

**MAPPING OF YOUTH POLICIES AND
IDENTIFICATION OF EXISTING SUPPORT AND GAPS
IN FINANCING OF YOUTH ACTIONS IN THE
WESTERN BALKANS**

COMPARATIVE REPORT



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The report is based on comprehensive research, organized and overseen by the Open Society Foundation in Albania, and involved six researchers, one in each Western Balkans six economies between September 2020 - January 2021.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a comparative analysis of the youth policies, funding mechanisms, participation, and donor interventions in the area of youth in the Western Balkans six economies (WB6). In addition, the comparative report outlines a mapping of donor programs in the area of youth across the region and provides a brief overview of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The methodology for drafting and updating the comparative report is based on desk and empirical research conducted during the period October – December 2020. This comparative report draws from the national reports for each of the WB6 economies, which analyze the current situation of youth policies in each economy, identifying existing support and gaps in the financing of youth actions and exploring youth participation in decision making by highlighting best practices and providing recommendations. The Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) has set the structure and scope of the research, outline of the reports, and methodology guidelines based on the need to inform implementation of the Western Balkans Youth Project as well as serve to project's beneficiaries including public administrations, donor community, and national youth councils / youth umbrella organizations.

This report finds that availability of youth-specific disaggregated data remains a challenge across the WB6 coupled with a lack of consistency with the age category (15-24; 15-29; 15-30) used in data collection by different institutions in all of the WB6 economies. This inconsistency hinders data comparability and youth research at a regional level. According to Eurostat, the total youth population in the WB6 economies is 3,611,109 which is 21.27% of the total population of all the six economies. Kosovo*¹ has the highest share of youth in the total population (26.29%), followed by Albania (23.4%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (20.37%) and North Macedonia (20.32%), Montenegro (19.49%), and Serbia (16.8%). The ratio of men and women in the youth population is similar in all economies, with the male youth population slightly larger; men comprise 51.16% and women comprise 48.84% of the youth population in the WB6 economies. Not all WB6 economies collect and publish youth specific data on ethnicity. According to Eurostat, the youth unemployment rate in the WB6 remains twice as high as in the European Union (EU), with Kosovo* having the highest youth unemployment rate. The data shows that youth unemployment rate in WB6 varies from 28,3% in Albania up to 55.4% in Kosovo*. Various public opinion studies point to an increase in the rate of young people intending to emigrate for a better life abroad. However, data on youth migration is lacking in all WB6 economies. For instance, 71% of respondents of age group 18-24 in RCC's Balkan Barometer 2020 stated that they would leave and work abroad.

In terms of the legal framework, Constitutional provisions on youth differ across the WB6, but all WB6 economies have approved laws on youth, which are intended to regulate different matters

¹ * This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.



related to youth, to ensure empowerment of youth, to improve their social position, to support youth organization, and to improve their participation in decision-making. In terms of the policy framework, not all WB6 economies have a national strategy on youth in place: Albania lacks a National Strategy on Youth (NSY) and Bosnia and Hercegovina does not have a youth strategy, a national action plan on youth, or any other similar document that strategically deals with youth on the state level. Action Plan development and implementation also differs across the WB6. In terms of institutions dealing with youth across the WB6 economies, youth as a policy sector is usually harbored with education, sports, or culture at the ministerial level. In the case of North Macedonia, none of the ministries cover youth portfolio, which is fall under the Agency for Youth and Sports. Whereas in Bosnia and Hercegovina, the ministry at central state level overseen youth portfolio, but does not have competences, which are at sub-state level. Across WB6 economies, local government units are also responsible for youth policy at the local level. Also, line ministers in policy areas such as employment, education, health and social protection, justice and internal affairs (security) are also responsible for youth-related policy areas. The mechanisms for and the extent of coordination and harmonization differs across economies. However, the limited inter-institutional coordination and cross-sectorial harmonization is a common feature of the youth policy frameworks of the WB6 economies.

On the overall, the WB6 economies have made considerable progress in terms of further establishing and consolidating their youth policy framework by adopting relevant laws, strategies, and action plans. However, a fully functional youth system that ensures effective youth empowerment, engagement and participation in decision-making is yet to be developed. Some positive aspects and strengths in youth policy framework are observed, such as the consultation process in development of youth laws and strategies. On the other hand, there are various weaknesses ranging from wider political issues and a lack of willingness to prioritise youth as an inter-institutional and cross-sectorial policy, to very specific types of difficulties in systematic monitoring and evaluation of youth policy development and implementation, data collection, and publication.

In terms of funding, in all the WB6 economies, youth policy is funded from various sources: the state budget, provincial/entity or budgets of local authorities, international organizations and donor funded projects. Apart from Kosovo*, there are no unique budget lines in state budgets dedicated to youth policy in the other WB6 economies, but youth funding is usually part of the budget of the responsible ministry for youth. Not all WB6 economies have a dedicated budget for the implementation of NYS and AP in the area of youth, which constitutes a major weakness in the youth policy funding framework. The most common way of supporting youth is through open calls, transfers and subsidies for youth organizations. Due to the lack of a comprehensive system of data gathering and funds management, total funds dedicated to or spent on youth and/or youth related issues is impossible to estimate either on an annual basis, or for longer periods of time. In all the WB6 economies, funds (state and local budget) for youth policy and youth issues are disbursed through public calls, transfers, or subsidies (of ministries in charge of youth) targeting



Nongovernmental organizations. In all the WB6 economies, the most acclaimed national youth programmes are aimed at raising employability and entrepreneurship of youth, at rewarding excellence among youth, and at supporting youth organizations in their functioning and implementation of activities related to youth strategies.

The reports for each WB6 economy point out some positive developments in terms of youth funding. All WB6 Governments contribute financially to important programmes and regional initiatives including the Erasmus+ Programme and Regional Youth Cooperation Office. A positive case is the Government of North Macedonia's response measures to the COVID-19 pandemic, which included the financial support of young people through specific programs. Despite the progress when it comes to the youth sector, the budgeting system's main issue lies in the lack of sufficient budget allocations for youth policy development and transparency of funding. In this regard, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of youth policy implementation is one of the biggest challenges in all the WB6 economies as it relates directly to transparency and accountability. Another weakness refers to data collection and publication on youth budgets. Financial overlapping is frequent due to the limited coordination between public institutions responsible for youth and youth related areas, as well as between central and local public authorities.

In terms of participation, the WB6 economies have in place youth legal and policy frameworks that state in principle the importance of youth engagement and participation in decision making. However, apart from Serbia, which has a consolidated youth representative system and has set up mechanisms for youth participation in policy making through Youth Structured Dialogue, in other WB economies there is still room for improvement for ensuring effective youth participation in policy development and dialogue. WB6 economies now have the legal framework in place to register youth umbrella organizations/youth councils as associations of youth organizations. However, such organizations are neither established nor recognized by state authorities in charge of youth policy in all WB6. For instance, Kosovo*, Serbia, and Montenegro have established national youth umbrella organizations recognized by state authorities. However, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia do not yet have a youth representative association at the state level recognized by state authorities. The Law on Youth of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina foresees a youth representative association, the Council for Youth of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but this body does not exist yet. Notwithstanding, progress can be observed in Albania and North Macedonia in terms of establishment of umbrella organisations. The new Law on Youth in Albania envisages the establishment of the National Youth Representative Organisation, which will be a partner in the youth policy structured dialogue. Also, the new Law on Youth in North Macedonia regulates the establishment of an umbrella organization for youth and therefore regulates their status as a youth representative body.

Weaknesses of youth participation in the decision-making processes are identified at different levels and areas particularly regarding the scope and mechanisms of established bodies, their status, functionality, communication and cooperation, outreach, and impact. In Bosnia and



Hercegovina, the only youth body on the state level is not functional and the representation young people suffers due to the lack of cooperation of entity-level ministries. In Kosovo*, the Central Youth Action Council (CYAC) is not fully functional and there is limited sustainable support for its operations. Since September 2020, Montenegro has a functioning umbrella youth organisation, the Association of the Youth Network of Montenegro with 35 members and recognised by state authorities. In North Macedonia, the National Youth Council is an organization that is member of the European Youth Forum but not officially recognized as body representing youth at national level.

In terms of evidence-based youth policy making across WB6 economies, some improvements can be noticed regarding evidence-based youth policy with the improvements in the general legal framework that enables citizen and youth participation in decision making. However, WB6 economies are still in the process of further consolidating their knowledge systems and the use of evidence and research in policy making. One of the limits is that the political agenda seems to be retained despite the evidence presented to policymakers. What is more, youth organisations and other related stakeholders such as networks, civil society organisations (CSOs), research centers, and think-tanks focused on youth, need to be better equipped to conduct evidence-based and applied research on youth and engage in policy dialogue. This then could contribute to development of youth policies jointly with youth participation.

In terms of donor interventions in the area of youth, although the coordination of donors has improved and more synergies are being built (particularly regarding priority areas such as employment, skills development and VET), many thematic areas related to youth overlap between various donors' priorities. Youth issues and needs are rarely mentioned in donors' overall strategic priorities and plans and most donors state that their current approach is to "mainstream" or "integrate" youth issues across other sectors. Some good practices can be observed, such as the consultation of programming with civil society, including youth, in addition to government bodies. Sub granting as a means to support smaller civil society organizations has also been increased and has proven vital for the financial sustainability of CSOs, particularly grassroots ones.

Overall, COVID-19 has had different effects on youth, ranging across changes in employment, education, health, and youth engagement and has expanded the notion of youth vulnerability in WB6 economies as elsewhere. In terms of responses, not all WB6 Governments have provided youth-specific responses to the COVID-19 crisis. Some limited measures are noted in terms of education, with the provision of remote learning and other support for online learning and a few economic measures to support youth. It is thus important to develop tailor-made measures to support youth resilience and counter the impact of COVID-19.

