

# Strengthening Peace and Security in High Schools: Insights from the Student Council Conference

KYC Kosova held a transformative Student Council Conference on Peace and Security, a pioneering initiative aimed at fostering dialogue among diverse student groups, empowering young leaders, and addressing the pressing challenges in schools across Kosovo. This conference brought together 150 student representatives, including participants from Serbian schools and other marginalized communities, aligning with the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda.

## The Context of Peace and Security in Schools

Ensuring peace and security in schools is a global challenge that requires immediate attention and collaborative solutions. According to a 2023 UNESCO report, approximately 32% of student's worldwide experience bullying at least once a month, significantly affecting their mental health and academic performance. In Europe, a 2022 Eurostat survey highlighted that 1 in 5 students reported feeling unsafe in their school environment, citing issues such as violence, harassment, and inadequate infrastructure.

In Kosovo, the situation mirrors global trends. A 2024 study by the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation revealed that over 40% of students in secondary schools identified bullying as a major concern. Additionally, inter-ethnic tensions remain a persistent challenge, exacerbated by the parallel education system. The same study reported that only 25% of schools have access to psychological support services, leaving a significant gap in addressing mental health issues among students.

Safety concerns extend beyond interpersonal conflicts. Reports indicate that incidents involving narcotics, weapons, and vandalism are on the rise in schools across Kosovo. A 2023 survey conducted by the Kosovar Youth Council found that 35% of students had witnessed or been aware of violent incidents in their school premises.

These statistics underscore the urgent need for comprehensive policies and interventions to create safe and inclusive learning environments. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach involving students, educators, parents, and policymakers.

## Building Connections and Addressing Challenges

The event opened with an acknowledgment of the unique challenges faced by schools across Kosovo. Participants were organized into working groups to discuss three thematic areas: Challenges, Policies, and Interventions. Discussions highlighted significant concerns, including:

- **Bullying and Harassment:** Both peer-to-peer and teacher-related incidents were reported as widespread issues.
- **Mental Health:** Students emphasized the need for psychological support in schools to combat stress and conflict.
- **Inter-Ethnic Tensions:** Divisions between communities, often exacerbated by the parallel education system, were identified as barriers to peaceful coexistence.
- **Safety Concerns:** The presence of narcotics, weapons, and inadequate school infrastructure were seen as critical threats.

A student from Mitrovica captured the spirit of the discussions: *“Safe and peaceful schools are the key to a bright future. We must work together to build environments where everyone feels secure and respected.”*

## Policy Recommendations and Action Plans

Through collaborative dialogue, students proposed innovative solutions to improve peace and security in schools. Key recommendations included:

- **Inclusive Policies:** Appointing school coordinators for conflict resolution and promoting tolerance through campaigns.
- **Anonymous Reporting Platforms:** Implementing digital tools to allow students to report incidents without fear of reprisal.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Organizing marches, workshops, and educational initiatives to promote peace.
- **Infrastructure Improvements:** Installing security cameras, emergency alarms, and metal detectors in schools.

A participant from Gjilan suggested, *“Awareness-raising campaigns and Peace Clubs can help us overcome divisions and build stronger, safer communities.”*

## Notable Interventions and Initiatives

Working groups also outlined practical interventions to address these challenges:

- **Capacity-Building Programs:** Training for students and staff on conflict resolution, mental health support, and advocacy.
- **Municipal Cooperation:** Strengthening collaboration between local student councils, municipalities, and NGOs to address safety concerns.
- **Regular Inspections:** Routine checks for narcotics and weapons by local authorities to ensure a secure environment.

A student from Peja highlighted the need for comprehensive efforts, stating: *“Together with parents, teachers, and local authorities, we can create a framework that ensures safety and supports learning for all students.”*

## Outcomes and Future Steps

The conference’s immediate outcomes included the drafting of the Student Council Peace and Security Policy Recommendations and a collaborative Action Plan. These documents outline strategic steps to:

- Promote tolerance and respect within schools.
- Enhance reporting mechanisms for security incidents.
- Integrate peacebuilding activities into the school curriculum.

## Conclusion: Empowering Youth as Agents of Change

The Student Council Conference demonstrated the power of youth-led initiatives in addressing systemic challenges. By providing a platform for dialogue and collaboration, KYC empowered young leaders to take proactive roles in fostering peace and security in schools. The insights and recommendations from this conference will serve as a foundation for ongoing efforts to create safer, more inclusive educational environments across Kosovo.

A participant summarized the spirit of the event, saying, *“Let’s practice motivation and love, not discrimination and hate.”*

KYC remains committed to supporting these initiatives and ensuring that the voices of students continue to shape the future of education in Kosovo.

