  
**Vulnerable Youngsters**, Access to Basic Services,  
including Sexual and Gender Based Violence

**Local administrative units of  
Velipoja and Shirgjan**



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in local administrative units of Velipoja and Shirgjan  
with focus on vulnerable youngsters, access to basic services,  
including Sexual and Gender Based Violence.*

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## 1. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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It is the team's hope that this study analyses and recommendations presented in this report will positively contribute to building a sound foundation for the work of the local government units, local institutions of health and education, Civil Society organizations, parents, teachers, community members and young people themselves to address the gender equality concerns and issues through tailored programs and interventions, local development plans which are gender sensitive and create the enabling environment for young people to thrive, focusing on service delivery and outreach to adolescent girls and boys in underserved/rural areas.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

### 2.1 Context

Gender equality, centered in human rights, is recognized both as a development goal on its own and as vital to accelerating sustainable development. Unless young women are able to fully realize their rights, human development will not be advanced. It is crucial to approach young women's systematic inclusion as a condition of youth empowerment overall.

Albanian society has a long history of male domination. Women, and young women in particular, face structural discrimination due to the patriarchal nature of most societies. Young women are often amongst the most marginalized, vulnerable and – if they live in rural/remote areas, or precarious human settlements – hardest to reach young people. More efforts are required to ensure that the gender equality mechanism is fully operational and that all strategies at central and local level are gender mainstreamed.

Albania is part of most relevant major international conventions and regional human rights instruments on gender equality, against gender-based violence and trafficking on human beings, domestic violence<sup>1</sup> etc.

In September 2015, Albania adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that present similarly strong entry points, especially for ending poverty (Goal 1), good health and wellbeing (Goal 3), quality education (Goal 4), gender equality (Goal 5), decent work (Goal 8) and Goal 10 on reduced inequalities

Albania was one of the fourteen countries from Central and Eastern Europe to participate in the first phase of the global “Future We want” consultations on the development of Post-2015 Development Agenda. The outputs and findings of the national consultations, fed into the development of the SDG framework. Following the consultations, the Government of Albania agreed to pilot the Governance SDG, both for national purposes and for informing the Post-2015 Development Agenda as well.

Legal and policy framework has been improved impressively. There has been further progress in enforcing human rights, strengthening the institutional and legislative framework for tackling women's rights as women empowerment, political participation, employment, reproductive health and rights, gender-based violence and the protection of vulnerable groups, in particular the Roma and Egyptian communities. The Law ‘On reproductive health and rights of 2002 and ‘On gender equality in the society’ of 2004 were an important initiative followed by amendments in Labor Code, Criminal Code, Electoral Code, new law on gender equality, new provisions on trafficking, etc., which have established a good legal basis.

There is a progress in establishing the institutional mechanisms on gender in national and local level as key tool for the implementation of gender policies.

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<sup>1</sup> Albania has ratified: Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its Protocol's; the Beijing Platform for Action of 1995; European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR); CoE Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence [Istanbul Convention]; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); The European Social Charter together with its Protocols (1961-2002) and the Revised European Social Charter; Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; ILO Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100); ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111); ILO Convention to promote the Occupational Safety and Health, 2006 (No. 187), etc.

Level of knowledge and implementation of international conventions, international instruments and national legal bases is improved. Different state actors and civil society played an important role to raise the awareness and knowledge and School for Magistrate is a vital institution in the country that provide initial and ongoing trainings for judges and prosecutors. Police officers, prosecutors and gender ‘focal points’ in line ministries have been given training on preventing discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Still domestic violence is a serious problem in Albania.

Certain key international organizations such as UN (UNFPA, UNWomen, UNICEF, and UNDP) and OSCE play an important role in supporting Government and civil society organizations and other partners, in drafting new laws or secondary legislation as well as supporting the gender mainstreaming policies and actions in the country.

There are several service delivery centers for reproductive health issues, social and legal counseling, shelter for trafficked women and girls and LGBT people, and a psychosocial centre for victims of sexual abuse with adequate standards are in place.

## 2.2. Socio-economic context

Demographic trends show that the Albanian population is projected to decrease, mainly due to low fertility rates and continuous migration abroad. Continuously falling fertility since 2013 has also contributed to population decline. In 2018, the fertility rate was 1.37 live births per woman in reproductive age, which is the lowest rate since 2013 (1.73).

Education attainment in Albania shows a large gap with the EU-28 average for both men and women, while the gender gap favors boys in lower grades and then reverses in tertiary education, in favor of girls.<sup>2</sup>

Enrolment in preschool education shows a wide gap between Albania, with 76.3 percent, and the EU-28, where 95.4 percent of children are enrolled in preschool. And while enrolment of boys and girls is virtually identical in the EU-28, in Albania boys have higher enrollment. The labor market shows disparities between women and men in Albania, which are greater than in the EU-28. Women have lower labor force participation rates and employment rates, and higher inactivity rates due to household responsibilities. Labor market indicators for Albania fall behind those of the EU-28. Youth in Albania has the lowest labor force participation rates and employment rates, and the highest unemployment rates compared to the rest of the population.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the differences in the labor market women also face a double burden, since they are primarily responsible for the unpaid labor within the household, which is mainly focused in household chores and child-care.

Lastly, the gender wage gap is 10.7 percent in Albania and 16.0 percent in the EU-28. While women’s formal representation has increased, men hold the vast majority of political and economic positions of power. The introduction of the 30 percent gender quota for National Parliament resulted in an increase in the share of women Members of Parliament (MPs) from

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<sup>2</sup> Youth in the EU-28 is for the ages 19-24 years

<sup>3</sup> See <http://dataexplorer.wittgensteincentre.org/wcde-v2/>

23 percent in 2015 to 26.2 percent in 2019. At the level of regional assemblies, where a 50 percent quota applies, 35.9 percent of women councilors are women.<sup>4</sup>

What's more while municipalities have been given greater policy making powers, local government units (LGUs) still lack sufficient financial resources and administrative capacity to exercise them effectively. Women representation in local government needs improvement. Although 44 per cent of local councilors' seats were won by women in the last local elections, only eight of the 61 municipalities are run by women. Municipalities need continued capacity building for their staff. LGUs' fiscal autonomy is at risk, as most of their budget is dependent on national transfers. As a result, although the municipalities are getting better at collecting own revenue, the overall ability of local institutions to deliver quality public services remains limited. Their financial situation has been made ever more complicated by the pandemic, with resources available to LGUs further shrinking (EU Report 2021).

### 2.3. Legal Framework, Institutions and Policies of Relevance to Gender Equality

Albania has made considerable progress in establishing a relevant institutional framework and policies, as well as in various international commitments to ensure gender equality.

- **Albanian Constitution (AC):** Constitution states the principle of equality before the law and prohibits discrimination (Article 18). Constitution does not include references to sexual orientation and gender identity, Albania's anti-discrimination legislation prohibits discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons.
- **International Conventions status:** Republic of Albania applies international law that is binding upon it (article 5 of Albanian Constitution). Ratified international agreements prevail over the national legislation (AC article 116/1) and “An international agreement that has been ratified by law has superiority over laws of the country that are not compatible with it” (article 122/2 AC). Ratified International agreements constitute part of the internal legal system after being published in the Official Journal. They are directly implemented, except cases when of impossible self-executing and its implementation requires issuance of a law.
- **Laws:** Albania has developed an adequate legislation for addressing human-women rights protection. Albania legislation generally reflects UN and European standards regarding gender equality and equal opportunities. Better implementation/ enforcement of legislation still remains the biggest challenge in Albania.
- **Law No. 9970/24.07.2008 “On Gender Equality in Society” (LGE):** The purpose, scope, and the provisions on protection and prevention of the LGE are framed as such to provide effective protection against gender-based discrimination and any form of behavior that promotes discrimination. Additionally, through laying down measures to ensure equal opportunities for women and men it aims at eliminating gender-based discrimination in whatever forms it may occur.
- The amendments of the **Law No. 9669 of 18.12.2006 “On Measures Against Violence in Family Relations”**<sup>5</sup> make a clear attempt toward full harmonization with the EU *acquis communautaire*, the Council of Europe Convention “On preventing and

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<sup>4</sup>[https://www2.unwomen.org/media/field%20office%20albania/attachments/publications/2020/12/cgeb%20albania\\_report\\_1.pdf?la=en&](https://www2.unwomen.org/media/field%20office%20albania/attachments/publications/2020/12/cgeb%20albania_report_1.pdf?la=en&)

<sup>5</sup> Law No 47/2018 On Some Additions and Amendments to the Law No 9669 of 18.12.2006, “On Measures Against Violence in Family Relations”.

combating violence against women and domestic violence” and the GREVIO Committee Recommendations. These changes are also in line with and fulfill the CEDAW Committee recommendations to Albania. The law provides improvements on the standards of victim protection and makes clearer the obligations of the responsible authorities against domestic violence and gender-based violence.

- ***The Criminal Code (CC)*** has adopted provisions for protecting human’s dignity, human rights and freedoms for every person considering protection from violence and harassment, specifically, punishing criminal acts against morality and dignity such as insulting, libel, stalking [Article 121/a], Spreading personal secrets [Article 122]; punishing criminal acts against the health such as battering [Article 90], etc.; punishing sexual crimes and qualifying sexual harassment as a criminal offence;<sup>6</sup> punishing physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm, punishing trafficking etc.
- ***Law on Public Consultation [2014]*** has been adopted laying down the procedural norms for transparency and public participation in decision-making. This law is overall in line with European standards.
- The main national authority in charge of these issues is ***the Minister of Health and Social Protection (MHSP)***.
- The Albanian parliament also includes structures supporting gender equality. ***The Sub-Commission on Gender Equality and Prevention of Violence against Women*** is part of the permanent parliamentary Commission on Labor, Social Issues and Health.
- Furthermore, ***the Commissioner for Protection against Discrimination*** is an independent body established in 2010 that protects individuals from discrimination including gender-based discrimination.
- Albania has ratified ***the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993***, and ***the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)*** ratified from Albania in 2012. Albania is a ***member state of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995)*** and ***the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security***.<sup>7</sup>
- Current gaps in administrative sex-disaggregated statistics and gender data are likely to reinforce existing inequalities and the vicious cycle between lack of data and no remedial action.<sup>8</sup>

#### 2.4. Violence against women/gender-based violence remains

Violence against women/gender-based violence remains widespread, affects more than 50 percent of women in Albania, and challenges the integrity of all women and girls.

On the other hand, the in-depth analysis report of several studies on violence against adolescents and youth sheds light once again on all those determinants related to physical, emotional and sexual abuse of them. It also presents a detailed analysis of the legal framework and emphasizes the importance of taking appropriate measures in the fight against violence against adolescents and youth.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Other forms of violence such as sexual violence, stalking, forced marriage and sexual harassment, were either introduced or entirely remodeled with the amendments to the CCA made by Law No. 144/2013. See also, [Grevio baseline report](#) pg 12.

<sup>7</sup> [Instat.gov.al/media/6661/gender\\_equality\\_index\\_for\\_the\\_republic\\_of\\_albania\\_2020.pdf](https://www.instat.gov.al/media/6661/gender_equality_index_for_the_republic_of_albania_2020.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> [https://www2.unwomen.org/media/field%20office%20albania/attachments/publications/2020/12/cgeb%20albania\\_report\\_1.pdf?la=en&vs=4248](https://www2.unwomen.org/media/field%20office%20albania/attachments/publications/2020/12/cgeb%20albania_report_1.pdf?la=en&vs=4248)

<sup>9</sup> [https://albania.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/adolescent\\_and\\_youth\\_abuse\\_in\\_albania.pdf](https://albania.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/adolescent_and_youth_abuse_in_albania.pdf)

Not all Coordinated Referral Mechanisms (CRMs) established in municipalities to treat domestic violence cases are effectively functioning. Specialist support services are understaffed, under-budgeted, insufficient, and not tailored to treat all forms of violence and all groups of women, or other family members in need.

Access to justice remains an area where women face significant barriers in claiming their social, economic and human rights.

Data/information on the gender-related aspects of natural resource management, environmental pollution, and the impacts of climate change remains highly limited in Albania, which reveals a clear omission/gap in awareness, discourse and policy.

Adequate financing of gender equality and women's rights is at the core of a smart, effective and forward-looking development and recovery strategy.

However, government expenditures on DV/GBV measures constitute just 0.1 percent of total funds allocated, are negligible vis-à-vis the overall budget, and in discordance with the Strategy's commitments.<sup>10</sup> Thus, (at least) in the area of DV/GBV, resources are not allocated as initially planned.

## 2.5 Implementation of strategies and funding

In February 2020, the Health and Social Protection Minister initiated the drafting and adoption of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for healthcare and social workers dealing with cases of domestic or gender-based violence, to enhance the cooperation and effectiveness of CRMs.<sup>11</sup> For healthcare workers, SOPs were approved to reduce the risk of women and girls experiencing gender-based violence in civil emergency situations. In May 2020, two protocols were prepared on how CRMs were to manage COVID-19-related domestic violence cases, and sent to municipalities.<sup>12</sup> In July 2020, ACPD coordinated 9 online trainings on the SOPs for local coordinators, healthcare, and social workers from all municipalities (1678 participants).

## 2.6. Administrative Units of Velipoja and Shirgjan

Velipoja administrative unit is part of Shkodra Municipality. There are two schools in this administrative area: Comprehensive school/Shkolla e Bashkuar "Nikolle Zagorjani" and 9-year school "Gjergj Vate Martini" with a total of 550 pupils from both schools bearing a lot of social problems, among which domestic violence and early marriages can be identified as the main issue among teenage girls. This administrative unit embraces 11 villages: Velipojë, Pulaj, Luarzë, Baks-Rrjoll, Gomsiqe, Baks i Ri, Pulaj, Reç i Ri, Ças, Mali Kolaj and has a population of 9,574 inhabitants.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> People's Advocate 2019 Annual Report, published online in Albanian: See: <https://www.avokatipopullit.gov.al/media/manager/website/reports/Raporti%20Vjetor%202019%20-%20Avokati%20i%20Popullit.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Prepared with UNFPA support

<sup>12</sup> Prepared with UNDP support: a) Protocol on managing domestic violence cases at local level through the CRM, b) Protocol on managing domestic violence cases at local level through the CRM during the COVID-19 situation"; [https://www.al.undp.org/content/albania/en/home/library/womens\\_empowerment/protokoll-i-menaxhimit-te-rasteve-tedhunes-ne-familje-ne-nivel-.html](https://www.al.undp.org/content/albania/en/home/library/womens_empowerment/protokoll-i-menaxhimit-te-rasteve-tedhunes-ne-familje-ne-nivel-.html)

<sup>13</sup> Information on Administrative Units of Velipoja and Shirgjan are provided by local authorities



The Velipoja Administrative Unit has 1 (one) Health Center located in the village of Velipoja, and 5 ambulances located in all the constituent villages of the Velipoja Administrative Unit, some of which are not functional.