The report presents recommendations for policymakers, youth organisations, and donors, drawing from the recommendations provided in each national report by focusing on the availability of data and statistics in the area of youth, evidence-based youth policy and consultation processes, the



legal and policy framework, institutions, and structures dealing with youth, funding mechanisms and inter-institutional cooperation, and a cross-sectorial approach. The report strongly recommends that WB6 Governments continue their investment in regional cooperation in the field of youth and increase efforts for strengthening mobility, recognition of qualifications, tackling brain drain, and increasing the provision of space for the participation of young people. A funding mechanism proposal is also included.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APIYE	Action Plan for Increasing Youth Employment / Kosovo*
ASCS	Agency for the Support of Civil Society / Kosovo*
AYS	Agency for Youth and Sport, North Macedonia
CRCA Albania/ANYN	Albanian National Youth Network (informal group)
CfY	Council for Youth
CoM	Council of Ministers
CYAC	Central Youth Action Council / North Macedonia
CYAP	Club on Youth Affairs and Policies
EAK	Employment Agency of the Republic of Kosovo*
EC	European Commission
GoA	Government of Albania
EU	European Union
FES	Friedrich Ebert Stiftung office for Albania
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation
ILO	International Labor Organization
KAS	Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung
KOMS	National Youth Council of Serbia
LEPY	The Law on Youth Empowerment and Participation / Kosovo*
LYAC	Local Youth Action Council / Kosovo*
LYAP	Local Youth Action Plan / Montenegro
LYC	Local Youth Councils
LoY	Law on Youth
MCA	Ministry of Civil Affairs in Bosnia and Hercegovina
MCYS	Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports / Kosovo*
MESCS	Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports / Montenegro
MESY	Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth in Albania
MoYS	Ministry of Youth and Sport, Serbia
NAPY	National Action Plan for Youth Albania
NAY	National Agency for Youth in Albania
NAYLO	National Association of Local Youth Offices
NAPOR	National Association of Youth Workers
NEET	Not in Employment, Education, Training
NYA	National Youth Assembly, North Macedonia
NPO	Non-Profit Organization
NSY	National Strategy on Youth
NYC	National Youth Council
NYCA	National Youth Congress of Albania
NYPAB	National Youth Policy Advisory Body, North Macedonia
NYRO	National Youth Representative Organization in Albania



NYSAP	National Youth Strategy and Action Plan
OSFA	Open Society Foundation for Albania
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Presence in Albania
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
RYCO	Regional Youth Cooperation Office
UNDP	The United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	The United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	The United Nations Children's Fund
VET	Vocational education and training
WB6	Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo* ² , Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia)
WFD	Westminster Foundation for Democracy
WBIF	Western Balkans Investment Framework

This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.



CHAPTER 1: YOUTH POPULATION DATA

This chapter presents statistics regarding youth age, gender, ethnicity, education, employment, and migration in the WB6. The reports for each economy use national official statistics. In other cases, to support arguments, the report uses data published by international organizations' publications, including the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), the International Labor Organization (ILO), the World Bank (WB), and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). When available, European Statistical Office (Eurostat) data are also used. Availability of youth-specific disaggregated data remains a challenge across the WB6. In addition, this report finds a lack of consistency with the age category (15-24; 15-29; 15-30) used in data collection by different institutions in all of the WB6 economies, particularly in Albania, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Kosovo* and Serbia. The report argues that this inconsistency reflects limited sensibility towards data collection and appreciation of the role of youth research and evidence-based policy development. Harmonizing categories of age groups for data collection and insuring consistency would be beneficial for youth research and evidence-based youth policy.

1.1 Age and gender

According to Eurostat, the total youth population in the WB6 economies is 3,611,109 which is 21.27% of the total population of all the six economies. Kosovo* has the highest share of youth in the total population (26.29%), followed by Albania (23.4%), Bosnia and Hercegovina (20.37%) and North Macedonia (20.32%), Montenegro (19.49%), and Serbia (16.8%). The ratio of men and women in the youth population is similar in all countries, with the male youth population being slightly larger – there is 51.16% of men and 48.84% of women in the youth population in the WB6 economies.

1.2. Ethnicity

Not all of the WB6 economies collect and publish youth specific data on ethnicity. Albania, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Kosovo* and North Macedonia do not have official data on youth ethnicity, but only offer overall divisions of ethnic groups. In Montenegro, based on data from the Census in 2011, the youth age group of 20-29 declared themselves as Montenegrins (47.3%), followed by Serbs (25.3%), Bosnians (9.2%), Albanians (4.7%), Muslims (3.5%), Croats (0.6%), and Roma (1.1%).³ In Serbia, according the last Census from 2011, out of the total number of young people, 83.3% of youth declare themselves as Serbs, 3.1% as Hungarians, 2.8% as Romani, 2.6% as Bosnians, 2.5% of those who did not state their ethnicity, and 5.7% of other ethnic groups and those who have declared ethnicity according to regional affiliation or are classified as "other" and "unknown."⁴

³ "Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in Montenegro 2011", MONSTAT, 2011, available at <https://www.monstat.org/userfiles/file/popis2011/saopstenje/saopstenje%20starost%204%2009%202011%20prevod.pdf> (Accessed October 6, 2020), p.2.

⁴ Mladi u Srbiji početkom 21. veka (Young people in Serbia at the beginning of 21st century), Statistical Office of Republic of Serbia, Milka Bubalo Živković and Tamara Lukić page 107 Available: <https://pod2.stat.gov.rs/ObjavljenePublikacije/G2015/pdf/G20154005.pdf> Accessed on 21 December 2020



1.3. Employment

According to Eurostat data for 2018⁵, youth unemployment rate in the WB6 remains twice as high as EU-27. Kosovo* has the highest youth unemployment rate (55,4%), followed by North Macedonia (45,4%) and Bosnia and Hercegovina (38,8%) and then Serbia (29,7%), Montenegro (29,4%), and Albania (28,3%).⁶ The Regional Cooperation Council Balkan Barometer 2020 notes that employment rates of recent graduates, from both secondary and tertiary education are well below the European average with a large segment of the population now effectively unemployable after spending more than five years looking for a job.⁷

1.4. Youth migration

The Balkan Barometer in 2020 records another surge in interest when it comes to emigration from the region with the number of respondents willing to consider relocation having grown across all of the six economies, indicating a regional trend.⁸ Various studies that measure public opinion and perceptions point to an increase in the rate of young people intending to emigrate for better life abroad. However, data on youth migration is lacking in all of the WB6 economies, despite reports noting that youth emigration is damaging the WB economies.⁹ For instance, 71% of respondents of age group 18-24 in RCC's Balkan Barometer 2020 stated that they would leave and work abroad.¹⁰

⁵ Each report presents their official statistics on youth unemployment. For the purpose of the comparative report, Eurostat is used because it allows for comparative frame, albeit data is available only for 2018 and refers to youth as young people 15-24 years old.

⁶ "Employment and unemployment rates 2008, 2013, 2018", available at [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Employment and unemployment rates, 2008, 2013 and 2018 \(%25\) CPC20.png](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Employment_and_unemployment_rates_2008_2013_and_2018_(%25)_CPC20.png) (Accessed January 4, 2021).

⁷ Balkan Barometer, Public Opinion, Analytical Report 2020, available at https://www.rcc.int/download/docs/2020-06-Balkan-Barometer-Public-Opinion_final.pdf/bf27f9fc10de8a02df9db2b60596f0cd.pdf (Accessed January 4, 2021). p.60.

⁸ Balkan Barometer, Public Opinion, Analytical Report 2020, available at https://www.rcc.int/download/docs/2020-06-Balkan-Barometer-Public-Opinion_final.pdf/bf27f9fc10de8a02df9db2b60596f0cd.pdf (Accessed January 4, 2021). p.70.

⁹ "Youth emigration is damaging Western Balkan economies", Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2019, available at <https://www.wfd.org/2019/10/24/youth-emigration-is-damaging-for-western-balkan-economies/> (Accessed January 4, 2021).

¹⁰ Balkan Barometer, Public Opinion, Analytical Report 2020, available at https://www.rcc.int/download/docs/2020-06-Balkan-Barometer-Public-Opinion_final.pdf/bf27f9fc10de8a02df9db2b60596f0cd.pdf (Accessed January 4, 2021).



CHAPTER 2: OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF THE NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY FRAMEWORKS IN THE WB6

This chapter analyzes the national youth policy, and its legal and institutional framework. In addition to outlining the relevant strategic documents, action plans, laws, and bylaws, a critical assessment identifies achievements, challenges, and remaining gaps.

2.1. Constitutions

Constitutional provisions on youth differ across the WB6 economies. Youth rights and their special protection are guaranteed in the Constitutions of Albania and Montenegro. Even though not explicitly, the Constitution of North Macedonia regulates some key rights of youth, whereas there is no specific reference to youth in the Serbian constitution, apart from the right to special protection at work for youth. In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the picture is more complex due to its political and administrative organization. Therefore, the jurisdiction for youth-related issues in Bosnia and Herzegovina is organized at the sub-state level of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (and ten cantons of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and municipalities of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina), the Republic of Srpska (and its cities and municipalities), and the Brčko District.

2.2 Laws on Youth

All of the WB6 economies have approved laws on youth, and their implementation is at different stages depending on the time of approval, progress, and governmental plans for the future development of youth policy.

In Albania, the Law on Youth was approved in November 2019 after a broad consultation process, and its implementation is in progress, with three out of five bylaws adopted so far. The Law on Youth in Albania enables the creation of the National Youth Council (NYC), the Local Youth Council (LYC), and the National Youth Representative Organization (NYRO) as the youth umbrella organisation and envisages a fund for youth grants from the state budget.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, despite the lack of state-level youth law, all entities have prepared and adopted their own youth laws: The Law on Youth of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, The Law on Youth Organizing of the Republic of Srpska, and The Law on Youth of Brčko District.

In Kosovo* the Law on Empowerment and Participation of Youth (LEPY) was approved in 2009, and in November 2020 a new draft-law on youth was published for consultation. It is thus expected that Kosovo* will most probably have a new law on youth in 2021, but the speed of the process is not certain yet due to political development and snap elections.

Montenegro adopted the new Law on Youth in April 2019 and the Ministry of Sports and Youth (MSY) was in charge for the overall coordination of the implementation until the new Montenegrin



government was elected in December 2020. Pursuant to the most recent Decree on public administration organization, the former Ministry of Sports and Youth has ceased to exist and was replaced by the new governmental body, i.e., Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports (MESCS), which is now also in charge of youth policy in Montenegro.

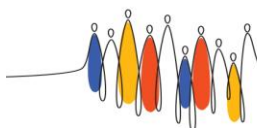
The most recent Law on Youth was approved in North Macedonia in January 2020: The Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies (LYPYP).

