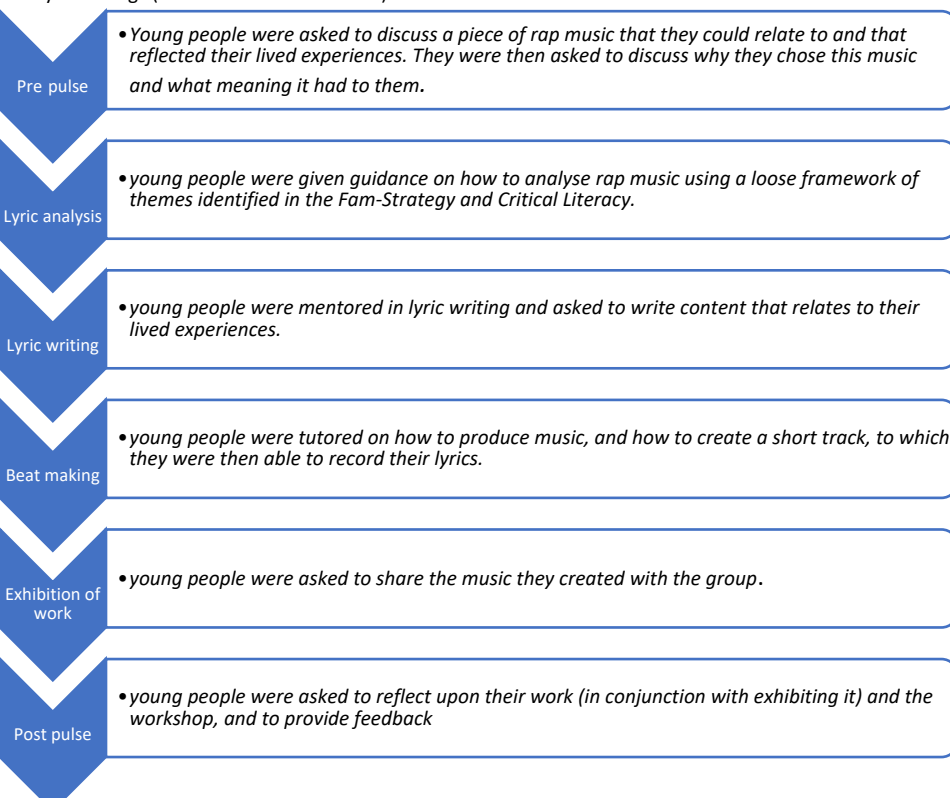


# Music for Futures - Lyrics and Beats Making Workshop: Cultivating resilience to organised crime in Albanian youth through music

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The Music for Futures - lyrics and beats making workshop employed a series of sessions in which young people in Albania learned to critically evaluate rap lyrics, craft their own lyrics, and apply them to 'beats' of their creation. The intervention was a first in Albania and employed innovative methods that have not been used previously in other academic interventions of this kind throughout the world. The project provided a music-based platform for young people to express their lived experiences and learn social, practical and critical thinking skills, whilst envisaging and working towards constructive futures for both themselves and broader Albanian society. It applied the FAM-strategy alongside critical literacy "to foster creative, critical, lateral, and imaginative thinking that challenges normalised, cultural perceptions and ways of being" (Schwandner-Sievers 2022).



## Resilience narratives

*"I chose the song The Weeknd – Save Your Tears. I like it because it is a song that makes you feel very free, to dance, to sing, without any complexes." Female participant Kukës*

*"A sleepless night again. In my bedroom. A rocket and some propane. Into space I zoom. Zoom zoom zoom. Just like the moon. You spin around my head. Too many stars out there. But there's only one sun. And it is you (lyrics)" - Male participant Shkoder*

*"I chose the song of Billie Elish – Everything I wanted. I like it as a song because it's a bit relaxing, I listen to it all the time. The part that I liked the most is: "As long as I'm here, no one can hurt you" (song lyrics). Female participant Shkoder*

*"The message is the strong adolescent emotions, such as sadness, despair, love, everything that an adolescent experiences throughout school, throughout life. It mainly talks about despair and how you feel tired with the lifestyle that you have..." - Male participant Kukes*

*"They're telling me to rap, I don't know where I should start. Corruption is killing us wherever we go.. Poverty is killing us..." Male participant Shkoder*

*"I can see you're sad, even when you smile, even when you laugh. I can see it in your eyes, deep inside you want to cry. Baby I just wanna tell you to be yourself... I will be there for you....." - Group lyrics Kukës.*

*"It talks about the earth and disasters that happen in earth, and that humanity should become better, or that it should protect our earth and the living that are on it.." - Male participant Kukës*

*"I chose a singer from Sweden... and the reason why I chose it is because it talks about the streets, how to get away from criminal paths" - Male participant Shkoder.*

## Motivation

Some young people found that music gave them mental and emotional energy with songs that helped them to shift their mindset and become more self-confident and driven (Karageorghis et al. 1999). Music helped them to overcome both internal psychological and external sociocultural barriers to performance in addition to providing them with motivational energy to take on new activities.

## Love and loss

A common theme that emerged within the resilience narratives was that of love and loss. These themes were not restricted exclusively to romantic relationships and also extended to close friendships and familial ones. Nonetheless, the lyric writing sessions helped the young people to open up and express these issues more freely in ways that can have therapeutic benefits.

## Social support

The participants frequently discussed the importance of social support in relation to overcoming adversity. Evidence in this field demonstrates that positive social bonds with family members and peers are one of the key protective factors that boost resilience (Walsh 2016). The young people explained that having someone who cares deeply about them can help to stop other people from hurting them and causing emotional trauma.

## Social alienation

Social alienation refers to feelings and experiences of being separated and isolated from one's friends, family, community, or larger society. The young people highlighted experiences of alienation in Albania alongside the related feelings of sadness and despair. Importantly, as before, they articulated the advantages of social support in providing resilience to overcome the effects of this.

## Corruption and poverty

Albania is rated as the 5th poorest country in Europe and has systemic corruption at all levels of society. Corruption and organised crime are symbiotic processes and the two are closely linked (Von Lampe 2016). The young people expressed experiences of these issues deeply but also considered ways to overcome them to achieve constructive goals in life.

## Gender inequality, bullying and resilience

The topic of bullying and being negatively judged by others also emerged in the workshops; this related to face-to-face experiences as well as cyberbullying. Nonetheless, through the sessions, the young people were able to think critically about these issues as well as providing messages of hope, support and resilience to others who are experiencing them.

## Environmental Sustainability

An interesting theme was that of global warming and environmental sustainability, which may become worse for young people as they grow older. Nonetheless, the intervention provided a platform to engage young people in debates about climate change and have their voices heard on the effects it is having upon them. This may also lead them to actively engage in this field more broadly.

## Crime

In the discussions, some of the young people expressed a preference for Albanian Drill Music with songs expressing content regarding drugs and violent crime; however, these artists also had more conscientious lyrics in their content. Some of the participants were also positively critical and openly discussed the problem and culture of crime in Albania, and music itself, as well as wanting to resolve it.

Themes of 'adversity, resilience and change' emerged through each of the sessions.. The themes are interrelated and were expressed by young people through what has been termed in this project as 'resilience narratives'. Resilience is an emerging academic field that seeks to identify the mechanisms which help strengthen an individual's resolve in times of adversity, stress and crisis (Luthar et al. 2000). This also has relevance for interventions that seek to prevent serious and organised crime by helping to strengthen individuals and communities, so they become more resilient to criminality.