At this Administrative Unit is set up and operates a mobile service that provides services such as information, counseling, guidance, psycho-social services and comes to the aid of the entire community, children, youth and the family as a whole.

Velipoja is an area with significant economic problems, in certain villages. A good opportunity in the area in the economic sector has been fishing. The population has used fishing mainly in the area around the Lake and the area around Vilun Lagoon for family consumption, but also for trade.

In addition to the economic and social difficulties that the area presents, during the summer season tourism offers a good opportunity for seasonal employment for residents interested in different age groups. During the summer season women are employed in restaurants, hotels or self-employed selling their self-cultivating products.

The biggest difficulty in this area is during the winter season as a large part of the villages mainly Old Baks and Qas face floods of the area for a long period of time. This situation makes it difficult for these families to make a living.

Maritime tourism includes seasonal engagement for young people and also their involvement in these entities.

Shirgjan Administrative Unit is part of the Elbasan Municipality with a total population of 10896 habitants. Shirgjan Administrative Unit has a considerable number of Roma and Egyptians families and consequently there are a lot of strong social issues related to school dropout, early marriages, migration and immigration. This rural Administrative Unit is less reached by the local CSOs and is problematic in terms of social issues as referred by the psychologist of the Educational Directory. This administrative Unit embraces the villages: Shirgjan, Bathes, Bujqes, Jagodine, Kuqan, Kryezjarr, Mjekes. 189 young people are part of the High Schools of Shirgjan Administrative Unit.

### 3. AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study was to obtain a general overview of the situation of gender equality in local administrative units of Velipoja and Shirgjan with focus on vulnerable youngsters, access to basic services; evaluate the role of the local government and other public structures to support these groups in order to serve as a basis for guiding interventions to enable LGUs create a favorable environment for young people to realize their potential, focusing on gender-responsive youth development plans and services

## 4. METHODOLOGY

### 4.1. Types of research approach employed

In order to gain insights about the research questions we made use of both quantitative and qualitative approach. Whereas quantitative approach allows determining the existence of statistical associations between variables, and the extent of the phenomena of interest within the study population, the qualitative approach explores ideas and opinions of participants which cannot be mapped otherwise.

### 4.2. Details of quantitative and qualitative approach

In Shirgjan administrative unit, Elbasan Municipality, there were interviewed 60 young people.

In Velipoja administrative unit, there were interviewed 51 young people.

Two local administrators were involved with administration of the questionnaires. Local coordinators had a long experience in conducting quantitative and qualitative surveys, and they had an excellent view of the local community situation.

Even though two experienced local staff were recruited as questionnaire administrators, they underwent a specific short training for the purpose of the actual study. The short training and orientation covered the explanation of the study aim and objectives, an introduction of the study instruments and the procedures to be followed as well as ethical aspects of the interviewing process. The quantitative approach consisted of a series of face-to-face interviews, using a semi-structured questionnaire (mostly closed questions and some open-ended questions) with youngsters from underserved, poor, rural areas of Shirgjan and Velipoja administrative units.

The average duration of the interview with youngsters was about 40 minutes.

### 4.3. Statistical analysis

Absolute numbers and respective frequencies were reported to describe categorical data. In order to check whether there were significant differences in the distribution of some categorical variables across categories of another categorical variable, the chi square test was run. Tables and graphs were used to show and visualize the relevant information.

In all cases an association was considered as statistically significant if the P-value  $<0.05$ .

All the analysis have been carried out through the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences software (IBM SPSS Statistics), version 26.

## 5. LIMITATIONS

The actual surveys (youngsters' quantitative and qualitative survey with key informants) has some limitations:

- First, the survey included only one administrative unit in Elbasan and Shkodra municipality, each. The selected administrative units do not represent all administrative units of the each municipality (there are 13 administrative units in Elbasan municipality and Shkodra municipality has 11 administrative units) and they do not represent all administrative units of the country. Therefore, the generalizability of quantitative results is problematic. However, the selected survey sites are located in Central (Elbasan municipality) and Northern (Shkodra municipality) Albania, thus representing two out of three regions of Albania. In addition, the results of qualitative surveys are internally valid, thus achieving the most single critical element of qualitative approach.
- Second, the non-probability sampling further weakens the representativeness of the study population (regarding quantitative data).
- Third, the quantitative survey conducted is of cross-sectional nature and therefore the cause-effect relationships cannot be verified, and temporality of events cannot be determined. In this context, any association between the study variables needs to be interpreted with caution.
- Fourth, information bias cannot be ruled out as youngsters and key informants may have shared untrue information to the interviewers. However, we do not think that this is a major issue because the field team did everything in its power to minimize information bias by ensuring the participants of the anonymity and privacy of their answers, they gained interviewee trust and confidence and the interviewing process occurred privately, without the presence of third persons. In addition, we think that there is no reason or pressure of any kind forcing the respondents to not share true information: the questions were not that sensitive and the topic being discussed is a true concern for the community.

## 6. FINDINGS

### 6.1. General characteristics of study participants

#### 3.1.1 General characteristics of participants

The study involved 111 young people, 60 individuals in Elbasan (Shirgjan administrative unit) and 51 in Shkodra (Velipoja administrative unit) [Table 1].

**Table 1. Distribution of young people by place of residence**

Municipality	Administrative unit	Number	Percent (%)
Elbasan	Shirgjan	60	54.1
Shkodra	Velipoja	51	45.9
<b>Total</b>		<b>111</b>	<b>100.0</b>

In terms of age, 88 young people (79.3%) were in the 15-18 age group and 23 young people or 20.7% of the study participants were between 19-30 years old at the time of the study (see Table 2 for more details). About two-thirds (65.8%) of all young people were females and the percentage of females in Elbasan and Shkodra was 65% and 66.7%, respectively. About three-quarters (79.3%) of the participants had high school education, 18% had university education and the remaining 2.7% had secondary school education or less (Table 2).

**Table 2. Distribution of study participants by age, sex and education**

Variable	Elbasan		Shkodra		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
<b>Age</b>						
15 years	10	16.7	6	11.8	16	14.4
16 years	18	30.0	21	41.2	39	35.1
17 years	14	23.3	8	15.7	22	19.8
18 years	10	16.7	1	2.0	11	9.9
19 years	7	11.7	2	3.9	9	8.1
21 years	1	1.7	1	2.0	1	0.9
22 years	-	-	-	-	-	-
23 years	-	-	1	2.0	1	0.9
25 years	-	-	1	2.0	1	0.9
26 years	-	-	1	2.0	1	0.9
27 years	-	-	3	5.9	3	2.7
28 years	-	-	2	3.9	2	1.8
29 years	-	-	2	3.9	2	1.8
30 years	-	-	2	3.9	2	1.8
<b>Age-group</b>						
15-18 years	52	86.7	36	70.6	88	79.3
19-30 years	8	13.3	15	29.4	23	20.7
<b>Sex</b>						
Male	21	35.0	17	33.3	38	34.2

Female	39	65.0	34	66.7	73	65.8
<b>Education level</b>						
Secondary school or less	3	5.0	0	0.0	3	2.7
High school	45	75.0	43	84.3	88	79.3
University education	12	20.0	8	15.7	20	18.0

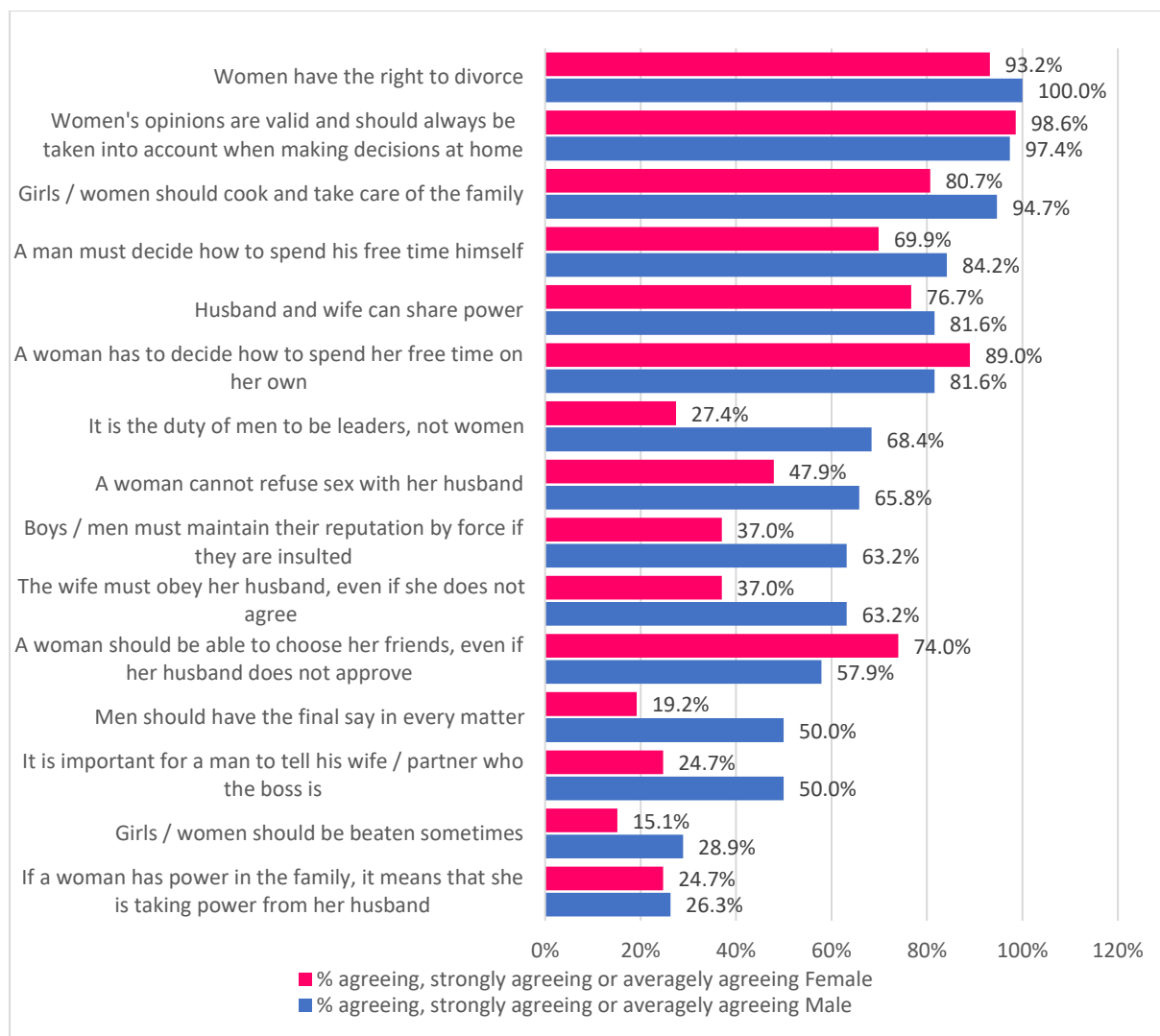
## 6.2. Gender norms, social interaction and violence

Young participants were asked to express their thought about gender norms, violence and various social interactions.

### 3.2.1 Gender norms – women’s and men’s rights and roles

Youngsters were invited to agree or disagree with a range of statements highlighting the role of man and woman in different situations. Figure 1 shows the gender differences with regard to these statements. Clearly there is a gender difference, with significantly higher proportions of male youngsters agreeing on a series of statements implying the supremacy of man/husband (statements such as: “The wife must obey her husband, even if she does not agree”, or “It is the duty of men to be leaders, not women”, or “Girls / women should cook and take care of the family” for example) and the opposite is true regarding statements implying the supremacy of woman/wife (statements such as: “a woman should be able to choose her friends, even if her husband does not approve” for example).

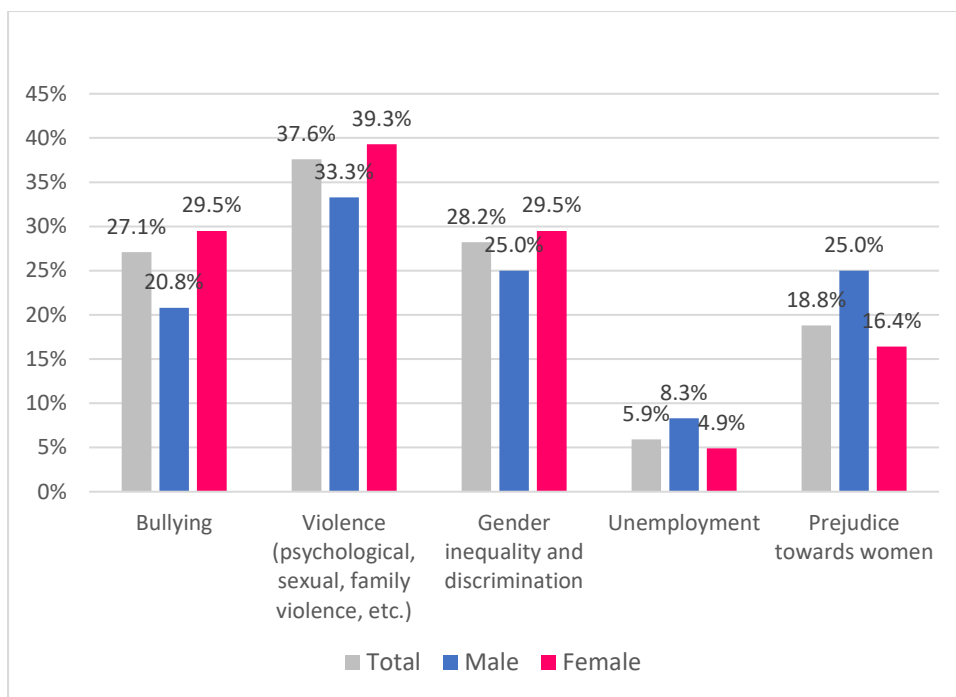
No significant differences were observed with regard to age, education level and marital status of the participants, meaning that these attitudes are gender based reflecting gender stereotypes. However, significantly higher proportions of Velipoja youngsters agreed with the majority of patriarchal statements favoring men over women, compared to Shirgjan youngsters. This implies that gender stereotyping is exerted with various intensity depending on the prevailing local mentality.