Whereas Serbia has a more consolidated experience in terms of legal framework on youth. The Law on Youth was formulated through a broad participatory process and adopted in July 2011. At the end of 2018, the National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS), the National Association of Youth Workers (NAPOR) and the National Association of Local Youth Offices (NALYO) reached an agreement on common and priority goals of amending the Law on Youth and the Law on Volunteering to improve the institutional framework and create the preconditions for quality systemic care for young people. In October 2020, the Serbian Premier announced that in 2021, the current implementation of the Law on Youth will be analyzed, and amendments will be prepared.

All the laws are intended to regulate different matters related to youth, to ensure empowerment of youth, to improve their social position, to support youth organization, and improve their participation in decision-making. Legislation of all the economies contain similar definitions of the youth related main terms such as youth organizations, the rights and obligations of the youth, etc. Also, aforementioned laws regulate similar youth-related matters, such as legal protection and provisions for youth rights, youth work, role of youth councils, etc. Additionally, they envision mechanisms and instruments through which young people can address issues of their interest and concerns. In the case of North Macedonia, the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies was accompanied by other policy documents such as the Quality Standards for Youth Work, the Youth Workers Portfolio, and Quality Standards for Youth Centers. However, Albania missed the opportunity to develop such key policy documents when the Law on Youth was approved in 2019, even though youth organizations and civil society actors had been arguing for their importance.

2.3 Target population of Youth Policy

Youth in youth policies in the WB6 economies is defined differently. In Montenegro, and Serbia, people of age between 15 and 30 are considered youth. In Bosnia and Herzegovina youth category is defined at sub-state level with the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Brčko District defining youth as young people in the age group 15 – 30 and Republic of Srpska in the age group 15-29. Montenegro, and Serbia, people of age between 15 and 30 are considered youth. In North Macedonia and Albania, youth is defined as people of age 15 to 29, while in Kosovo* youth are those between 15 and 24. However, the new draft law in the consultation process in Kosovo* intends to define youth as young people between 15 and 29. Comparable data analysis and research on youth would have benefited from a harmonized definition of youth.



2.4 National Strategy on Youth

Not All of the WB6 economies have a national strategy on youth in place. Albania lacks a National Strategy on Youth (NSY) as the previous one expired in 2013. However, there is an indication that the Government of Albania (GoA) will prepare a new NSY for the period 2022-2026, which would be a welcoming development given the longstanding advocacy of youth organizations for the need and the importance of developing such a strategic overarching policy document.

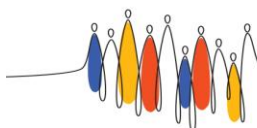
Bosnia and Herzegovina do not have a youth strategy, a national action plan on youth, or any other similar document that strategically deals with youth on the state level. The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina does not have a strategy on youth. The process has been in the status of “almost completed” since 2015. The 3rd Youth Policy of the Republic of Srpska 2016 – 2020 defines the main goals, tasks, and directions of the youth sector development. The Youth Strategy of the Brčko District is in the drafting process.

Kosovo* has recently approved a National Youth Strategy and Action Plan (NYSAP) 2019-2023, developed through a broad consultation process. Also, in Montenegro, the National Youth Strategy 2017-2021 was adopted by the Government in 2016, including the set up of a Coordination Body for its monitoring. In North Macedonia, the National Youth Strategy 2016–2025, was adopted in 2016 and the procedures for adopting a new Youth Strategy (2021-2025) have already started. After a wide consultative process, the National Youth Strategy 2015-2025 was adopted in February 2015 in Serbia. A revision of the NYS is also planned, and one of the priorities in the work will aim to improve youth entrepreneurship and simplify the business operations of young entrepreneurs.

2.5 National Action Plan on Youth

In 2015, the Government of Albania adopted the National Action Plan on Youth (NAPY) 2015-2020, which expired in 2020, but the monitoring and evaluation reports are lacking. It is expected that the government will develop a National Strategy on Youth 2022-2026, and an Action Plan will follow thereafter, but there are no official announcements regarding this. A National Action Plan on youth at the Bosnia and Herzegovina state level does not exist. In Kosovo* the Action Plan 2019-2023 is part of the current National Youth Strategy. Montenegro has a National Action Plan on Youth 2020-2021 and reports on its implementation are published regularly.

In North Macedonia, the National Youth Strategy has been followed by one action plan only, the Action Plan 2016 -2017. However, with the new strategy it is expected that Action Plans will be developed with shorter durations for implementation, defined activities, dynamics, indicators of activities, and projections of budget funds, as well as conditions and evaluation indicators for the implementation of the National Youth Strategy. In Serbia, the Action Plan for the implementation of the National Youth Strategy for the period 2018-2020 was adopted in December 2018. It is expected that the new Action Plan will be developed in the coming period.



2.6 Institutions dealing with Youth

Across the WB6 economies, youth as a policy sector is usually included with education, sports or culture at the ministerial level. In Albania, the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, with a dedicated Deputy Minister for Youth, is the public institution in charge of youth policy and the National Agency for Youth established in September 2020 is in charge of the implementation of youth policies, including youth funding.

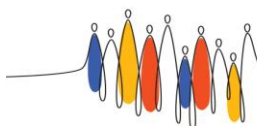
In Bosnia and Herzegovina, at the state level the public institution responsible for youth is the Ministry of Civil Affairs with its Department for Mobility and Youth, within the Education Sector. At the level of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Department of Youth in the Federal Ministry for Culture and Sport is responsible for youth policy and the overall institutional mechanisms for youth-related issues and the implementation of youth action programs. The Ministry of Family, Youth, and Sport of the Republic of Srpska is responsible for creating Youth Policy and the Action Plan. The Brčko District Department for Administrative Affairs is responsible for the implementation of Youth Law and youth policy. The Brčko District Assembly has established the Commission for Youth.

In Kosovo*, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports and its Department of Youth are responsible for youth policy and implementation. With the new government in place in December 2020, in Montenegro the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports and the Directorate for Sports and Youth is responsible for youth policy and its implementation. In North Macedonia, the key authority in youth policy is the Agency of Youth and Sports, and youth is also part of the portfolio of the Ministry of Education and Science. In Serbia, the responsible authority is the Ministry of Youth and Sports, whereas in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, the responsible authority is the Provincial Secretariat for Sports and Youth.

Across the WB6 economies, local government units also are responsible for youth policy at the local level. Also, line ministers in policy areas such as employment, education, health and social protection, justice and internal affairs (security) are also responsible for youth-related policy areas. The mechanisms for, and the extent of coordination and harmonization differs across economies. However, the limited inter-institutional coordination and cross-sectorial harmonization is a common feature of the WB6 youth policy framework.

2.7 Other sectors impacting youth

Across the WB6 economies, the progress of employment and skills development policy impacts youth to a large extent. In Albania, the National Employment and Skills Strategy 2019–2022 is in place, with a particular focus on youth qualifications and Vocational Education Training (VET), and the Government of Albania has developed various Employment Promotion Programs supported by donors. Bosnia and Herzegovina do not have a national employment strategy at the state level, and thus youth employment is targeted through other policy measures. Whereas Kosovo* has a specific policy document on youth employment, namely the Action Plan for



Increasing Youth Employment 2018-2020, in the case of Montenegro and North Macedonia, employment strategies expire in 2020 (the National Strategy for Employment and Human Resources Development 2016-2020 and the National Employment Strategy 2016-2020, respectively). Also, the National Employment Action Plan in Serbia expired in 2020. Generally, the effectiveness of such policies on youth employment and access to labor market, skills development and qualification remains challenging to assess across the WB6, due to a lack of data collected systematically via monitoring and evaluation activities.

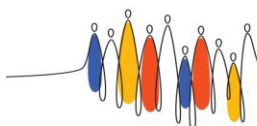
2.8 Critical Assessment

On the whole, WB6 economies have made considerable progress in terms of further establishing and consolidating their youth policy framework by adopting relevant laws, strategies, and action plans. However, a fully functional youth system that ensures effective youth empowerment, engagement and participation in decision-making has yet to be developed.

Some positive aspects and strengths in the youth policy framework are observed, such as the consultation process in the development of youth laws and strategies. Consultative processes that involved all relevant stakeholders, outcome-based approaches, and inclusive processes of approval of new laws on youth have been observed in Albania, Montenegro, and North Macedonia in the past two years. Particularly in the case of Serbia, a consolidated policy dialogue between the Government and youth organisation is noticed with a collaborative, consultative and inclusive process for the adoption of the youth law back in 2011, but also currently with the plans for a revision of the law on youth and National Youth Strategy. Also, in Kosovo* there is a relatively well-designed system of policies, laws /bylaws, strategic and action plans, structures, and mechanisms, at both central and local levels targeting youth. A positive step in North Macedonia was the approval of additional policy documents supporting the Law on Youth, such as Quality Standards for Youth Work, the Youth Workers Portfolio, and Quality Standards for Youth Centers.

On the other hand, there are various weaknesses ranging from wider political issues and a lack of willingness to prioritize youth as inter-institutional and cross-sectorial policy, to very specific types of difficulties in systematic monitoring and evaluation of youth policy development and implementation, data collection and publication. For instance, although the Law on Youth in Albania is expected to enhance the role of youth organizations in decision-making and ensure the efficiency of state institutions working on issues affecting young people, concerns have been raised about the risk that the new law places youth structures and funding under political control. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the youth policy framework is incomplete as there is no state-level law or policy document. In North Macedonia, the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies implementation has barely started also due to the pandemic crisis and to an existing apathy of institutions in prioritizing youth policy.

Apart from Serbia, which has a consolidated youth representative system and has set up mechanisms for youth participation in policy making, in other WB economies, there is still room



for improvement for ensuring effective youth participation in policy development and dialogue. For instance, in Albania, the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth has no youth organisation recognized as a policy dialogue partner in youth policy development. In Bosnia and Hercegovina there is lack of youth participation in the development of youth policy and particularly lack of coordination among different stakeholders.