**Figure 1. Opinions of respondents about women's and men's rights and roles**

### 6.3. Problems young men and women face in this area

Youngsters were invited to give information about the type of problems young men and women residing in this area are faced. Among all participants, 76.6% of them mentioned various problems and Figure 2 shows a summary of their answers. The most frequent problem was violence of various forms (psychological, sexual and family violence) mainly towards women, reported by 37.6% of respondents, followed by gender inequality issues (28.2%), bullying (27.1%), prejudice towards women (18.8%) and unemployment (5.9%).



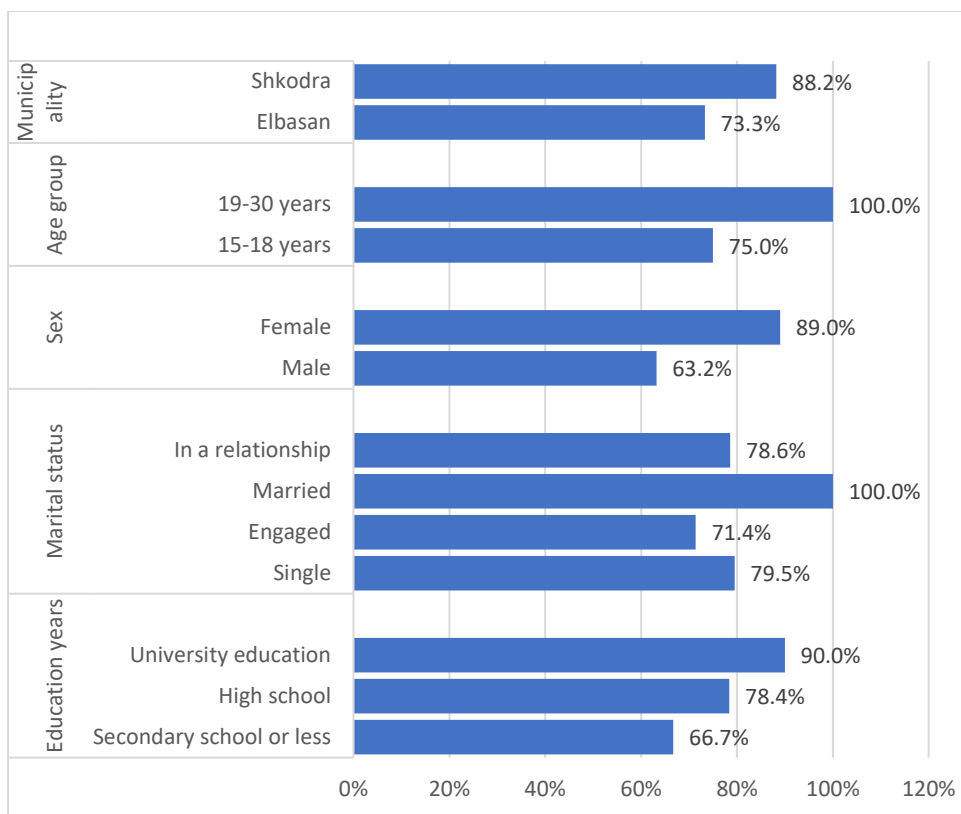
**Figure 2. Participants' opinions about the problems local young men and women face**

Interestingly, significantly higher proportions of youngsters in Shkodra than in Elbasan reported bullying (36.8% vs. 19.1%, respectively), violence (52.6% vs. 25.5%, respectively), unemployment (13.2% vs. 0%, respectively), whereas the reverse trend was noticed with regard to gender inequality and discrimination (10.5% vs. 42.6%, respectively). No significant differences were observed with regard to gender, age, education level and marital status of the participants.

#### 6.4. Witnessing violence in the community

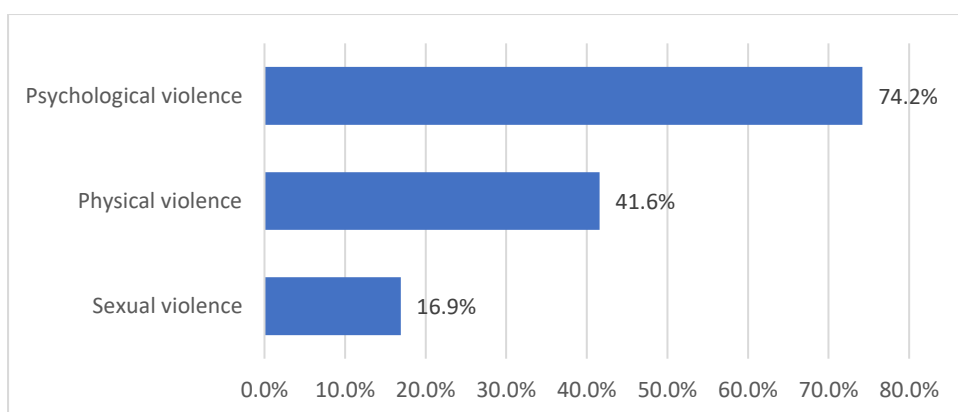
Youngsters were asked whether they know young women or men experiencing violence in their local community. Overall, eight out of ten youngsters (80.2%) answered positively to this question. Significantly higher proportions of females and those aged 19-30 years old reported to know other youngsters suffering from violence in their local community, compared to their respective peers (Figure 3); also, higher proportions of youngsters in Shkodra (88.2%) than in Elbasan (73.3%) reported the same but this difference has only borderline significance ( $P=0.059$ ). Also, such proportions increase with increasing education level, but this seems to be confounded by the effect of age, as noticed above. Lastly, there seems to be no difference of violence knowledge by marital status, even though all married participants knew somebody young suffering from violence in their community compared to lower percentages of participants of other marital statuses reporting the same (Figure 3).





**Figure 3. Percentage of youngsters knowing somebody suffering violence in their local community, by background characteristics**

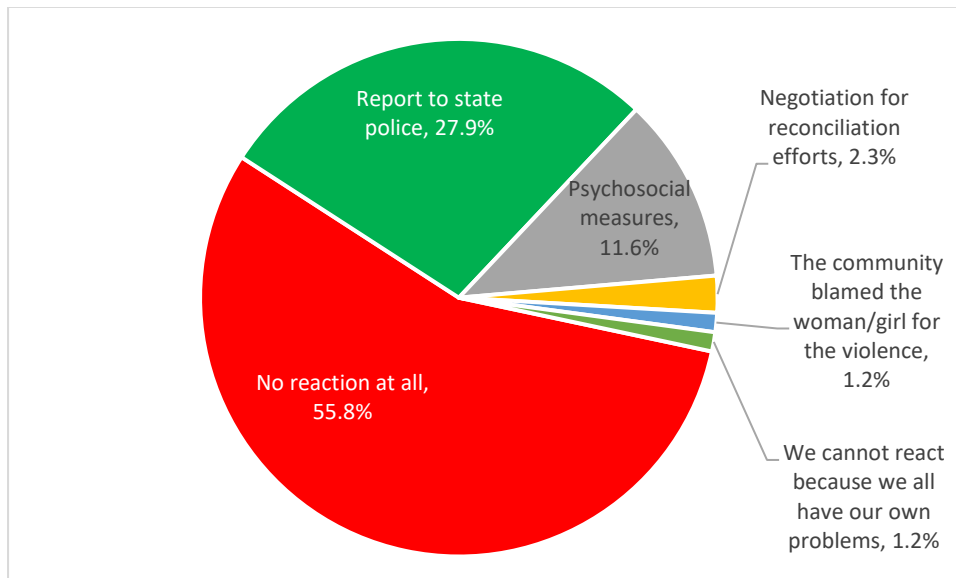
Among those who said that they knew somebody experiencing such violence, 74.2% reported psychological violence, 41.6% reported physical violence and 16.9% reported sexual violence (Figure 4).



**Figure 4. Percentage of youngsters knowing somebody suffering various types of violence**

With regard to how the community responded to these violence episodes, 55.8% of respondents said that there was “no reaction at all”, in 27.9% of cases such episodes were reported to the

state police, 11.6% of respondents said that psychosocial measures and support for the victims was provided (Figure 5).



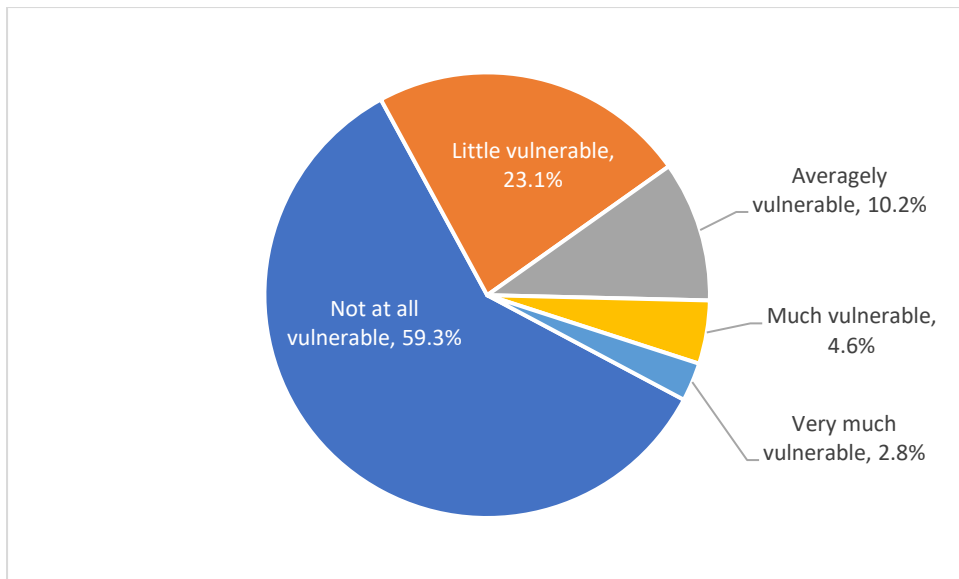
**Figure 5. How the community responded to violence episodes, according to young participants' opinions**

The proportion of youngsters reporting that the community did not react at all to episodes of violence was significantly higher in Shkodra (72.1%) than in Elbasan (39.5%).

### 6.5. Feeling safe in the community

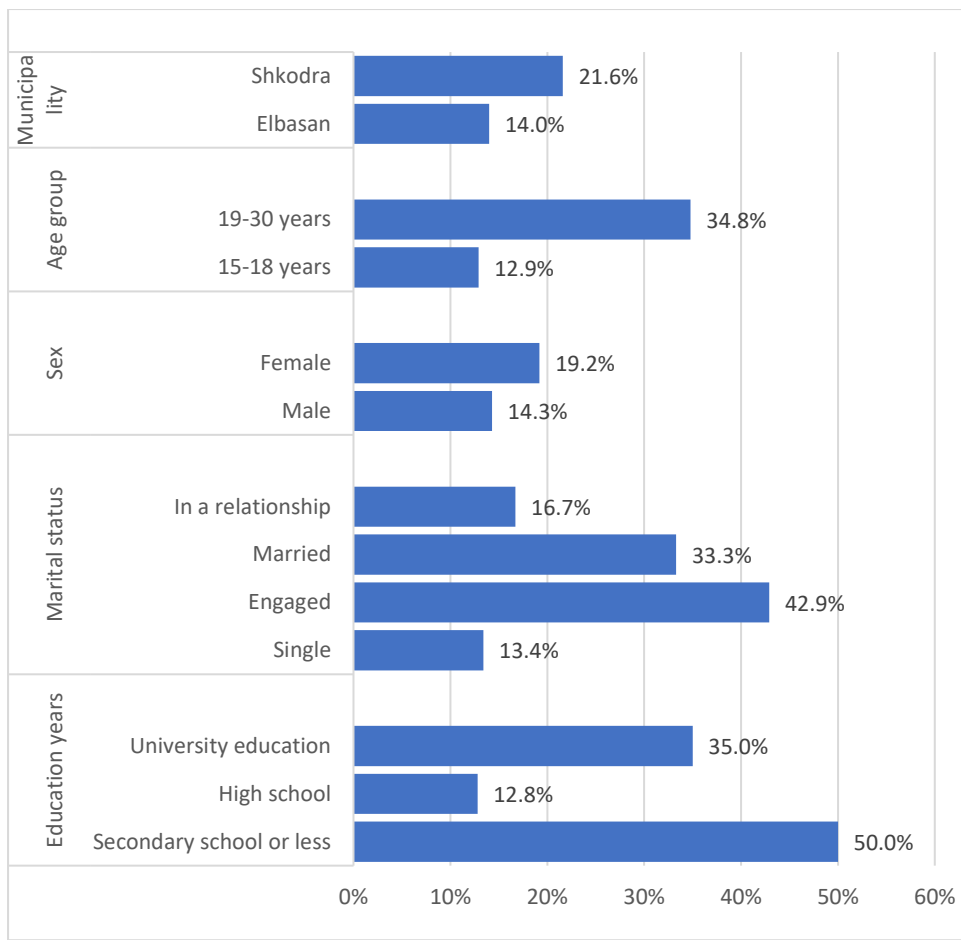
Youngsters were invited to report whether they feel safe in their local community. Two-thirds of all participants reported that they felt safe in their own local community but one-third did not feel safe in their community. A higher percentage of females (37%) than males (26.3%) reported to not feel safe in the community, and curiously, a significantly higher proportion of 19-30 years old youngsters (56.5%) than 15-18 years old youngsters (27.3%) reported feeling unsafe in the community. There were no other significant differences of this indicator by survey site or education level.

Participants were asked about how vulnerable to sexual harassment have they felt in their everyday life. About 59% of respondents said that they felt not at all vulnerable, implying that the remaining 41% were at least feeling little vulnerable to sexual harassment (Figure 6).