Another weakness is the lack of a cross-sectorial approach to youth policy implementation. In Albania and Montenegro youth policy is a cross-sectorial policy area and various line ministries and bodies deal with youth issues, but there are limited synergies and overall coordination. Also, in Kosovo* and North Macedonia there is a strong need to further improve inter-institutional cooperation in the field of youth and enhance a wider cross-sectorial approach regarding youth as a cross cutting issue. In Serbia, cross-sectorial cooperation exists only to a small degree, as it relies heavily on the relatively modest resources of the Ministry of Youth and Sports and their proactivity, while other ministries and governmental bodies do not contribute to cross-sectorial cooperation as much. The coordination and harmonization of initiatives between central and local government needs to be enhanced across the WB6 economies.

A common weakness across the WB6 economies is that of a lack of systematic monitoring and evaluation of youth policy development and implementation. For instance, in Albania there are no regular monitoring reports, nor data published regarding the implementation of the current Action Plan. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, ministries do not develop monitoring and evaluation plans for corresponding policies that would enable a full and efficient assessment of the mid-term and final evaluation of the policy results. Also, there are a lack of mechanisms to measure the impact of funds allocated to the youth sector in Kosovo*. The main challenge of the Serbian national youth policy is the limited adequate mechanism of monitoring and evaluation of youth policy development and implementation.

Another weakness is the limited institutional and human capacities in authorities responsible for implementation of youth policy. For example, in Serbia five employees of the youth sector in the ministry had to evaluate the implementation of 330 projects between 2015 and 2017, on top of coordinating mechanisms at the national level for ensuring cross-sectorial cooperation and other assignments. Also, in Albania the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth has limited staff dedicated to youth and a disconnection between central and local government in youth policy implementation is also noticed because MESY has limited human resources to monitor and follow up. In Montenegro, there is still a low capacity the local government.

Another weakness that is common to WB6 economies in the youth policy framework is that of politicization, which is an issue raised by almost all stakeholders interviewed, but which is quite difficult to back up with evidence and resources. In Albania, the youth networks and civil society organisations have raised the issue of politicization which might become prominent once the new law is fully implemented and the new structures appointed by political authorities such as the



minister or mayors start operating. In Bosnia and Hercegovina national/state level youth policy coordination does not function because of the political fragmentation in the economy. In Kosovo*, there are some indications of the politicization of Youth Councils at the local level. In Serbia, there are indications as well for the politicization of the youth sector is noticed mostly in relation to the management and administration within Local Youth Offices. In Montenegro, the employment of young people in the recently established local Youth Centers is considered to be allegedly based on political affiliations rather than merit. Such indications require further investigation to identify the dynamics, causes, and potential countering mechanisms to ensure youth structures' full independence from political influence.



CHAPTER 3: FUNDING FRAMEWORK

The chapter analyzes youth policy funding and presents some key interventions and WB6 governments programs in the youth area, including a critical assessment of the above.

3.1. Youth Policy Funding

In all the WB6 economies, youth policy is funded from various sources: state budget, provincial/entity or budgets of local authorities, international organizations, and donor funded projects. Apart from Kosovo*, there are no unique budget lines in state budgets dedicated to youth policy in the other WB6 economies. Therefore, by reviewing state budgets, the total funds allocated to youth policy cannot be estimated.

Albania does not have a dedicated budget program for youth. Although youth is a cross cutting issue, the competencies for the policy making as well as the budget program dedicated to youth is under MESY. Given that youth is one part of the overall portfolio, and considering that its primary emphasis is on education, there is no data regarding a specific budget for youth.¹¹ The MESY publishes quarterly monitoring reports for its budgetary spending, but it provides information for a ‘sports and youth development’ budget with no specification on youth. Other line ministries are responsible for youth-related policy implementations such as employment, VET, culture, and others and they too have budget programs for youth, but it is difficult and complex to analyze specific and detailed data on youth budgets.¹² Youth organizations have lobbied the Government of Albania for some time now to allocate a dedicated state budgetary line for youth.¹³ However, finance experts note because youth is a cross-cutting issue, there cannot be a specific budget for youth, unless there is only one institution in charge of policy making and implementation of issues related to youth. In addition, a specific budget for youth is not possible because the Government of Albania uses Program and Performance-based Budgeting.¹⁴

In Bosnia and Hercegovina, the funding of the youth policy in different parts of the economy is planned at the entity or district levels and there is no dedicated budget programme/line for youth. Financing at the entity level also takes place through transfers/grants of the ministries in charge of youth questions or youth-related issues. The Ministry of Civil Affairs Bosnia and Hercegovina has allocated funds from the state budget, but it only supports projects strictly related to its jurisdiction. The budget decision available for 2020 foresees an allocation of EUR 5,927,406.78 for the Ministry of Civil Affairs Bosnia and Hercegovina. The only state-level funding related to youth is the one allocated for the Commission for Coordination of Youth Issues of Bosnia and Hercegovina. Budgets for 2021 are still not available.

¹¹ The Ministry of Education Sports and Youth publishes regular information about budget spending, but the data is very difficult to be accessed (all data is presented on the website as scanned pdf files) and there is no specific budget line for youth.

¹² Youth in Albania, 2019, available at http://partnersalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Youth_Political_Participation_Albania_2018.pdf (Accessed October 5, 2020).

¹³ Confirmed during the interviews with stakeholders from youth in Albania conducted for the purposes of this report, October – December 2020.

¹⁴ Based on consultation with OSFA expert on budget and financing, Tirana, January 2021.



In Kosovo*, within the 2020 Law on Budget, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports as a budget entity has a separate budget line dedicated for youth. This program code is further divided into three sub-program budget codes: (a) Youth Protection and Integration, (b) Youth Development and Support, and (c) Development of Youth Integration Policies. For budget year 2020, a total of EUR 2,128,132 has been allocated to the program code for youth.¹⁵ Apart from the MCYS budget, there are two other sources from the Kosovo* state budget that are allocated to fund activities in the youth sector. These are additional funds disbursed through the Employment Agency for the implementation of the National Youth Program and vocation training services. The 2020 budget for employment services in total is EUR 7,462,920, while for vocation training services it is EUR 816,955¹⁶.

In Montenegro, the implementation of the youth policy is funded from the state budget and municipal budgets. The main implementer of Law on Youth and youth policy is the newly established Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports. Apart from Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, there are also other ministries and public institutions that indirectly target youth, even though youth issues and youth policy are not their core focus, meaning that they (indirectly) offer funding for youth-related activities and/or projects/programs. At the state level, the Budget of Montenegro provides funds for: the implementation of the youth specific policy – the Program for the construction, reconstruction, adaptation and equipping of youth services allocated by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports; the functioning of the youth services provided by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports; as well as funds for the activities implemented by the ministry in accordance with the Strategy and the Action Plan.

Youth Policy in North Macedonia does not have a specific budget line in the Governmental budget for 2019 and 2020. The budget for youth in the age group 15 to 29 for 2019 was approximately EUR 402,081.00,¹⁷ or 4% from a total budget of the Agency for Youth and Sports.¹⁸ In addition to the AYS budget for the department for youth, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy allocates financial resources to young people according to the Action Plan for Youth Employment 2016-2020. Also, the amount for implementing the Youth Guarantee as one of the major governmental programs for 2019 was EUR 120,325.20.

In Serbia, funds for youth policy are allocated from the budget of Serbia (through Ministry of Youth and Sports and line ministries) and provincial and local level governments. When referring to the Budget of Serbia, in 2020 the percentage of the budget allocated for youth through the

¹⁵ The budget for youth in 2020 compared to 2019 is 7,3 % less.

¹⁶ Law No.07/L-001 on the Budget Appropriations of the Republic of Kosovo for Year 2020, Available at: <https://mf.rks-gov.net/desk/inc/media/EA0446D5-97E0-4540-A9CB-73521FD245A9.pdf> (Accessed December 5, 2020).

¹⁷ Annual financial plan for youth- 2019, Agency for Youth and Sport, available at: <http://ams.gov.mk/documents/GFISM2019.pdf>, (Accessed October 1, 2020).

¹⁸ Budget of the Republic of North Macedonia 2020, Ministry of Finance, available at: <https://finance.gov.mk/mk/node/4105>, (Accessed October 1, 2020).



Ministry of Youth and Sports is 0.09% of the annual state budget¹⁹. The total funds in the budget of the Autonomy Po Vojvodina (APV) for youth policy in 2020 amount to EUR 227,884.10 which is 6% of the total funds allocated for the Provincial Secretariat for Sports and Youth.

3.1.1 Funding the National Youth Strategies and the Action Plans

Not All of the WB6 economies have a dedicated budget for the implementation of the National Youth Strategy and the Action Plan in the area of youth, which constitutes a major weakness in the youth policy funding framework. For instance, in Albania, due to the lack of monitoring reports on National Action Plan on Youth 2016-2020, there is no data regarding the National Action Plan on Youth budget spent on youth programs and activities. Reports note a slight increase in the state budget regarding youth, but that is mainly because of the increase in education and social protection budget lines. Funding every year for the National Youth Service²⁰ and the establishment of Regional Youth Centers, as well as the implementation of youth activities provided in the National Action Plan on Youth, is in the amount of EUR 607,888 (75 million ALL),²¹ but there is no data available regarding actual expenditures.

In Kosovo*, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports budget for 2020 does not show a separate budget line or code for the implementation of the National Youth Strategy and Action Plan 2019-2023. Rather, the funds are disbursed through transfers and subsidies for activities of the Department of Youth within the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports. In Montenegro, the budget for the implementation of the strategy is provided within the overall budget of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport/former Ministry of Sports and Youth for each year. The budget for the Strategy (2017-2021) implementation was introduced by the Law on Budget (2017, 2018 and 2019) and announced in the Official Gazette of Montenegro, as well as on the website of the former Ministry of Sports and Youth.²² The total budget funds used for the implementation of the strategy of the AP for 2019 was over a million Euro (regular budgetary funds). Some of the activities were completed through donations of international organizations (OSCE, UNDP, UNICEF).²³

¹⁹ Alternative Report on the Position and Needs of Youth in the Republic of Serbia – 2019, National Youth Council (KOMS). Available at: <http://koms.rs/istrzivanje/alternativni-izvestaj-o-polozaju-potrebama-mladih-u-republici-srbiji-2019/>, p37

²⁰ With the new Law on Youth this has been dissolved and the National Agency for Youth (NAY) has been established in September 2020, which is in fact a restructuring of former National Youth Service.