**Figure 6. Feeling vulnerable to sexual harassment in everyday life**

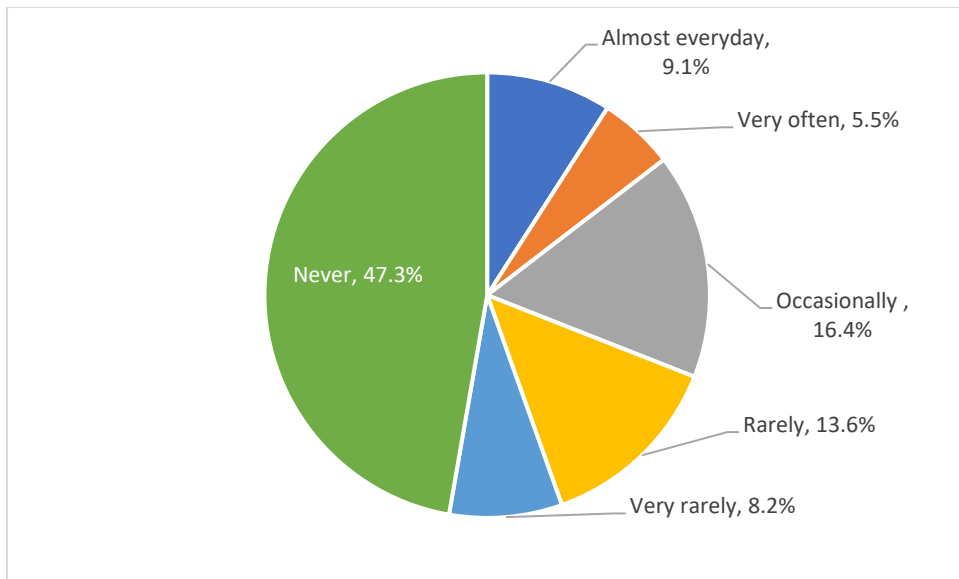
Higher proportions of youngsters in Shkodra (21.6%) than in Elbasa (14%), higher proportions of females (19.2%) than males (14.3%), higher proportions of 19-30 years old individuals (34.8%) than 15-18 years individuals (12.9%), and higher proportions of those with low education level (50%) than those with high school (12.8%) and university education (35%), felt at least averagely vulnerable to sexual harassment (Figure 7). The age, education level and marital status differences were statistically significant ( $P < 0.05$ ).



**Figure 7. Percentage of youngsters feeling at least averagely vulnerable to sexual harassment in everyday life, by background characteristics**

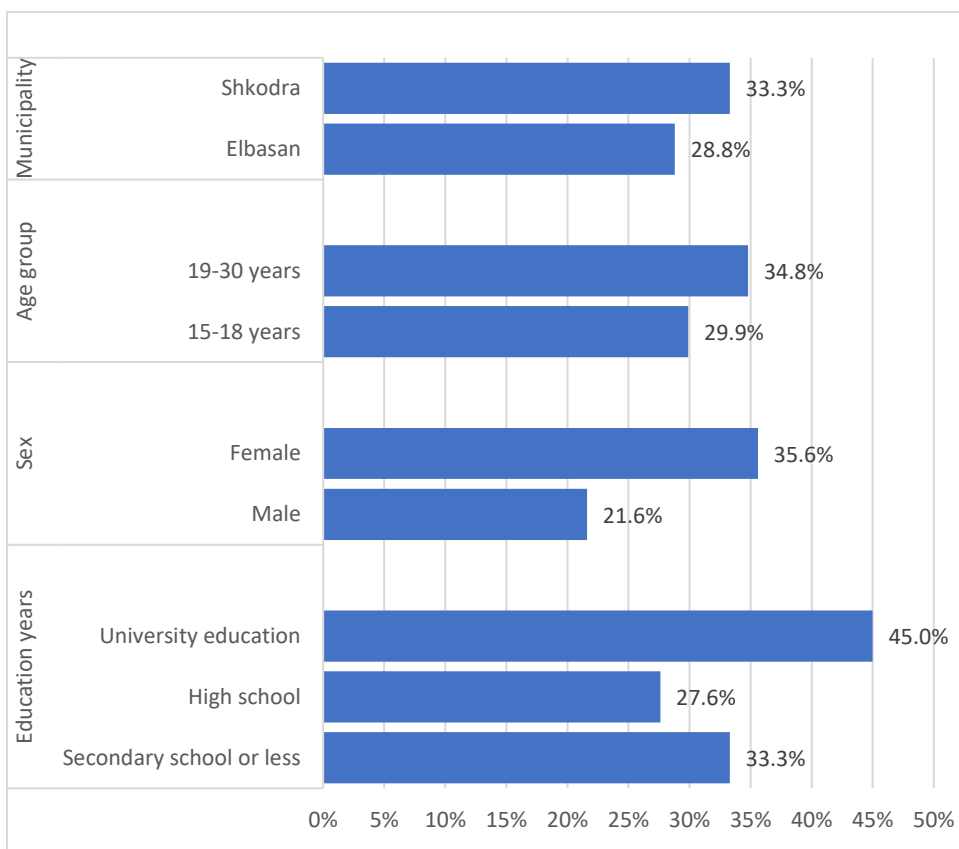
### 3.5.1 Receiving unwanted sexual comments

About 52.7% of participants reported that they had received unwanted sexual comments at least once in their lifetime, with 30.9% of participants having received such comments at least on some occasions (Figure 8).



**Figure 8. Frequency of receiving unwanted sexual comments**

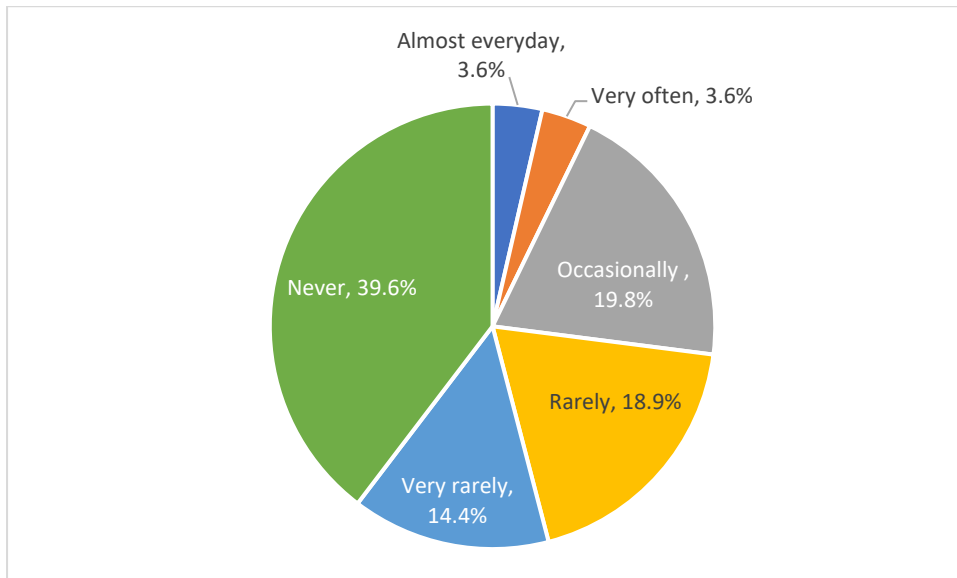
Higher proportions of Shkodra youngsters, females, 19-30 years old participants and university education youngsters had received unwanted sexual comments at least occasionally, compared to their respective counterparts (Figure 9).



**Figure 9. Percentage of youngsters having received unwanted sexual comments at least occasionally, by background characteristics**

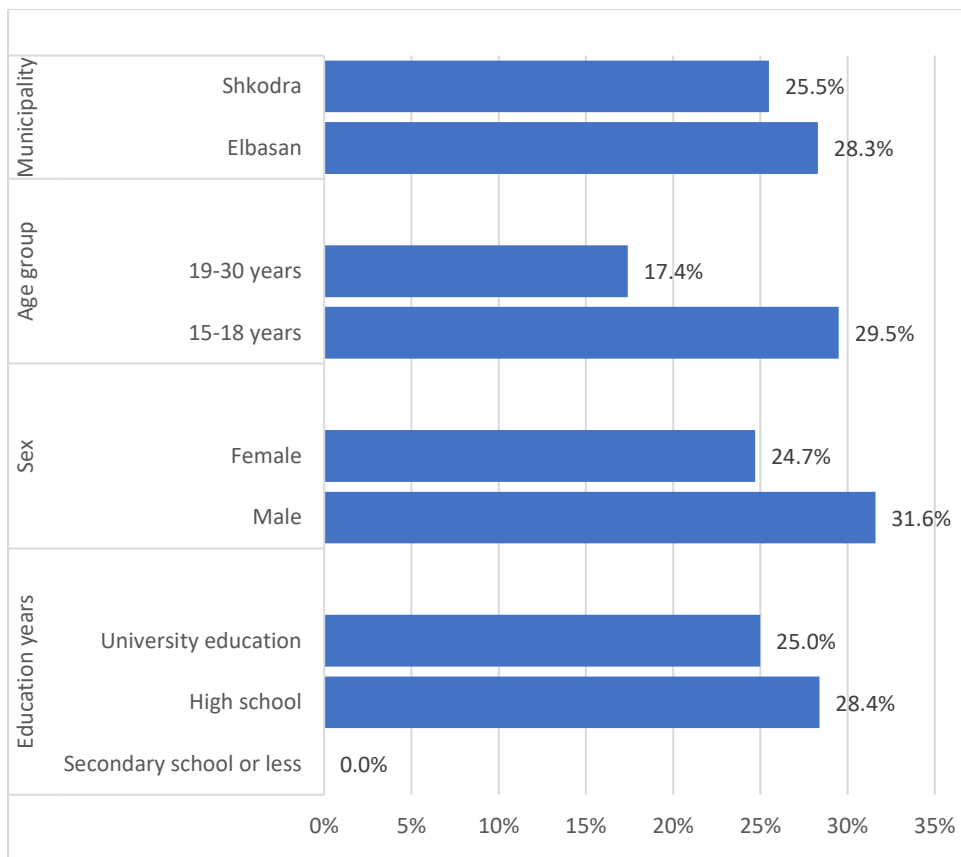
### 3.5.2 Being insulted or spoken harsh words

About 60.4% of participants reported that they had been insulted or spoken harsh words at least once in their lifetime, with 27% of participants having experienced these at least on some occasions (Figure 10).



**Figure 10. Frequency of being insulted or being spoken harsh words**

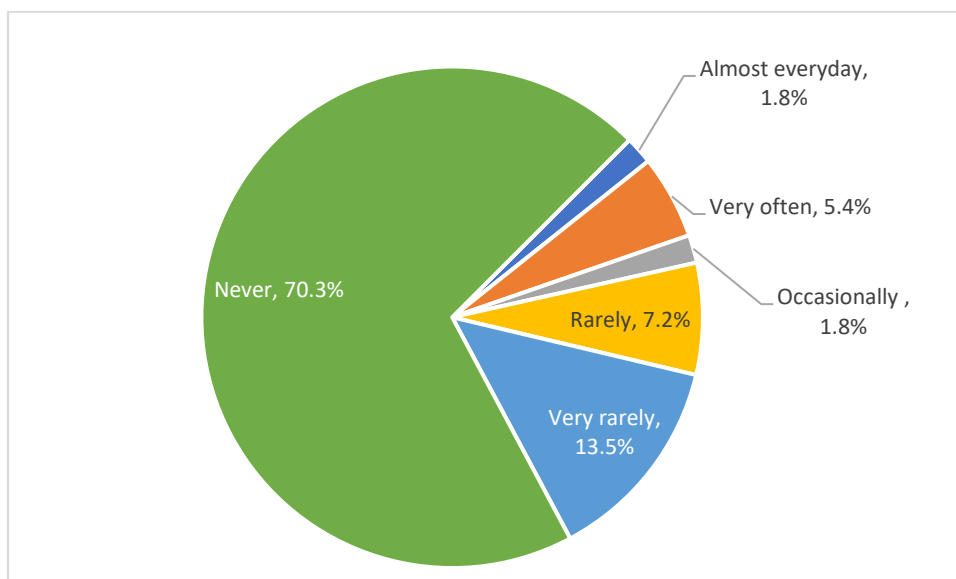
Higher proportions of Elbasan youngsters, males, 15-18 years old participants and high school youngsters had been insulted or spoken harsh words at least occasionally, compared to their respective counterparts (Figure 11). However, all such differences are not statistically significant ( $P > 0.05$  in all cases).



**Figure 11. Percentage of youngsters being insulted or being spoken harsh words at least occasionally, by background characteristics**

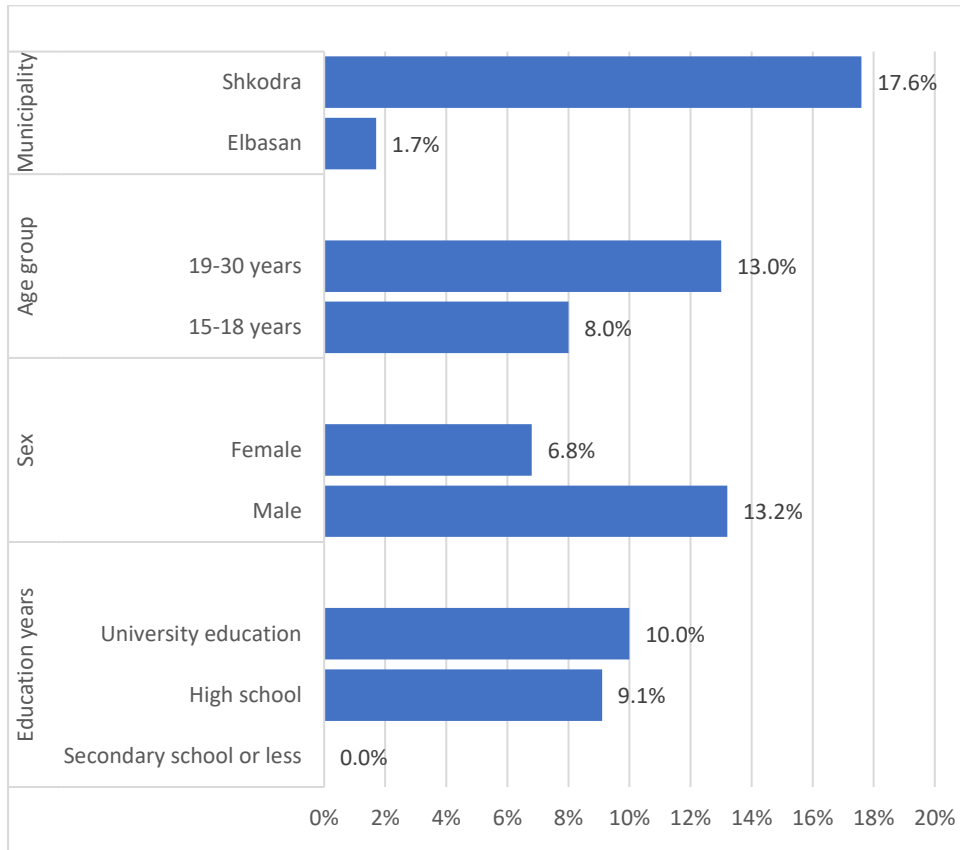
### 3.5.3 Being slapped, kicked or hit with hard objects

About 29.7% of participants reported that they had been slapped, kicked or hit with hard objects at least once in their lifetime, with 9% of participants having experienced these at least on some occasions (Figure 12).