²¹ Monitoring Report for January – April 2020, MESY, available at https://arsimi.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Raport-i-Monit-4-M-Janar-30-Prill-2020-FN_Final-30.5.2020.pdf (Accessed October 5, 2020).

²² Budgets of the Ministry of Sports and Youth, available at: http://www.ms.gov.me/ministarstvo/Budzet_Ministarstva_sporta, (Accessed on November 28,2020)

²³ “Annual report of the Action Plan“, MSY, 2020, available at [http://www.ms.gov.me/ResourceManager/FileDownload.aspx?rid=402593&rType=2&file=Izvje%C5%A1taj%20o%20realizaciji%20Akcionog%20plana%20Strategije%20za%20mlade%20za%202019.final%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.ms.gov.me/ResourceManager/FileDownload.aspx?rid=402593&rType=2&file=Izvje%C5%A1taj%20o%20realizaciji%20Akcionog%20plana%20Strategije%20za%20mlade%20za%202019.final%20(2).pdf) (Accessed on November 28,2020)



3.1.2 Funding youth organizations projects, initiatives and activities

The most common way of supporting youth is through open calls, transfers and subsidies for youth organizations. Due to the lack of a comprehensive system of data gathering and funds management, total funds dedicated to or spent on youth and/or youth related issues is impossible to estimate either on an annual basis, or for longer periods of time. In all the WB6 economies, funds (state and local budget) for youth policy and youth issues are disbursed through public calls, transfers, or subsidies (of ministries in charge of youth) targeting Nongovernmental organizations.

In Albania, currently there are no funds from the state budget directly for youth organizations. The new Law on Youth envisages that youth organizations, other non for profits organisations and informal groups and networks working in youth-related areas can benefit from central government funding through a dedicated youth fund.²⁴ A specific Council of Ministers' decision has been approved for this purpose, defining the criteria and procedures for the selection of youth organizations, and specifying that the National Agency for Youth will be responsible for the management of youth grant funds. The application process will be done online through the e-government portal (e-Albania) or through the webpage of National Agency for Youth. The call is expected to be open in the first quarter of 2021.

Currently in Bosnia and Hercegovina, there are no funds available from the state budget directly for youth organizations at the state level, although some initiatives are in progress as outlined in the Mid-term plan of the Ministry of Civil Affairs 2019-2021.²⁵ In Montenegro, from 2017 to 2020, former Ministry of Sports and Youth and its Directorate for Youth implemented activities planned by the Strategy, but also (in line with the previous Law on Youth) published a once a year a call for proposals for non governmental organizations' projects that were in line with the Strategy and Action plan for the current year. This has contributed to a larger extent to the status of young people, involving them into the implementation of youth policy. Through the public calls for financing projects of Nongovernmental organizations, the Ministry allocated almost EUR 800,000.00 for around 150 projects of Nongovernmental organizations aimed at the implementation of youth policy measures and activities within the six key priorities defined by the Strategy 2017-2021. In 2020, the amount of EUR 94,545.36 was allocated for the projects of 12 nongovernmental organizations implementing youth policy in line with the Strategy and the Action Plan of the implementation of the Strategy for 2019.

²⁴ Law on Youth No. 75, Date. 4.11.2019, available at <https://www.parlament.al/Files/ProjektLigje/20191107152923ligj%20nr.%2075,%20dt.%204.11.2019.pdf> (Accessed September 25, 2020). Article 12.

²⁵ "Decision on adoption of the Medium-Term Work Plan of the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 2019-2021", 2019, Ministry of Civil Affairs Bosnia and Herzegovina, available at: http://www.mcp.gov.ba/attachments/bs_Migrirani_dokumenti/Va%C5%BEni_dokumenti/Va%C5%BEno-Srednjoro%C4%8Dni_plan/Srednjoro%C4%8Dni_2019-21.pdf (Accessed January 10, 2021).



In North Macedonia, in the 2020 call for applications of the Agency for Youth and Sports, 13 projects were approved, and the total budget approved was EUR 54,553.²⁶ Funds allocated for youth organizations are distributed through open calls for nongovernmental organizations and civil society organizations. In Serbia, based on the Law on Youth and the Rulebook on Financing and Co-financing of Programs and Projects of Public Interest in the Youth Sector, the Ministry of Youth and Sports finances programs and projects of public interest in the youth sector directed to achieving goals of the National Youth Strategy. Since the adoption of the first National Youth Strategy (2008-2014), regular annual calls have been used as an instrument for its implementation. Since its establishment in 2007 until June of 2019, through donations to non-governmental organizations, the Ministry of Youth and Sports has allocated more than EUR 16,140,000.00 for the realization of 1,427 projects.²⁷

3.2. Key Youth Programs/Instruments

In all the WB6 economies, the most acclaimed national youth programs are aimed at raising employability and entrepreneurship of youth, at rewarding excellence among youth, and at supporting youth organizations in their functioning and implementation of activities related to youth strategies.

In Albania, another state budget that contributes to supporting youth initiatives is provided by the Agency for the Support of Civil Society to support non for-profit organizations' projects. In 2019, a total of EUR 173,451 was explicitly allocated in support of youth projects and initiatives such as rural youth integration, raising awareness of youth regarding the justice system, and youth self-employment.²⁸ Yet, in 2020 the Agency for the Support of Civil Society suspended the application deadline of the Open Calls for Proposals due to COVID-19 and no specific funding has been made available for youth organizations.²⁹ In terms of education, one of the key programs of the Government of Albania is the Excellence Fund, which is a grant awarded to excellent students to pursue their studies in the top 15 universities in the world. This grant is available for bachelor, master, and PhD students with a total fund of approximately EUR 1 million. In terms of employment, the Government of Albania has been implementing the National Programme on Work placement and Internships.

In Bosnia and Hercegovina, key youth programs on all levels focus on supporting key areas of employment, with a specific focus on young entrepreneurs, targeting unemployment through

²⁶ Decision of the AYS for distribution of the youth projects, AYS, 2020, available at: <http://ams.gov.mk/component/content/article/20-odnosi-so-javnosta/soopstenija/1480-rezultati-javen-povik>, (Accessed 12 October, 2020).

²⁷ Ministry of Youth and Sports Information Bulletin, Belgrade. Available at: <https://www.mos.gov.rs/informator-o-radu>, (Accessed on October 10, 2020). p. 21.

²⁸ Monitoring Report for January – April 2020, MESY, available at https://arsimi.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Raporti-i-Monit-4-M-Janar-30-Prill-2020-FN_Final-30.5.2020.pdf (Accessed October 5, 2020).

²⁹ “The role of civil society and media in crises management in Albania”, WFD, 2020, available at https://www.wfd.org/2020/12/22/the-role-of-civil-society-and-media-in-crises-management-in-albania/?fbclid=IwAR0hinRBUDyy_YdPhqbSBbTazzR02n0yERI9YV7fdt4f-5uUjCrVKOIPP5I (Accessed January 5, 2021).



additional education opportunities in forms of internships, career guidance and counseling, as well as support to businesses of marginalized groups, especially young women. Most of the key youth programs are funded through donor support and seem to be equally dispersed, with far reaching activities across the entire territory of Bosnia and Hercegovina.

In Kosovo* a particular program affecting youth is the Active Labor Market Measures (ALMM) Program implemented by the Employment Agency of Kosovo*. The total annual budget of the Active Labor Market Measures is EUR 6,600,000, of which 40% of funds are disbursed to youth employment initiatives, making this program one of the key sources for funding of youth policies in Kosovo*. The Active Labor Market Measures serves to implement the Action Plan for Increasing Youth Employment in Kosovo*.

In Montenegro, other funding instruments for youth include public calls for supporting researchers and young scientists, Youth Cultural project by Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sport, fund for students and teachers by Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sport, co-financing of the EU funded projects by Ministry of Public Administration, Digital Society and Media, Program for improving the competitiveness of the economy of Ministry of Economic Development and the Program of Support to Self-Employment of the Employment agency of Montenegro

Of particular interest for the development of youth areas is the case of North Macedonia, the only WB economy, that implements a Youth Guarantee scheme, which also includes the Youth Card. The Youth Guarantee is a set of Government measures aimed at guaranteeing the quality services offered to youth in employment, continuous education, retraining, practice, and training. The amount spent in implementing the Youth Guarantee for 2019 was close to EUR 120,325.20. The European Youth Card is a project that is a part of the government program for 2019 and 2020 and part of the work program of the AYS in 2019, with a budget of EUR 65,040.65.

In Serbia, the Youth Incentive Program My First Salary from 2020 gives a chance to young people who have graduated from university or high school. In order to encourage youth employment, the Government of Serbia passed a decree to open this program. The decree on Youth Incentive My First Salary came into force on August 15th, 2020. Young people who want to participate in the program should be younger than 30, have a university or high school degree, and no work experience. Also, all graduates should be registered with the National Employment Service.

3.3. Critical assessments

In all the WB6 economies, youth policy is funded from various sources: the state budget both at the central and the local level, international organizations and donations, sponsorships and other legal forms of funding. Considering that youth is a crosscutting issue, it can in principle benefit from funding from various policies and budget programs, including health and social protection, education, employment, VET, entrepreneurship, innovation, culture, arts, and sports in all of the WB6 economies. This report argues that continuing direct support to youth is essential as well as

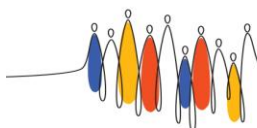


intensifying such support particularly in emerging priority areas. In addition, it is necessary to provide institutional funding for youth sector (organisations, associations, groups, networks and other forms) to ensure sustainability of operations through supporting with financial means and skills development. Moreover, the model of Youth Guarantee, still nascent in North Macedonia, should also be implemented across WB6. Another funding mechanism may be the support for Structured Youth Policy Dialogue by considering achievements and challenges in the case of Serbia, that is the only one in WB6 that has made progress in terms of Structured Youth Policy Dialogue. Supporting youth engagement in the knowledge square or Quadruple Helix by funding their cooperation with academia, research, civil society, media, policy and business sector.

The reports for each WB6 economy point out some positive developments in terms of youth funding. All of Governments of the WB6 economies contribute financially to important programs and regional initiatives including the Erasmus+ Programme and the Regional Youth Cooperation Office.

For instance, Kosovo* has a specific budget code pertaining to the youth sector, and while Kosovo* faces budget constraints, the budget on youth has experienced a yearly increase. In Serbia, the main strength of the funding framework for the NYS is that the budget for its implementation is regulated by the Law on Youth, and a major portion of its funds are allocated annually through the budget of Serbia. This ensures continuity in the achievement of the overall strategic goals of the NYS. Moreover, as an integral part of the AP, the budget provides a clear, concise and coherent financial framework for achieving the goals of the National Youth Strategy. In the case of Montenegro, in addition to the increase of youth funding, another positive development has been noticed since 2016 regarding the impact of funding on youth with an increase in the number of youth-targeted projects, an increase in territorial coverage of projects, and high satisfaction of youth organizations. In North Macedonia, budget planning based on youth needs is a clear strength in the policy funding framework, and the implementation of the Youth Guarantee is another positive development.

A positive case is the Government of North Macedonia's response measures to the COVID-19 pandemic, which included young people who would be financially supported through the following programs: Young farmers, who will receive EUR 20,000 to be motivated to engage in agriculture and to produce a final product that is attractive to the European market; a youth allowance was introduced, encouraging the employment of young people in production activities after graduating from high school. The youth allowance was in the amount of EUR 48 per month and is paid to young people up to 23 years of age who have at least completed their secondary education. The coverage through this measure is 4,000 young people. The Government also presented the project on personal income tax refunds for all new employees under 30, whereby, in the first two years, the funds will be returned directly to the employee's account.



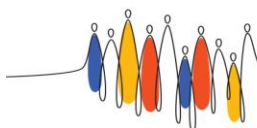
Despite the progress, when it comes to the youth sector, the budgeting system's main issue lies in the lack of sufficient budget allocations for youth policy development. The time gap in the planning and approval of the budgets of ministries, local authorities, institutions, on the one hand, and the budgets for national youth strategies and action plans on the other, is a challenge for the implementation of youth policy in Bosnia and Hercegovina and in Serbia.

Inefficient disbursement of funds is usually caused by small amounts, rigid criteria, and uncoherent procedures for the allocation to youth initiatives. In more precise terms small 'portions' of state funds are reaching individual youth organizations in all the WB6 economies and the funds are not sufficient for achieving a sustainable impact. The additional challenge related to disbursed amounts is noted in Montenegro, where a shift in the focus of youth law (from direct funding to Nongovernmental organizations to funding local self-government units and institutions for construction, reconstruction, adaptation, and equipping Youth Centers and clubs) decreased amounts disbursed to youth nongovernmental organizations by 5 times. Criteria for granting funds to youth organizations sometimes hampers innovative solutions. For example, in Montenegro, no funds are granted for initiatives that are not explicitly recognized in the youth strategy or action plan.

Frequent legislative changes, which affect the disbursement of funds, are hindering the effectiveness and efficiency of youth policy implementation. For example, in Bosnia and Hercegovina adoption of policies and respective budgets is frequently postponed which affect the realization of projects/initiatives. In Montenegro, the newly established Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports has joined four ministries of the former Government of Montenegro: The Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Sports and Youth, the Ministry of Culture, and the Ministry of Science. This raises the concern on how the youth policy will be funded in the future and by what amount, as well as which programs and instruments will remain and still be active.

Political, family, and other biases at all levels of decision-making are accentuated in Kosovo* and the politicization of the youth sector in Serbia is also considerable. From a critical assessment in other national reports, it might be presumed that this finding is also valid for the other WB economies, but the question is to what extent it reflects the critical attitude of youth organizations from the economies mentioned.

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of youth policy implementation is one of the biggest challenges in all the WB6 economies as it relates directly to transparency and accountability. Economies lack M&E frameworks or mechanisms at a national and local level. For example, in Bosnia and Hercegovina, the coordination of efforts at the entity level almost is almost non-existent, as there is no state-level youth law that could prescribe it. There is also a significant lack of capacity (funds, quantity, and expertise of staff) both at a local and national level for M&E to be conducted adequately. Local and national reports on youth policy implementation often lack relevant information, e.g., expenditure, activities implemented, results achieved, target groups. Youth



organizations often find reporting and other administrative requests (necessary for M&E) too complex in the context of the small-scale projects they are implementing.

Another weakness refers to data collection and publication of youth budgets. For instance, in North Macedonia, according to the National Youth Strategy, different ministries or institutions are in charge of implementation of various measures. Thus, the budget for the efforts falls under the budget of those specific institutions/ministries. However, the budgets of these institutions are not disaggregated by youth measures. In Montenegro, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports is in charge of implementing youth policy focusing on increasing youth mobility and participation in different fields of public interest defined by Law on Youth and by the Strategy. Other ministries are in charge of implementing youth related programs and projects in line with the Strategy, but there is no available information about the financial aspects since they do not report to the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports on this.

Unavailability of data is another concern such as the case in Montenegro where municipalities do not provide annual information about allocations for local youth policy at the municipal level. Across All of the WB6 economies, despite the availability of data on budget allocations from ministries, information on specific programs/instruments for young people remains very limited as youth are integrated into the support given to all target groups.

The financial overlapping is frequent due to the limited coordination between public institutions responsible for youth and youth related areas, as well as between central and local public authorities.



CHAPTER 4: YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN POLICY MAKING AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCILS IN THE WB6

This chapter analyzes the existing mechanisms of youth participation, both at the central and local levels, and presents the primary national youth organizations and networks operating across the WB6 economies.

4.1 Youth engagement and participation in policy: Key mechanisms and processes

The WB6 economies have in place a youth legal and policy framework that states, in principle, the importance of youth engagement and participation in decision making; Albania, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia have national laws on youth in place, whereas Bosnia and Hercegovina do not have a state level law, but each sub-state has adopted a law on youth. Youth can organize themselves across the WB6 economies through informal groups, networks, associations, non for-profit organizations, nongovernmental organizations, youth councils, students' councils, and other associations or organizations in the areas of culture, art, sports, and others.³⁰ However, actual youth participation in decision making varies from one economy to another as is outlined in the following section.

4.1.1 Participation at central level

In Albania, youth participation at the central level will be done through two new structures envisioned in the new Law on Youth: The National Youth Council (NYC) as an advisory body, which functions under the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, and the National Youth Representative Organization (NYRO). None of these structures is established yet: The Council of Ministers Decision on the National Youth Council was approved in December of 2020, but the one on National Youth Representative Organization is still in process. Therefore, the participation of youth at the central level so far has been done by other youth networks and organizations with the two most prominent ones being: The National Youth Congress of Albania (NYCA) and the Albanian National Youth Network (ANYN).

In Bosnia and Hercegovina, three entity-based youth laws ensure youth participation in drafting youth policy through official umbrella youth organizations, based on voluntary participation, and their representatives in advisory council for youth, working groups and assembly commissions. The advisory council for youth exists in both entities (the Republic of Srpska and Federation of Bosnia and Hercegovina). Additionally, the Committee on Children, Youth and Sports has also been established in the Assembly of the Republic of Srpska, as well as a Commission for Youth in the Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Hercegovina. At the state level, there is in place a Commission for the Coordination of Youth Issues in Bosnia and Hercegovina (consisting of

³⁰ WB6 legal framework distinguishes youth organizations from organizations for youth: the first are established by youth for youth, while the latter are non for-profit organizations or nongovernmental organizations that work with youth in addition to other areas of work.



members from youth councils of Federation Bosnia and Hercegovina and Republic of Srpska). Through this, youth participation in the state-level body should be ensured. Unfortunately, this sole state-level body whose work is dedicated to youth related issues, is not even functioning today. National Youth Councils have been established in the Republic of Srpska in 2004 and in the Federation of Bosnia and Hercegovina in 2015 (by 6 cantonal youth councils). Drafting youth policies in the Republic of Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Hercegovina was initiated and supported by the Youth Communicative centre, Banja Luka, and the Institute for Youth Development KULT. Both National Youth Councils, responsible decision-making bodies, and Nongovernmental organizations were involved in the process.

In Kosovo*, the Youth Department of the Ministry Culture, Sports and Youth is the key body responsible in the designing of policies, in the establishment of clubs and youth organizations, in allocating budget and funds for youth activities in the form of grants, in coordinating efforts of stakeholders and donors, and in ensuring procedures that will facilitate youth participation in Kosovo*. The Central Youth Action Council (CYAC) is the primary body to represent youth organizations at the central level and internationally. The COVID-19 pandemic and numerous internal problems including the non-election of the new chairman and board, a lack of funds and a lack of working space, together with other internal matters within board members of the Central Youth Action Council, made Central Youth Action Council engagement very limited during 2020. The CYAC has not participated in the drafting of the budget for youth or in the working group to amend the Law on Empowerment and Participation of Youth.³¹ In addition, the Assembly of Kosovo* Youth is an entity that operates at both central and local levels and actively represents youth in respective levels and cross-sectorial working groups.³²

In Montenegro, participation of youth is primarily facilitated by youth nongovernmental organizations, while there is not yet a Council for Youth (CfY). The establishment of the Council for Youth is envisaged by the Law on Youth, but due to the Parliamentary elections and the constitution of a new Government, the establishment of a Council for Youth is still on hold. The Association of the Youth Network of Montenegro was officially set up the Founding Assembly as youth representative took place in September 2020. In November 2020, a Certificate of Representation had been issued by the former Ministry of Sports and Youth, recognizing it as a representative association of NGOs. It has 35 member organizations.

In North Macedonia, the new law foresees the creation of a National Youth Assembly (NYA), which is a body that elects youth representatives in the advisory body, creates priorities and policies for youth advocacy, and coordinates their engagement. However, a National Youth Assembly has not been established yet. In addition, another body is foreseen in the law, that of a National Youth Policy Advisory Body (NYPAB), consisting of a body for cooperation between

³¹ Interview, CYAC Representative, Pristina October 27, 2020.

³² The Assembly of Kosovo* Youth is an independent nongovernmental organization.



youth representatives and representatives of the state administration bodies. It has an advisory and supervisory role in the implementation of youth policies and youth activities. A good practice established in North Macedonia following the trend of the European Parliament and other countries' good practices, the Assembly of North Macedonia, in September 2017 established the Club for Youth Issues and Policies (CYIP)³³. It is an informal body made up of members from all parliamentary parties with the aim of supporting young people's efforts in achieving their goals as it cooperates with youth organizations, informal youth groups, and party youth.