**Figure 12. Frequency of being slapped, kicked or hit with hard objects**

Higher proportions of Shkodra youngsters, males, 19-30 years old participants and university education youngsters had been slapped, kicked or hit with hard objects at least occasionally, compared to their respective counterparts (Figure 13).



**Figure 13. Percentage of youngsters that had been slapped, kicked or hit with hard objects at least occasionally, by background characteristics**

#### 6.6. Knowledge about where to turn in case of violence

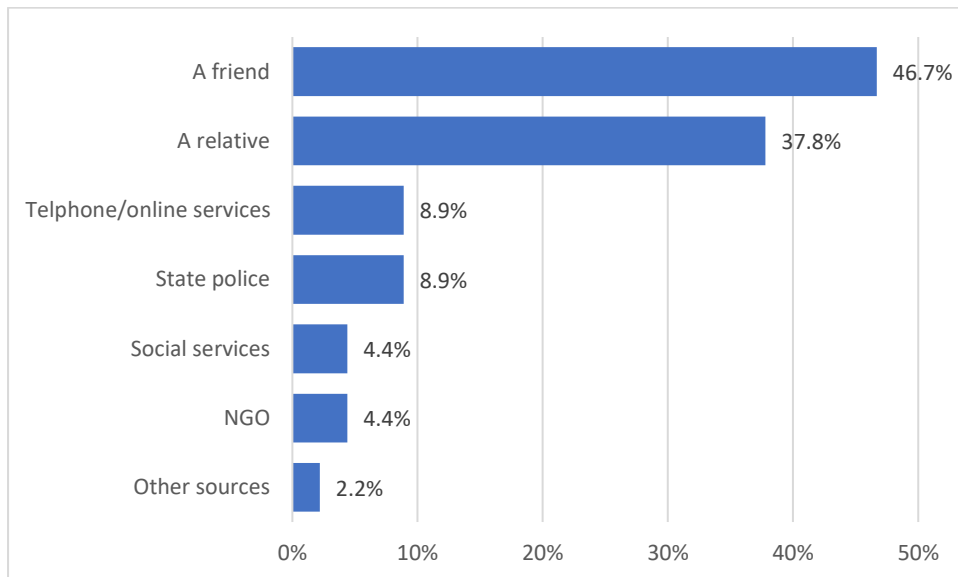
Young participants were asked to inform us on whether they knew where to turn or whom to contact in case of violence. The overwhelming majority of participants (84.7%) answered “yes” to this question and the remaining 15.3% said that they didn’t know where to turn in these cases. There were no statistically significant differences of this indicator with regard to survey site, age, sex and level of education of participants.

#### 6.7. Talking to others about experienced violence

Participants were asked to inform us on whether they had talked to someone about violence episodes that they have experienced. About 4 out of 10 youngsters (40.5%) reported that they had done so and 59.5% answered “no”. Among those who answered “yes”, 46.7% had talked to a friend, 37.8% had talked to a relative, 8.9% had talked to someone through phone or online



help, 8.9% had contacted the police, 4.4% had contacted social services, 4.4% had contacted an NGO and 2.2% had contacted other sources (Figure 14). All such age, gender, education level and survey site differences were not statistically significant ( $P>0.05$  in all cases).



**Figure 14. Percentage of youngsters contacting various sources about the experienced violence**

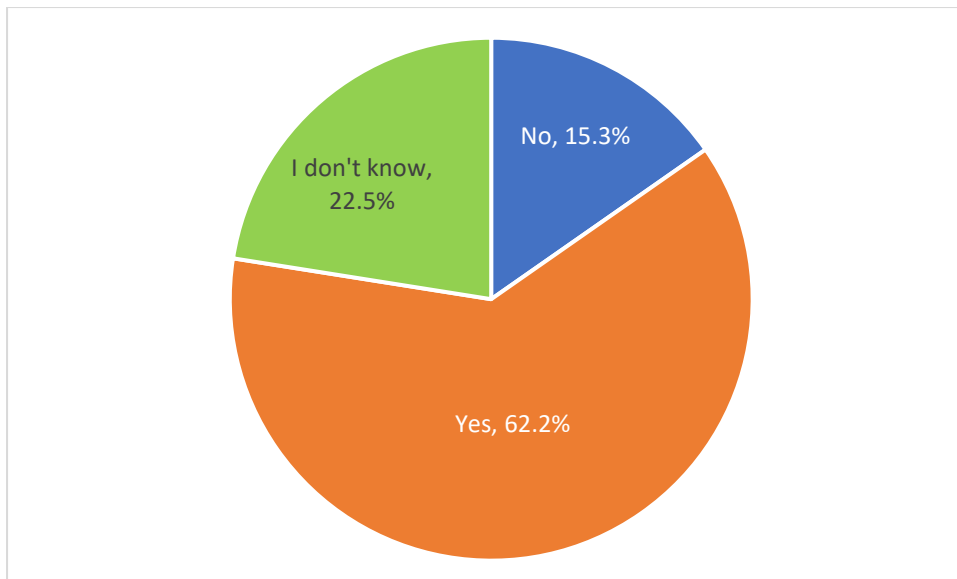
### 6.8. Officially reporting personally experienced violence

Participants were invited to inform us on whether they had ever reported officially any episodes of violence they had personally experienced. Practically all youngsters answered “no” to this question and only one participant (0.9% of all youngsters) said “yes”.

### 6.9. Early marriage opinions

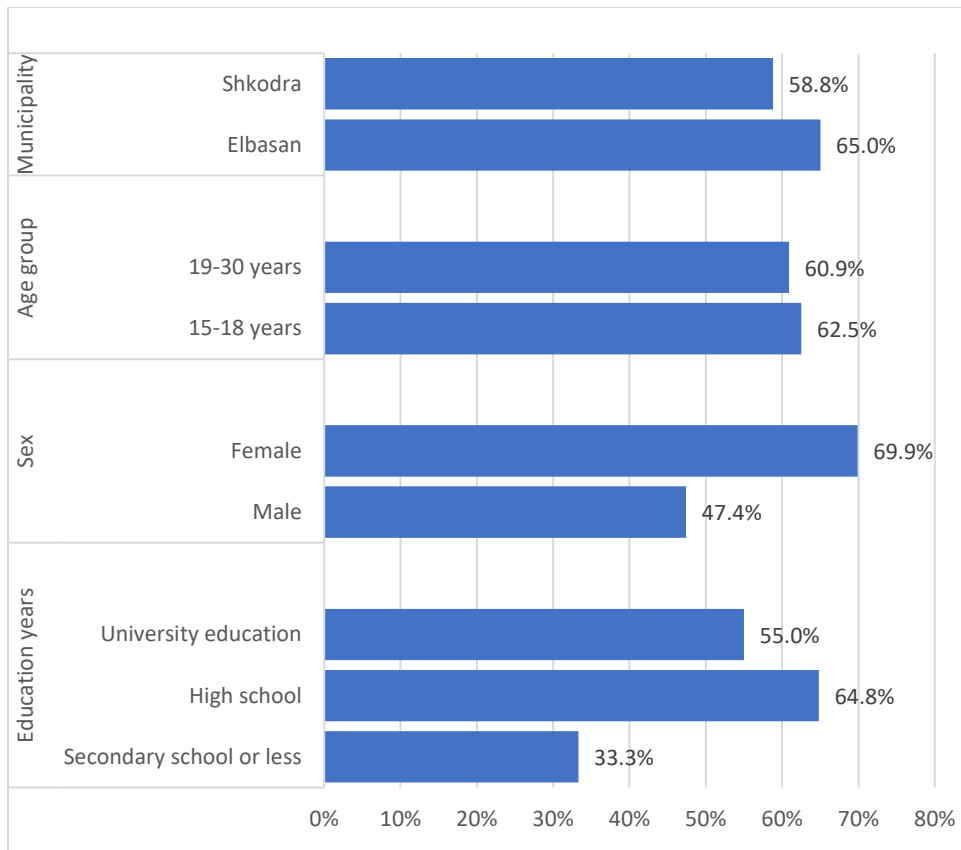
#### 3.9.1 Knowledge about early marriages occurring in the local community

Participants were invited to inform us on whether they had any knowledge about the occurrence of early marriages in their local community, with early marriage defined as being officially married before the age 18. About two-thirds of participants (62.2%) answered “yes” to this question, 15.3% said “no” and 22.5% responded “I don’t know” (Figure 15).



**Figure 15. Youngsters' opinions regarding the occurrence of early marriages in their community**

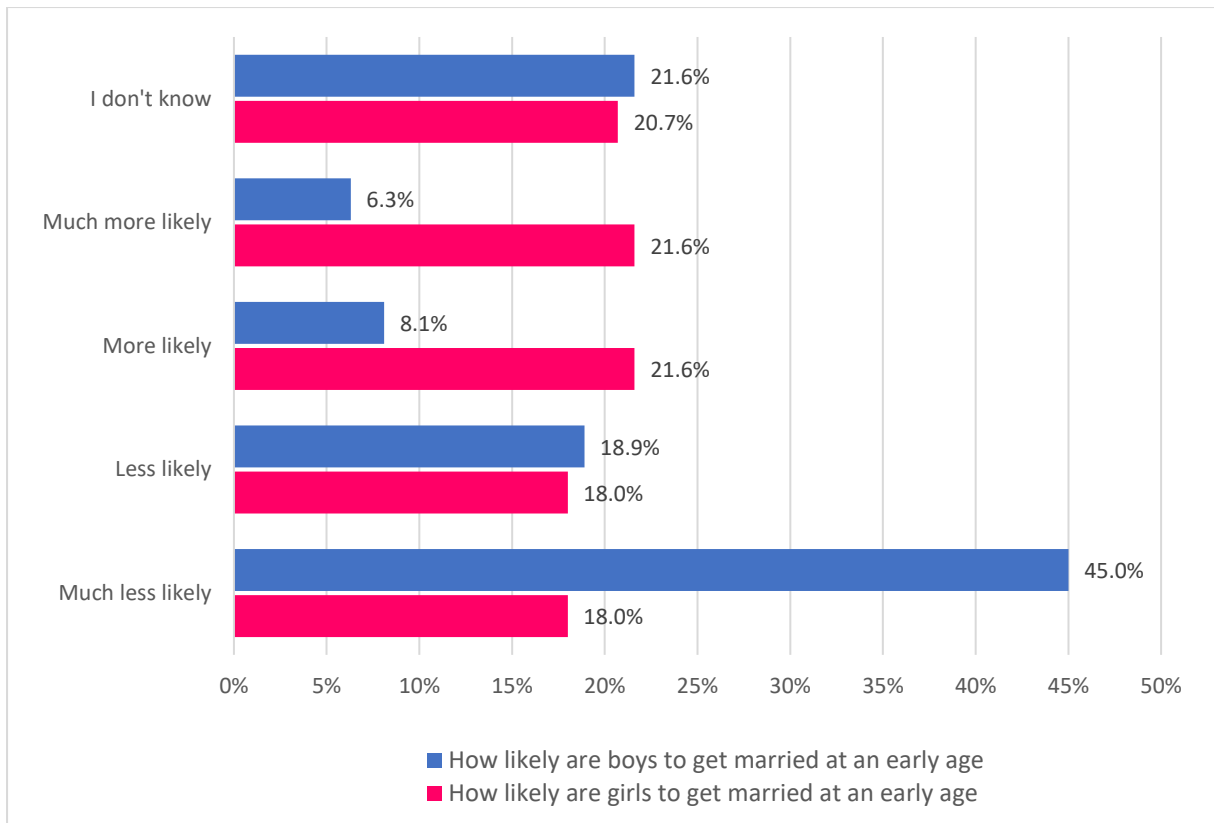
Even though all differences were not statistically significant, some trends can be spotted: higher percentages of females, Elbasan youngsters, and youngsters with high school and university education knew that about the occurrence of early marriages in their community compared to their respective counterparts (Figure 16). The biggest difference was noticed regarding gender, with 69.9% of females and only 47.4% of males being aware of early marriages in their community (borderline significance;  $P=0.052$ ). This means that females are much more aware about this phenomenon compared to males, probably because in most cases they are the ones being involved in early marriages.



**Figure 16. Percentage of youngsters that are aware that early marriages occur in their community, by background characteristics**

### 3.9.2 Opinions on the likelihood of boys and girls getting married early

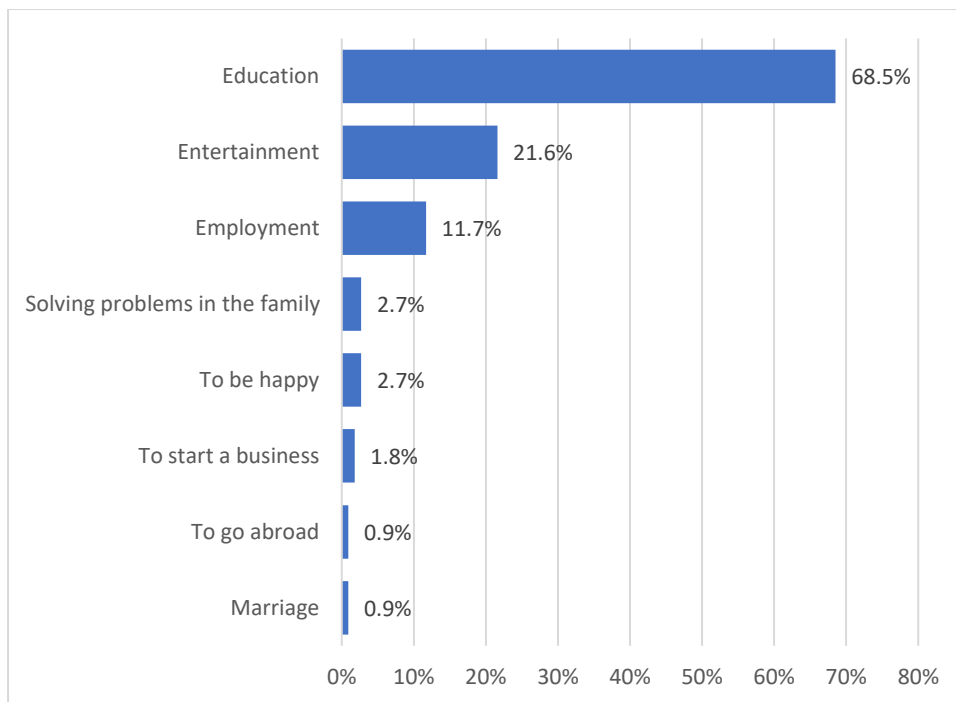
Participants were asked to share their opinions about the likelihood of girls and boys getting married early (before the age of 18) in their local community. Their answers are summarized in Figure 17. As expected, higher proportions of participants think that it is much less likely for boys than for girls to be married early (45% and 18% of participants reported it), and the inverse was true with regard to the likelihood of girls being married early: 43.2% of participants think that girls are more likely and much more likely to get married early compared to only 14.4% of participants thinking the same about boys. However, about one-fifth of youngsters responded “I don’t know” to this question. All age, gender, education level and survey site differences were not statistically significant ( $P > 0.05$  in all cases).