Serbia in particular has a good track record of youth participation in policy making, including Youth Structured Dialogue. As such, the National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS) formally launched an initiative to establish a National Working Group for Structured Dialogue within the Youth Council of the Government of the Republic of Serbia in 2019. The first Youth Dialogue with crucial decision makers was held in December of 2019. In August 2020, the first activities for the realization of the second Dialogue with the Prime Minister were launched. A public call was announced for the participants in the event, and the Government in the technical mandate and the President of the Republic were notified about the intention of the Umbrella Organization of Serbian Youth.³⁴ In 2020, the National Youth Council of Serbia launched an initiative to establish a dialogue between young people and the line minister, which was accepted, and the first dialogue with Minister Vanja Uvodičić was held in December 2020.³⁵ Additionally, other civil society organizations organized a dialogue with other ministers in Government, e.g., the Youth Department of the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights organized a dialogue with the Minister for Human and Minority Rights and Dialogue, Gordana Čomić.³⁶

In addition, in October, the National Youth Council of Serbia launched the initiative: A New Vision for Youth Policy (New Deal) to bring about critical changes in youth policy in the coming period. In October 2019, a draft was made of recommendations, which are the starting point for further consultations and agreements. Recommendations for the implementation of the National Youth Strategy, recommendations related to the legislative framework, recommendations associated with the cooperation of youth policy actors, and recommendations related to developing positive values among young people have been formulated. In 2020 there was no additional information regarding the process of the New Deal.

4.1.2 Participation at the local level

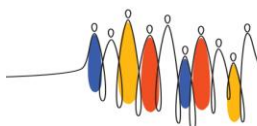
In Albania, good practices in youth participation at the local level can be observed in the case of the Tirana Municipality, which in cooperation with the Youth Leadership of Tirana, established a

³³ Statement from the interview with Mr. Sefer Selimi – Youth and community center Gostivar, October 2020.

³⁴ More information regarding Second Dialog with Prime Minister available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JT0js6Hh2YI> (Accessed on 6 January 2021).

³⁵ More on dialogue between young people and the line minister available at <https://koms.rs/2020/12/15/realizovan-dijalog-mladih-sa-ministrom-omladine-i-sporta/> (Accessed January 6, 2021).

³⁶ More on dialogue with other ministers in Government available at <http://www.bgcentar.org.rs/na-amplitudi-dijaloga-mladipitaju-razgovor-sa-ministarkom-gordanom-comic/> (Accessed January 6, 2021).



Youth Advisory Board at the Tirana Municipal Council in 2014. Tirana was awarded the title of the European Youth Capital 2022 by the European Youth Forum.³⁷ The application process followed an inclusive and participatory approach, working closely with the Youth Advisory Board and youth organizations.³⁸

In Kosovo*, municipalities are obliged to develop the local youth action plans for participation of youth in decision making and 38 Local Youth Action Councils (LYAC) in all Municipalities have been established, as well as Youth Centers (YC) that operate at the local level.³⁹ To date, even though Local Youth Action Councils are formally established in all municipalities, their role and activity in engaging at the municipal level to perform their duties is limited.⁴⁰ One of the reasons is the challenge that Municipalities face to support youth organizations and finance basic functions.⁴¹

In Montenegro, the Local Council for Youth are established in four municipalities, but have not been established as a common practice yet. In this regard, it is very important to emphasize that structures of the Local Council for Youth and Local Youth Councils are completely different. While members of the Local Youth Councils have only young people, a local Council for Youth shall consist of representatives of municipality bodies in charge of youth policy, nongovernmental organizations that implement youth policy, and at least one member of the Local Council for Youth shall be a representative of nongovernmental organizations that implement youth policy or a young person.

In North Macedonia, all municipalities have formed local youth councils and have adopted local youth strategies but in practice, most of them are not functional. Regarding young people's participation at the local level, it is important to highlight the fact that under the new law, the establishment of local youth assemblies is foreseen as well. So far, only a few municipalities have expressed support for youth activities, and most of them simply support youth information centers.

In Serbia, the existence of municipal/town bodies and authorities implies functional structures that unite local youth care, guarantee the implementation of the Local Action Plans (LAP),⁴² and advocate for the most critical issues and problems of young people in decision-making bodies. Therefore, during the implementation of Local Action Plans, it is necessary that the following bodies function: The Local Youth Office (LYO) and the Local Youth Council (LYC) that is in

³⁷ "Winner of the European Youth Capital for 2022", available at <https://www.youthforum.org/congratulations-tirana-winner-european-youth-capital-2022> (Accessed October 4, 2020).

³⁸ Confirmed during interviews with stakeholders in the youth, conducted for the purposes of this report, October – December 2020 in Albania.

³⁹ According to Article 6, paragraph 1.8 of the LEPY, the MCYS is responsible to: "set-up structures and procedures that will guarantee participation of youth and to ensure relations of partnership between youth organizations and Government"

⁴⁰ This conclusion is reached by the 2019 report. From desk research and interviews most of LYACs are passive. Almost no LYAC has website, some are active in social media.

⁴¹ Interview, Civil Society Representative, Pristina, December 4, 2020

⁴² There are 81 LAPs adopted.



charge of youth. Out of 72 established Local Youth Councils, 58 remained active in 2020. There are 137 Local Youth Offices, and 97 of them are active. In 2020, due to Covid-19, no new Local Youth Office has been opened.

4.2 Evidence-based youth policy

Across the WB6 economies, some improvements can be noticed regarding evidence-based youth policy with the improvements in the general legal framework that enables citizen and youth participation in decision making. For instance, in Albania, the drafting of the Law on youth was done with a broad consultation process with various youth stakeholders, organizations and networks. Other youth-related policy areas are increasingly being informed by evidence and research such as employment, VET, innovation, and digital skills. In Bosnia and Hercegovina, lower levels of governance conduct their research on youth by using the consultancy support of Nongovernmental organizations to compensate for limited institutional capacities in conducting and using research for decision making. Another good example in Bosnia and Hercegovina is the MoU between the Ministry of Civil Affairs and the Institute for Youth Development KULT on implementing a new comprehensive national research study on the youth population in Bosnia and Hercegovina.

The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports in Kosovo* has a limited record of using evidence for policymaking. For instance, the recent National Youth Strategy and Action Plan 2019-2023 was based on a number of sources of information used for its preparation, such as a review of documents developed by relevant ministries, local governments, youth organizations and development agencies working in the field of youth. Moreover, broad consultation has taken place with the main stakeholders including youth offices, representatives of youth organizations, and donors active in the field of youth. Additionally, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports has commissioned a particular study on youth (Youth Study Kosovo* 2018-2019) as another source of information for the strategic planning process.

Montenegro also presents some good practices in terms of evidence-based youth policy. For instance, the Strategy was created based on the evaluation of the implementation of the previous strategy, the analysis of youth needs, and the position of youth in different areas of youth policy. In addition, Local Youth Action Plans in each municipality have been developed based on research on the position and needs of youth implemented by the local self-governments and members of working groups, often in cooperation with Nongovernmental organizations active in that field.

In North Macedonia, the Government and the governmental institutions' readiness to initiate processes based on the needs of the youth organizations and the young people in the economy is one of the strengths of the youth participation process in the economy. For the first time, the state dedicated one governmental discussion session to youth policies on which youth organizations had the opportunity to present their most important issues.



However, WB6 economies are still in the process of further consolidating their knowledge systems and use of evidence and research in policy making. One of the limits is that the political agenda seems to be retained despite the evidence presented to policymakers. For instance, in the Republic of Srpska, interviewees explained that comprehensive research had been done before outlining the Youth Policy of RS for the period 2016-2020. Still, the adopted Youth Policy does not reflect the results of this research. Instead, the document is based on different international and desk research data. In addition, institutionalized mechanisms for the cooperation of decision-makers and the research community in youth are very limited such as in North Macedonia, and research into youth conducted by the governmental institutions is not provided continuously but rather occasionally and *ad hoc*. What is more, youth organizations and other related stakeholders such as networks, Non for-profit organizations, research centers, and think-tanks focused on youth need to be better equipped to conduct evidence-based and applied research on youth and engage in policy dialogue. Also, in Serbia limited comprehensive and continuous research on youth issues is observed. The report on Serbia argues that most of the available research and population tracking did not recognize the youth cohort in accordance with the Law on Youth (i.e., as persons from 15 to 30 years of age). Therefore, one of the National Youth Strategy's specific goals is to increase knowledge on young people based on relevant data to be used as a basis for planning in all areas and levels of government.

4.3 Establishment and functioning of Youth Councils and umbrella organizations.

WB6 economies now have the legal framework in place to register youth umbrella organizations/youth councils as associations of youth organizations. However, such organizations are neither established nor recognized by state authorities in charge of youth policy in all WB6. For instance, Kosovo*, Serbia, and Montenegro have established national youth umbrella organizations recognized by state authorities. However, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia do not yet have a youth representative association at the state level recognized by state authorities.

Albania currently does not have a national youth council. However, the new Law on Youth has envisioned the establishment of the National Youth Council. Once it is set up, the National Youth Council's main function will be to present to Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth priorities of youth policy, budget and activities in the field of youth. It will be composed of 16 members: the Minister responsible for youth who will also chair the National Youth Council; the Head of the National Agency for Youth; 2 representatives from the Local Self-Government Support Agency; 8 representatives from youth organizations and/or youth, and 4 representatives from student councils. The National Agency for Youth will be responsible for the selection process of the representatives of youth organizations and youth and students' councils. The establishment of the National Youth Council is essential for further enhancing the youth policy framework in Albania and ensuring its proper implementation. Also, Article 13 of the new Law on Youth foresees the establishment of National Youth Representative Organization, which is expected to be established as a non for-profit organization by youth. However, the details of its mission, function, and



competences are not known yet as the Council of Ministers' decision because the criteria to be fulfilled by National Youth Representative Organization has not been approved yet.

In Bosnia and Hercegovina, the existing youth councils at the entity and district level mentioned above still struggle with the individual implementation of the youth law, operational budgets, and the development of internal structures. Since all three were established in different periods, each has its development and organizational challenges. Thus, they still have not found a way of adequately cooperating in developing a national youth council. None of them is a member of the European Youth Forum.