**Figure 17. Youngsters’ opinions about the likelihood of boys and girls getting married early in their communities**

#### 6.10. Youngsters’ actual priorities

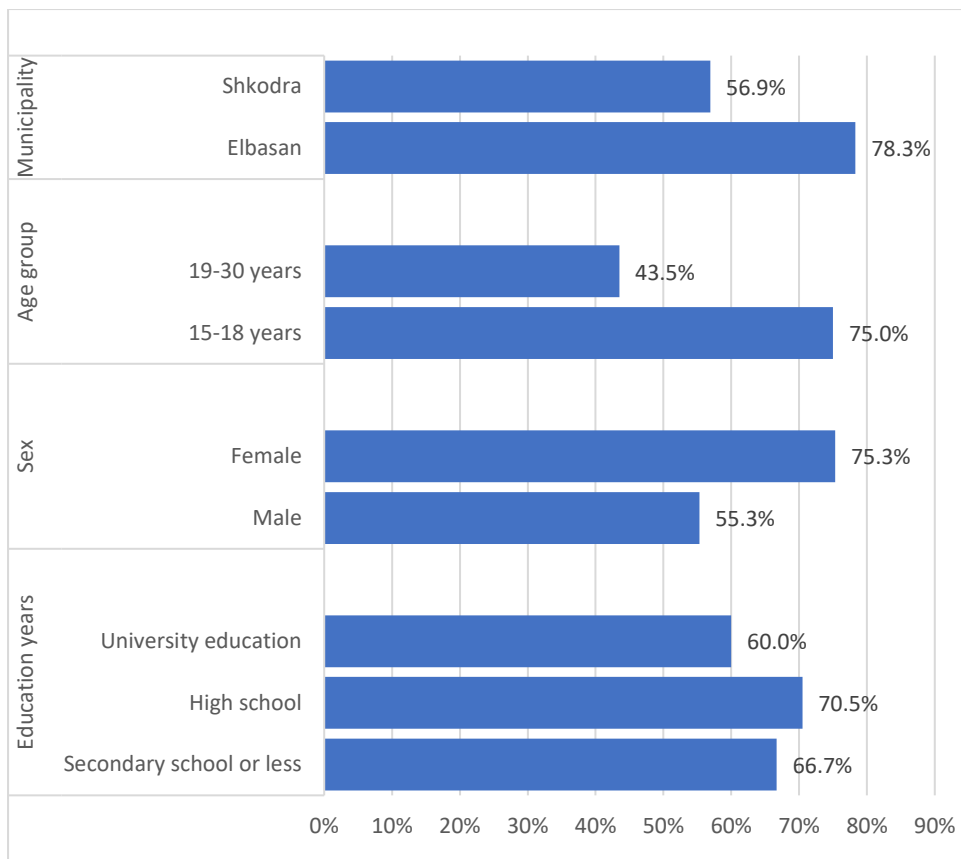
Participants were invited to inform us about their actual priorities. Their answers are summarized in Figure 18. The most common priority was to get educated, reported by 68.5% of participants, followed by the desire to be entertained (21.6%), employment (11.7%) whereas the other priorities listed were much less common.



**Figure 18. Youngsters' actual priorities**

### 3.10.1 Education priority by background characteristics of participants

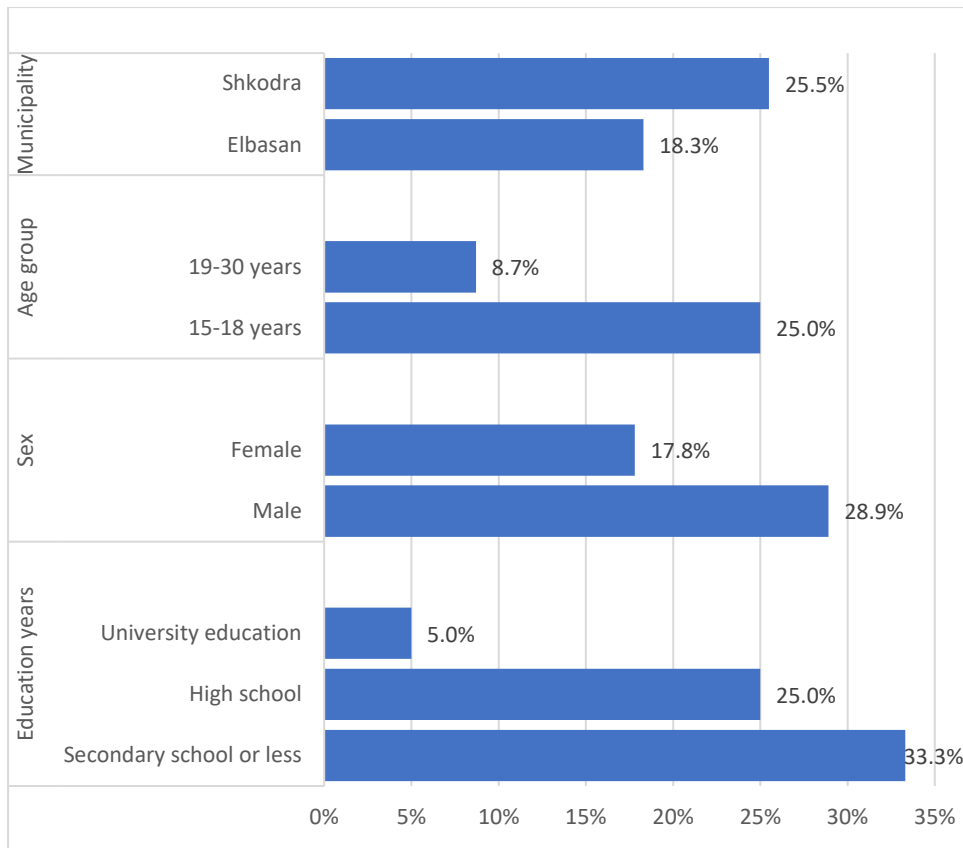
Figure 19 shows the distribution of percentages of youngsters that have education as their actual priority, by background characteristics of participants. It can be noted that higher proportions of Elbasan youngsters, females and those aged 15-18 years old have education as their current priority compared to their respective counterparts; all these differences were statistically significant with the exception of education level: the differences with regard to the level of education were not statistically significant and there was no clear trend either.



**Figure 19. Proportions of youngsters having education as an actual priority, by background characteristics**

### 3.10.2 Entertainment priority by background characteristics of participants

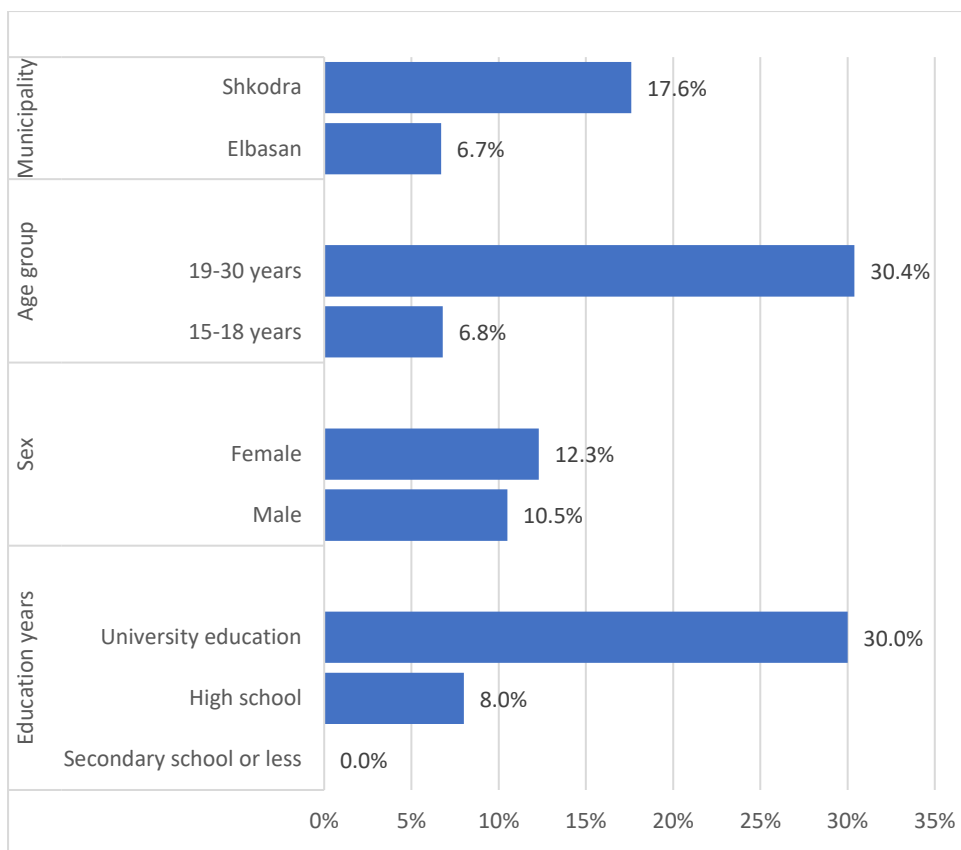
Figure 20 shows the distribution of percentages of youngsters that have entertainment as their actual priority, by background characteristics of participants. It can be noted that higher proportions of Shkodra youngsters, males, those aged 15-18 years old and those with lower education level have entertainment as their current priority compared to their respective counterparts; however, all these differences were not statistically significant ( $P > 0.05$  in all cases).



**Figure 20. Proportions of youngsters having entertainment as an actual priority, by background characteristics**

### 3.10.3 Employment priority by background characteristics of participants

Figure 21 shows the distribution of percentages of youngsters that have employment as their actual priority, by background characteristics of participants. It can be noted that higher proportions of Shkodra youngsters, females, those aged 19-30 years old and those with higher education level have employment as their current priority compared to their respective counterparts; however, all these differences were not statistically significant ( $P > 0.05$ ), with the exception of education level where the differences are significant ( $P < 0.05$ ).

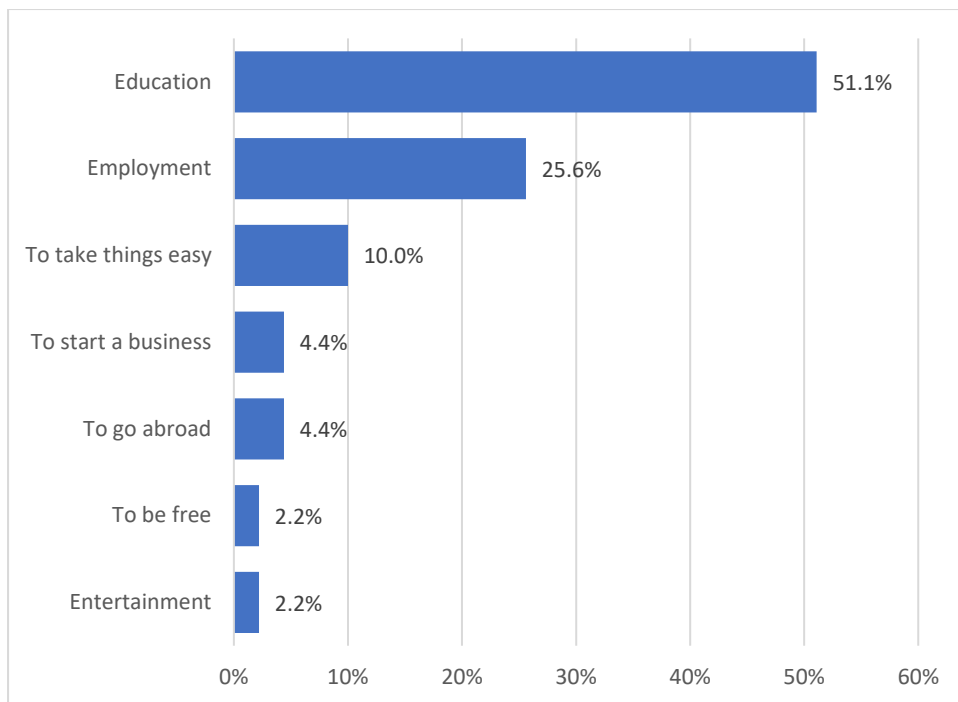


**Figure 21. Proportions of youngsters having employment as an actual priority, by background characteristics**

### 6.11. What youngsters would like to do to improve their life

Young participants were asked to share with us their opinions about what they would like to do in order to improve their life. 80.2% of all participants provided information. A summary of their answers is provided in Figure 22. More than half of respondents (51.1%) would like to pursue their education as a means to improve their life; the next most common thing youngsters would like to do in order to improve their life was to be employed, reported by 25.6% of respondents; taking things easy was reported by 10% of respondents whereas the other options were mentioned much less frequently.

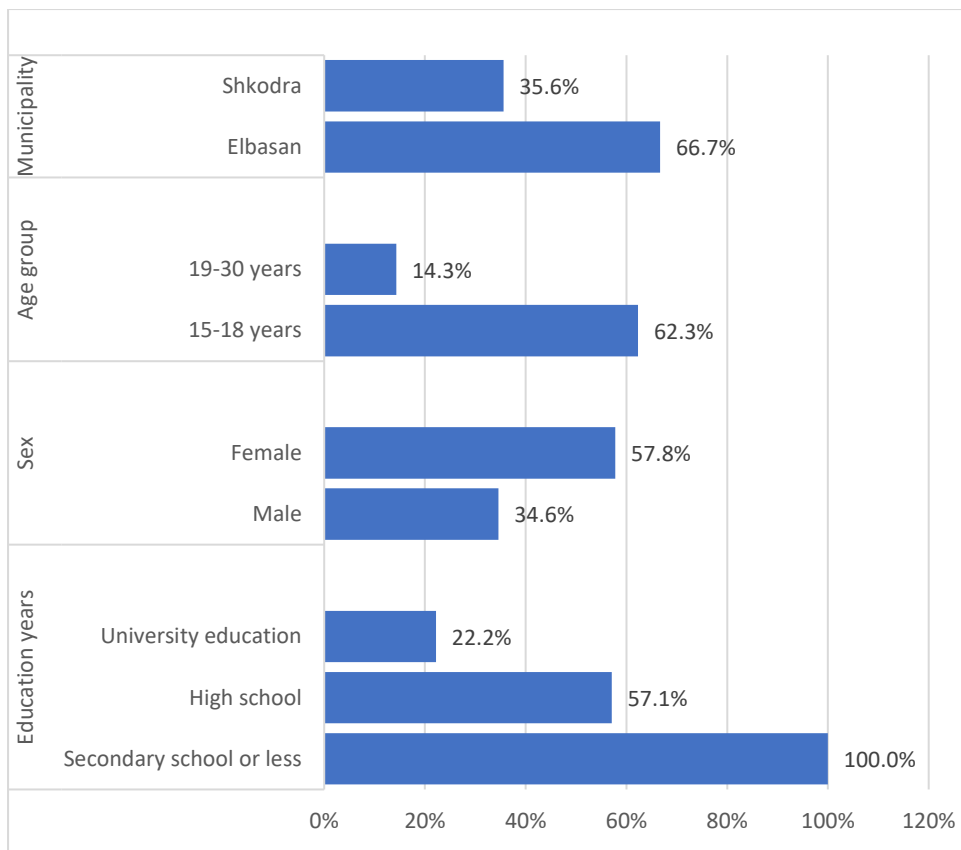




**Figure 22. What youngsters would like to do to improve their life**

### 3.11.1 Education as a means to improve one's life

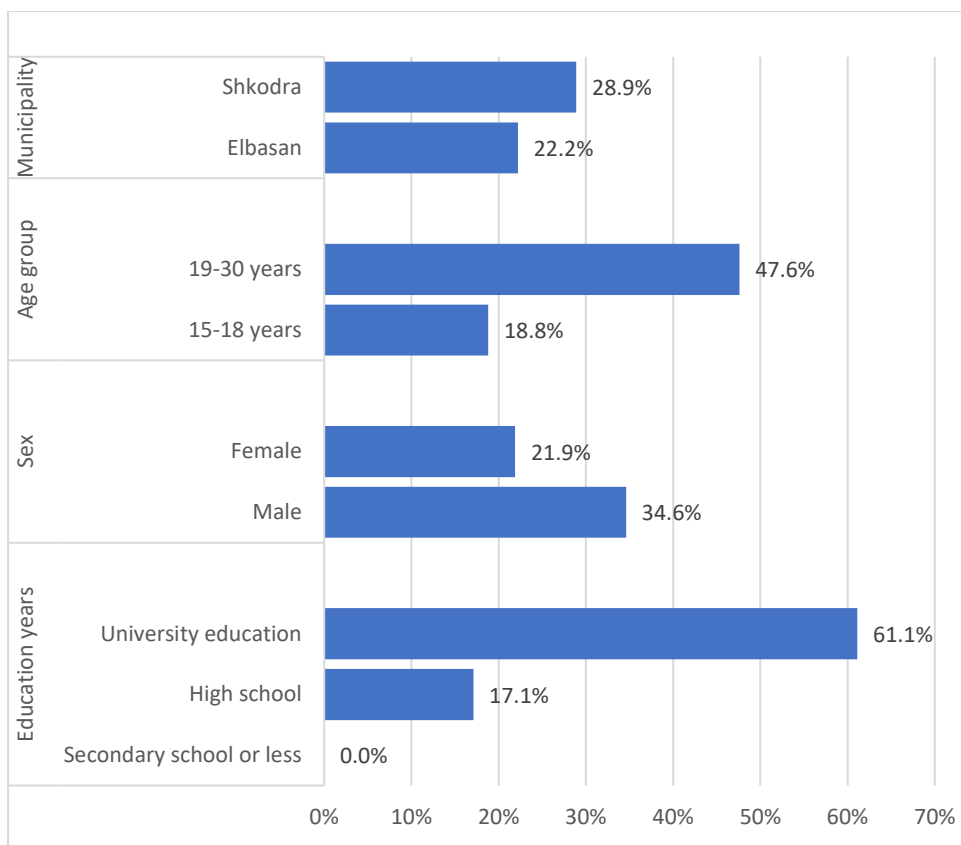
Figure 23 shows the distribution of percentages of youngsters that would like to continue their education as a means for improving their life, by background characteristics of participants. It can be noted that higher proportions of Elbasan youngsters, females, those aged 15-18 years old and youngsters with the lowest education level would like to continue their education track as a means to improve their life compared to their respective counterparts; all these differences were statistically significant ( $P < 0.05$ ).



**Figure 23. Proportions of youngsters that would like to continue their education as a means to improve their life, by background characteristics**

### 3.11.2 Employment as a means to improve one's life

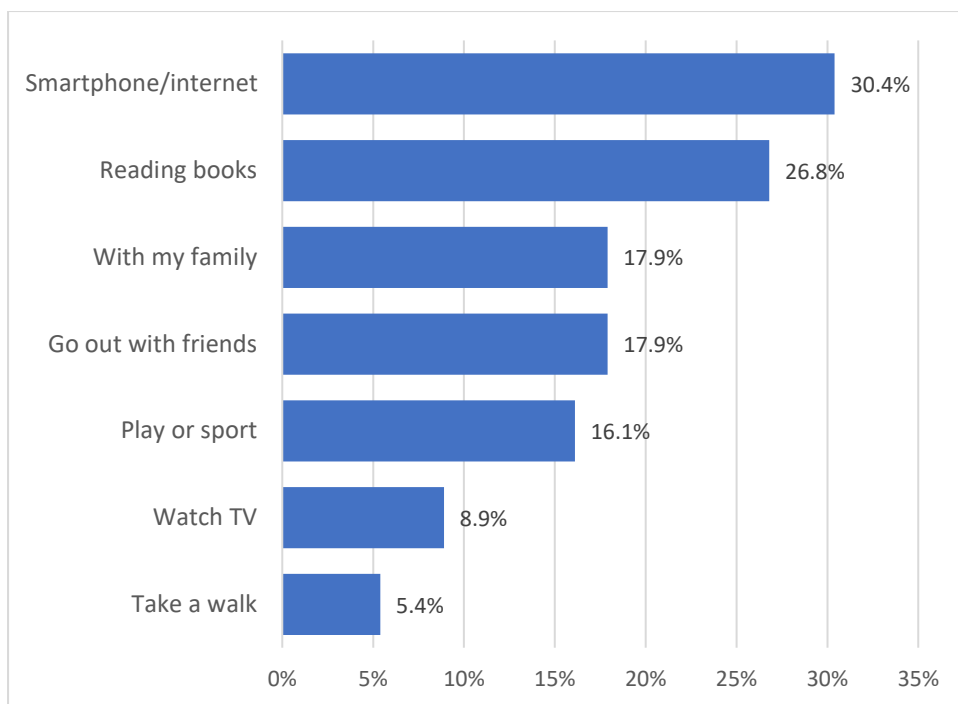
Figure 24 shows the distribution of percentages of youngsters that would like to be employed as a means for improving their life, by background characteristics of participants. It can be noted that higher proportions of Shkodra youngsters, males, those aged 19-30 years old and youngsters with the highest education level would like to be employed as a means to improve their life compared to their respective counterparts; the differences with regard to age and education level were statistically significant ( $P < 0.05$ ).



**Figure 24. Proportions of youngsters that would like to be employed as a means to improve their life, by background characteristics**

#### 6.12. What youngsters do in their free time

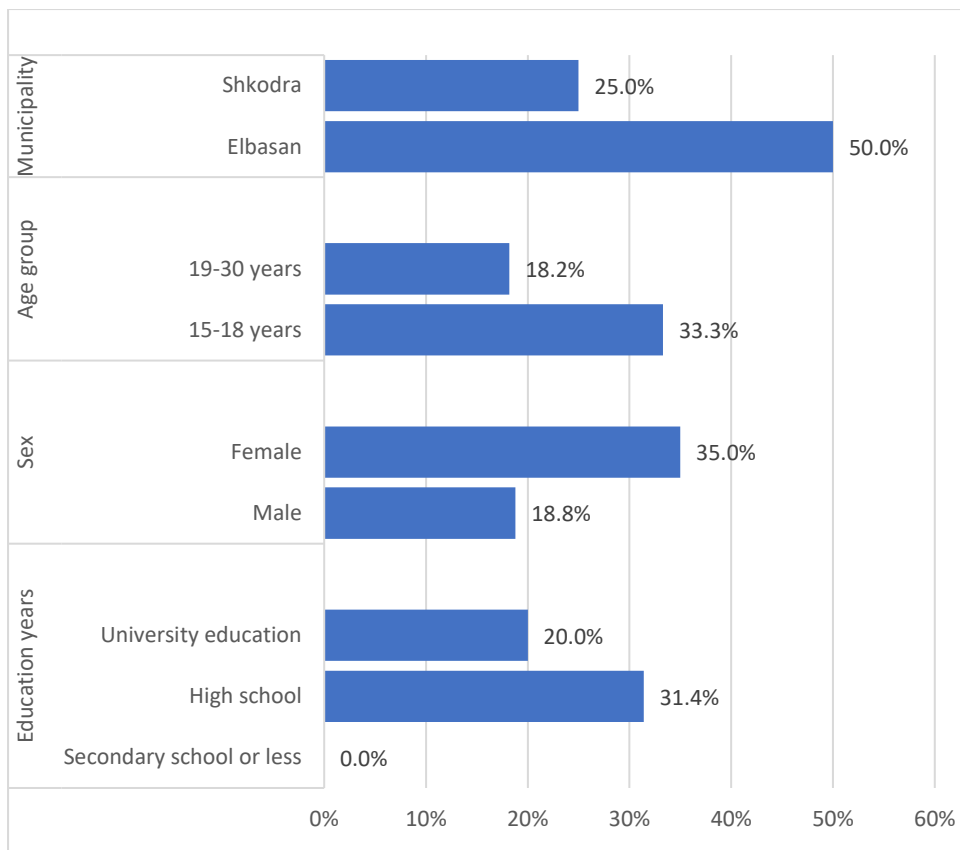
Young participants were asked to inform us about how do they spend their free time. 50.5% of all participants provided information. Their answers are summarized in Figure 25. The most common way to spend the free time was using the smartphone and navigating the internet and or interacting with social media, reported by 30.4% of respondents; the next most common way to spend the free time was reading books (26.8%), staying with family members (17.9%), going out with friends (17.9%) and playing or doing sports (16.1%). Other activities were reported less frequently.



**Figure 25. How youngsters spend their free time**

### 3.12.1 Navigating the internet and interacting with social media during free time, by background characteristics

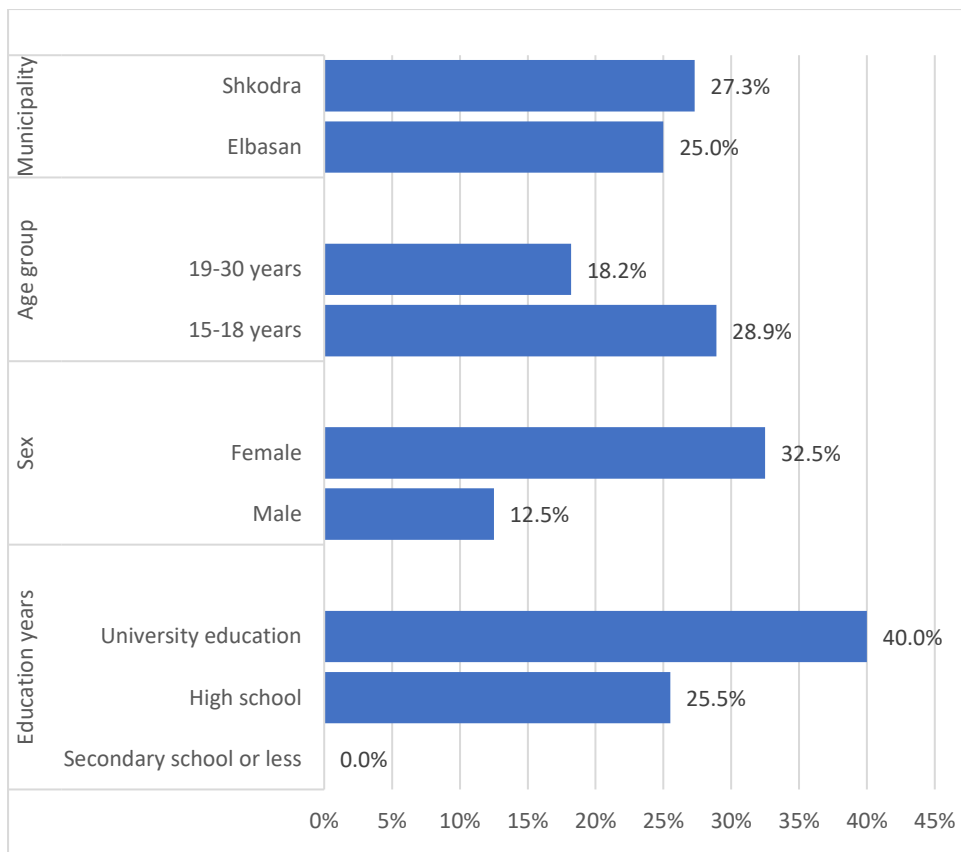
Figure 26 shows the distribution of percentages of youngsters that navigate the internet and interact with social media during their free time, by background characteristics of participants. It can be noted that higher proportions of Elbasan youngsters, females, those aged 15-18 years old and youngsters with high school education spend their free time navigating the internet and/or interacting with social media compared to their respective counterparts; the differences with regard to age and education level were all not statistically significant ( $P > 0.05$  in all cases).



**Figure 26. Proportions of youngsters that navigate the internet and interact with social media during their free time, by background characteristics**

### 3.12.2 Reading books during free time, by background characteristics

Figure 27 shows the distribution of percentages of youngsters that read books during their free time, by background characteristics of participants. It can be noted that higher proportions of Shkodra youngsters, females, those aged 15-18 years old and youngsters with the highest education level spend their free time reading books compared to their respective counterparts; the differences with regard to age and education level were all not statistically significant ( $P > 0.05$  in all cases).

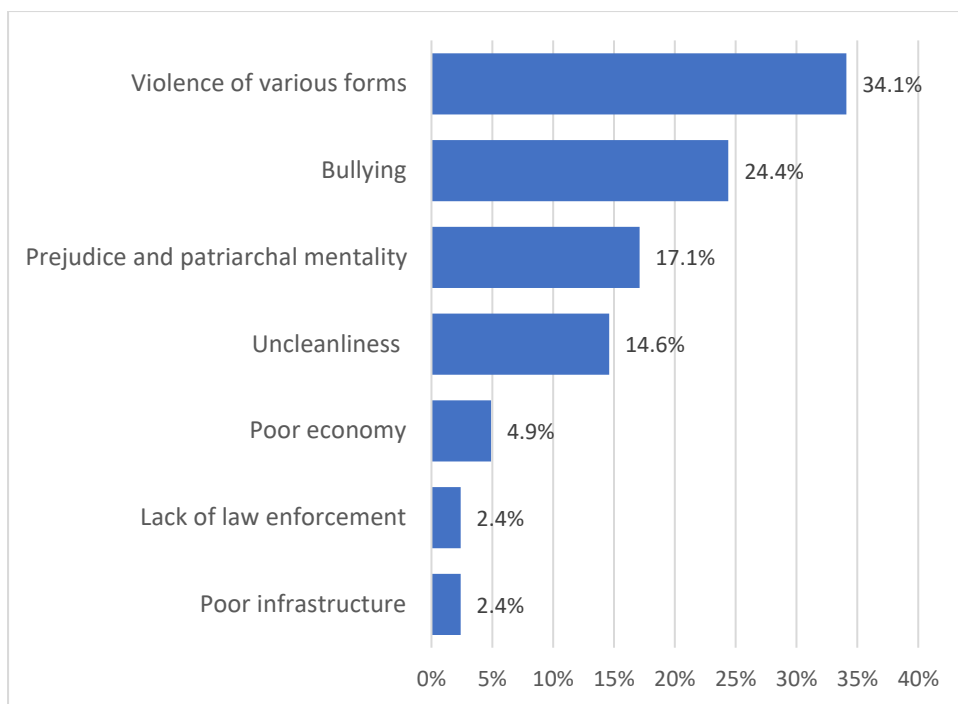


**Figure 27. Proportions of youngsters that read books during their free time, by background characteristics**

Similarly, there were no significant differences with regard to the distribution of proportions of youngsters using other ways to spend their free time by survey site, gender, age and education level of participants.

### 6.13. What problems do youngsters identify in their community

Young participants were asked to identify the main problems their community is facing. Only 36.9% of all participants provided information. Their answers are summarized in Figure 28. The most common identified problem was the existence and exerting of violence of various forms (psychological, physical, sexual), reported by 34.1% of respondents; the next most common problem was bullying (24.4%), prejudice and patriarchal mentality (17.1%), uncleanliness (14.5%) and poor economy (4.9%). Other activities were reported less frequently.

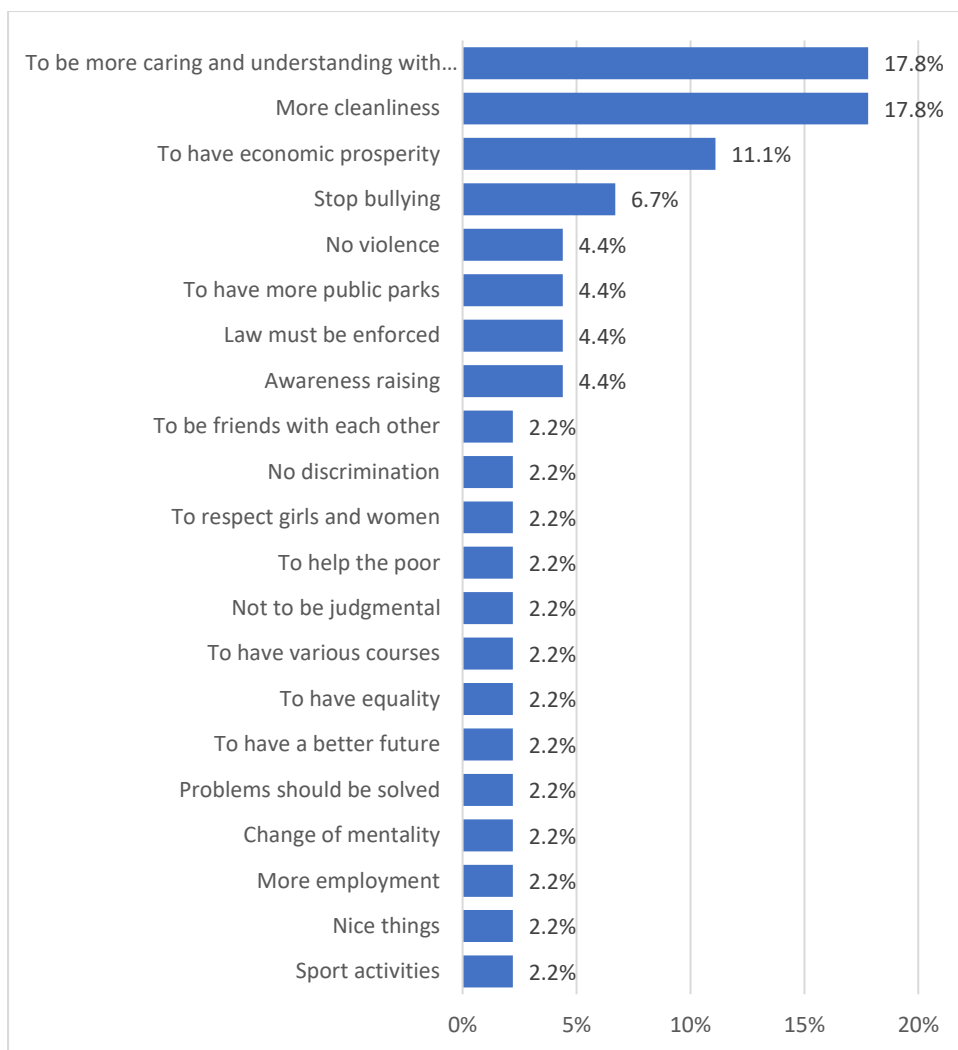


**Figure 28. Which are the most common problems youngsters identified in their community**

In general, there were no significant differences with regard to the distribution of identified problems by survey site, gender, age and education level of participants.

#### 6.14. What youngsters desire for their community

Young participants were asked to share with us what they desire for their community to prosper. Only 40.5% of all participants provided information. Their answers are summarized in Figure 29. The most common wish was to be more caring and understanding with each other, reported by 17.8% of respondents, and the wish for more clean environment reported by 17.8% or respondents as well; the next most common wish was to have economic prosperity (11.1%), to stop bullying (6.7%), to end violence (4.4%), to have more public parks (4.4%), to enforce the law (4.4%), to raise the awareness of the community (4.4%), whereas other elements were reported less frequently.



**Figure 29. What youngsters wish for their community to thrive**

#### 6.15. Engagement of youngsters in volunteer/community work

Young participants were asked to share with us whether they have been engaging with volunteer and/or community work. Only 46.8% of the participants provided information with regard to this question. 57.7% of respondents said that they were engaged in volunteer/community work, mainly at school or church.

There were no significant differences with regard to the distribution of participating in volunteer/community work by survey site, gender and education level of participants. However, significantly higher proportions of younger respondents aged 15-18 years old (68.3%) reported to be engaged with volunteer work compare to the respective proportion of older respondents aged 19-30 years old reporting the same (18.2%) and this difference is statistically significant ( $P < 0.05$ ).



## 7. MAIN CONCLUSIONS

### Gender norms, social interaction and violence

- Clearly there is a gender difference, with significantly higher proportions of male youngsters agreeing on a series of statements implying the supremacy of man/husband. No significant differences were observed with regard to age, education level and marital status of the participants, meaning that these attitudes are gender based reflecting gender stereotypes.
- The most frequent problem faced by young people was violence of various forms (psychological, sexual and family violence) especially against women.
- Interestingly, significantly higher proportions of youngsters in Shkodra than in Elbasan reported bullying, violence, unemployment, whereas the reverse trend was noticed with regard to gender inequality and discrimination.
- Significantly higher proportions of females and those aged 19-30 years old reported to know other youngsters suffering from violence in their local community, compared to their respective peers.
- More than half of the young people say that the community has not had any reaction to the episode of violence, while only a small percentage of respondents said that psychosocial measures and support for the victims was provided.
- The percentage of young people who reported that the community did not react at all to the episode of violence was significantly higher in Shkodër (72.1%) and Elbasan (39.5%).

### Community safety

- Two-third of all participants reported feeling safe in their local community, but one-third did not feel safe in their community.
- More than half of respondents said they did not feel vulnerable to sexual harassment at all, implying that the remainder felt at least somewhat vulnerable to sexual harassment.
- Half of the participants reported receiving unwanted sexual comments at least once in their lives.
- Higher proportions of Shkodra youngsters, females, 19-30 years old participants and university education youngsters had received unwanted sexual comments at least occasionally, compared to their respective counterparts.
- More than half of the participants reported being insulted or told harsh words at least once in their lifetime.
- Higher proportions of Elbasan youngsters, males, 15-18 years old participants and high school youngsters had been insulted or spoken harsh words at least occasionally, compared to their respective counterparts.
- Higher proportions of Shkodra youngsters, males, 19-30 years old participants and university education youngsters had been slapped, kicked or hit with hard objects at least occasionally, compared to their respective counterparts.
- About 4 out of 10 young people stated that they talked to someone about the episodes of violence they experienced. Almost half of the young people had talked to a friend about the episodes of violence.
- Only one of the participants stated that he has officially reported an episode of violence that he experienced personally.

- Young people generally have adequate knowledge of where to go in case of violence and how to react in such cases.

### Early marriages

- About two-thirds of the participants had some knowledge of the occurrence of early marriages in their local community. The biggest difference was observed in gender where women are much more aware of this phenomenon compared to men, probably because in most cases they are the ones involved in early marriages.
- Higher percentages of women, young people in Elbasan, and young people with secondary and university education were aware of the occurrence of early marriages in their community compared to their respective counterparts.
- Higher percentages of participants thought that boys were much less likely than girls to marry early, and the opposite was true for the likelihood of girls marrying early.
- Two-thirds of participants reported that their most common priority was education, followed by entertainment and employment.
- The highest percentages of young people in Elbasan, women and those aged 15-18 years, currently prioritize education compared to their respective counterparts.
- Higher percentages of Shkodran youth, males, those aged 15-18 years and with a lower educational level have entertainment as their current priority compared to their respective counterparts.
- Higher percentages of young people in Shkodër, women, young people aged 19-30 and those with higher education have employment as their current priority compared to their respective counterparts.

### Desires of young people to improve their lives

- More than half of the respondents would like to continue their education as a means to improve their lives; the next most common thing young people would like to do to improve their lives was to get a job.
- Higher percentages of young people in Elbasan, women, young people aged 15-18 and young people with lower education want to continue their educational path as a means to improve their lives compared to their counterparts.
- Higher percentage of Shkodran youth, males, those aged 19-30 and youth with the highest level of education would like to be employed as a means to improve their lives compared to their respective counterparts.
- The problem most often identified by young people in the community was the existence and practice of various forms of violence (psychological, physical, sexual), followed by bullying, prejudice and mentality.
- Most participants expressed that they would like their community to be more caring and understanding with each other, the next most common wish was for economic prosperity, to stop bullying, to end violence, to make the community aware.
- More than half of respondents said they were engaged in volunteer/community work, mostly at school or church.

## 8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions of this study, our recommendations are as follows:

- Addressing gender inequality and gender stereotyping through comprehensive interventions starting in early childhood.
- It is necessary to address violence in general and gender-based violence among young people in Albania, through primary prevention, i.e universal approaches aimed at reducing the likelihood of violence against women and girls. Prevention based on reducing risk factors related to violence and/or promoting protective factors that increase the safety of young women and girls. On the other hand, through tailored prevention programs targeting vulnerable young people who are at higher risk.
- Empowering women and girls through gender-specific interventions and addressing gender concerns in the development, planning, implementation and evaluation of all policies and programs.
- It seems that a lot of work needs to be done with the family environment in Albania, as it is one of the main sources of violence among young people. Promoting more open, supportive and understanding families and communities where choice and diversity are welcomed and social norms do not constrain children and young people.
- There is a need to enable access to all types of professions for girls and boys, women and men and increase women's access to high positions.
- Also, the education system must ensure that children and young people learn and discuss about gender equality, their bodies, free choice.
- Training health care staff and teachers on gender equality and to discuss these issues with children and young people from an early age.
- Support with psychological services to help young people who face multiple threats, episodes of violence, discrimination, and taking measures for their active involvement in economic and social life.
- Young people should be more interested in the country's political life; as they will be the future citizens with the power to choose and shape the country's politics and therefore society as a whole would benefit from more of their political engagement.
- It is necessary to fight gender inequality in relation to leadership positions in public institutions by giving women the opportunity to be elected to these positions; this would be positively reflected in the community and would be another booster of gender equality and a changing factor of the existing mentality.
- There is an urgent need for key public institutions to start doing their job in addressing gender inequality, gender stereotypes, discrimination against young girls and women, the existing patriarchal mentality and the problems faced by vulnerable youth.
- Interventions would allow local government units, along with other public institutions, to create an enabling environment for youth to thrive, focusing on service delivery and outreach to adolescent girls and boys in underserved/rural areas.
- Addressing gender inequality and gender-based discrimination is a multidimensional, long-term intervention involving all social actors, at every level starting from early education and continuing throughout life. For this purpose, there is a need for advocating the equal rights of women and girls, fighting discriminatory practices and challenging roles and stereotypes that affect inequalities and exclusion and strong political commitment, empowering all stakeholders and especially the most vulnerable groups. vulnerable.
- Financial support for issues of gender equality and women's rights should be at the heart of development strategies.