In Kosovo*, The Central Youth Action Council (CYAC) was established in 2011. Formation of the Central Youth Action Council is foreseen under Article 8 of the Law on Empowerment and Participation of Youth. The Central Youth Action Council is a voluntary organization with a specific role towards central authorities and international youth mechanisms. Around 130 youth organizations are represented to the Council through their Local Youth Action Plans. The Central Youth Action Council is still not a member of the European Youth Forum (since Kosovo* is not member of the Council of Europe). Apart from the Central Youth Action Council, at the central level there is another youth organization, the Assembly of Kosovo* Youth, independently established by a group of young Kosovars in 2009 that to-date has operated in 20 out of 38 municipalities, so far counting over 500 members.⁴³

In Montenegro, the new procedure introduced by the Law on Youth defines the establishment of an Umbrella Youth organization or Association of nongovernmental organizations. Accordingly, the process of establishing the Representative Umbrella Association of nongovernmental organizations implementing youth policy, called the Association of Youth Network of Montenegro, has been initiated by youth nongovernmental organizations in March of 2020 and the former Ministry of Sports and Youth immediately established the cooperation with the Initial Board. The Founding Assembly took place in September 2020 and the Association was officially set up. In November of 2020, a Certificate of Representation was issued by the former Ministry of Sports and Youth, recognizing it as a representative association of nongovernmental organizations that implement youth policy for the period of one year.⁴⁴

The establishment of the Association of Youth Network of Montenegro marks an important step forward in youth policy framework and participation of youth in policy in Montenegro. However, the establishment of the Council for Youth is still on hold, because of the parliamentary election which was held on August 30th, 2020 and the new Government structure. This body, once set up, will be in charge of the following: making proposals for the improvement of youth policy; giving suggestions regarding the process of preparing the Strategy; delegating its members to participate

⁴³ Interview, Civil Society Representative, Pristina, October 27, 2020

⁴⁴ Youth Network of Montenegro, available at <https://www.mmcg.me/clanstvo> (Accessed on December 19, 2020)



in the procedure of the preparation of laws in the areas that regulate issues of importance for youth; monitoring the position of young people and proposing measures for their improvement at the request of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, and giving an opinion on other issues of importance for young people.

In Serbia there are three main national youth policy actors, often referred to as the “three pillars of youth policy”. Those are: The National Association of Youth Workers – NAPOR (established in 2009), the National Youth Council of Serbia – KOMS (established in 2011), and the National Association of Local Youth Offices (NALYO), established in 2014. Initiated through a bottom-up approach, the establishment of all three has been supported by the Ministry of Youth and Sports and each contributes to the participation of young people. On July 20th, 2020, the National Youth Council of Serbia was recognized as having the status of the umbrella association by the Ministry of Youth and Sports, in accordance with the Law on Youth.

4.4 Regional platforms and networks

Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) is an independently functioning institutional mechanism, founded by the Western Balkans 6 participants (WB6): Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, aiming to promote the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation between the youth in the region through youth exchange programs. The Agreement on the Establishment of RYCO was signed by the WB6 Prime Ministers at the WB Summit held in Paris, on 4 July 2016. RYCO WB6 members contribute EUR 1 million each year through the following weighted formula: Albania: 17.3%, Bosnia and Herzegovina: 15.4%, Kosovo*: 10.2%, North Macedonia: 13.8%, Montenegro: 4.4%, and Serbia: 38.9%.

Currently, RYCO is supported by several donors, including the EU, the UN, France, Germany, Sweden, and the OSCE. Current or upcoming funding to RYCO and the RYCO Strategic Plan 2019-2021 are being considered from multiple development partners. In addition to its core work on reconciliation, trust, cooperation and dialogue in the Western Balkans through supporting and funding projects which bring youth of the region together, with the support of donors, RYCO is also working on: a social entrepreneurship ecosystem, an incubation program, volunteerism policy reform, a Regional Volunteer Service and Program, democratic values, participation, and active citizenship.

RYCO has established a good example of decision-making and youth participation. The Governing Board, which is the highest decision-making authority of RYCO, is comprised of two representatives from each Contracting Party: one Government representative in direct charge of youth policy and one youth representative. In that way, critical stakeholders in the youth sector are directly influencing the setting up of intervention goals. RYCO's Strategic Plan, on which all the interventions lean, has to be adopted by the Governing Board. Also, RYCO is working on strengthening its own capacities for better cooperation with grassroots organizations, marginalized youth and other stakeholders. RYCO has an Advisory Board with representatives of various youth



organizations, networks and donors in WB, Europe and beyond. RYCO has a solid and stimulating online presence particularly in social media, responding to communication attitudes and preferences of youth across the region.

Western Balkans Youth Cooperation Platform (WBYCP)⁴⁵ is a grassroots regional youth platform implemented by the Cooperation and Development Institute (CDI), together with the umbrella youth organizations of the six Western Balkans Countries: the National Youth Congress of Albania, the National Youth Council of Macedonia, the National Youth Council of Serbia, the High School Students Union of Montenegro, the Central Youth Action Council of Kosovo, the Bosnia and Herzegovina Association for the United Nations, and with the support of the Hanns Seidel Foundation. With the aim to promote youth connectivity in the Balkans, WBYCP offers a unique and tailor-made space to youngsters from the region where they meet, plan, organize, implement, and give voice to their action. In WBYCP youngsters can find partners for joint activities, design and implement joint initiatives, exchange ideas, consult a youth library, and build and carry out outreach and lobbying action. WBYCP is designed to function as a resource center for youth in the Western Balkans. WBYCP also offers a wide array of existing initiatives, including national, regional, and EU-supported that target youth in the Western Balkans.

The **Young European Ambassadors (YEA)**⁴⁶ platform is a creative network of future young game changers from across the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia) and the European Union (EU). Although YEAs come from different backgrounds, all of them share an interest in learning about the EU's values, and in promoting the opportunities that the EU offers. Most importantly, YEAs are open to sharing ideas and developing their talents towards inspiring change within their communities, the Western Balkan region, and across the EU.

4.5 Critical Assessment

In terms of participation, the WB6 economies have in place youth legal and policy frameworks that state in principle the importance of youth engagement and participation in decision making. However, apart from Serbia, which has a consolidated youth representative system and has set up mechanisms for youth participation in policy making through Youth Structured Dialogue, in other WB economies there is still room for improvement for ensuring effective youth participation in policy development and dialogue.

WB6 economies now have the legal framework in place to register youth umbrella organizations/youth councils as associations of youth organizations. However, such organizations are neither established nor recognized by state authorities in charge of youth policy in all WB6. For instance, Kosovo*, Serbia, and Montenegro have established national youth umbrella

⁴⁵ Western Balkans Youth Cooperation Platform, available at <http://connecting-youth.org/about.php>. (Accessed October 15, 2020).

⁴⁶ The Young European Ambassadors, available at <https://www.webalkans.eu/>. (Accessed October 15, 2020).



organizations recognized by state authorities. However, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia do not yet have a youth representative association at the state level recognized by state authorities. The Law on Youth of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina foresees a youth representative association, the Council for Youth of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but this body does not exist yet. Notwithstanding, progress can be observed in Albania and North Macedonia in terms of establishment of umbrella organisations. The new Law on Youth in Albania envisages the establishment of the National Youth Representative Organisation, which will be a partner in the youth policy structured dialogue. Also, the new Law on Youth in North Macedonia regulates the establishment of an umbrella organization for youth and therefore regulates their status as a youth representative body.

Weaknesses of youth participation in the decision-making processes are identified at different levels and areas particularly regarding the scope and mechanisms of established bodies, their status, functionality, communication and cooperation, outreach, and impact. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the only youth body on the state level is not functional and the representation young people suffers due to the lack of cooperation of entity-level ministries. In Kosovo*, the Central Youth Action Council (CYAC) is not fully functional and there is limited sustainable support for its operations.

A positive development can be noticed in Montenegro in terms of youth participation. Since September 2020, Montenegro has a functioning umbrella youth organisation, the Association of the Youth Network of Montenegro with 35 members and recognised by state authorities. In North Macedonia, the National Youth Council is an organization that is member of the European Youth Forum but not officially recognized as body representing youth at national level.

All WB6 economies shall strengthen youth participation by ensuring the establishment of a meaningful and genuine policy dialogue with youth through the Youth Structured Dialogue as the model provided by the European Youth Dialogue. Initially the establishment of National Youth Councils and umbrella youth organizations should be ensured as well as supporting them with resources and capacity development. Core institutional funding for such umbrella organisations is needed to ensure their sustainability.



CHAPTER 5 – COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF KEY DONOR INTERVENTIONS IN THE FIELD OF YOUTH IN WB

This chapter provides an overview of international donor assistance in the field of youth in the Western Balkans. Drawing from the donor mapping conducted for each of the Western Balkans' six economies, this chapter presents a comparative analysis, identifying synergies, overlaps, and gaps.

Donor Mapping was conducted by reviewing relevant reports, evaluations, and analyzes carried out in the field of youth and youth-related areas. In-depth interviews were also held with some major donor organizations in each economy, and their strategic documents were consulted. In addition, a general web search was undertaken on each donor organization, looking at specific sites focused on youth and youth-related issues. Wherever available, statistics have been included, such as those from the OECD Official Development Assistance Reports.⁴⁷

5.1 Key donors in the field of youth

A recent report in 2019 finds that for the period 2016-2019, more than 200 institutional donors were active in the Western Balkans, excluding private corporations.⁴⁸ The study finds that these donors have mainly supported programs, projects, and other initiatives in the areas of the Rule of Law, Economic Advancement and Education, Social & Economic Justice, Sustainable Development, Citizen's Activism & Initiatives, and Human Rights and Civil Society Strengthening, with the principal recipients of projects being CSOs and both central and local governments.⁴⁹ Youth has not been identified as a specific targeted area of intervention. However, the study indicates a rising interest in youth. Based on surveyed perceptions of donors in the Western Balkan region, the study argues that there is an increased interest from donors in grassroots civic activism and bottom-up social movements. These are considered signs of increasing citizen engagement in public life and as a dynamic that well-established CSOs and donors need to learn from, reach out to, and support in appropriate ways.⁵⁰ Consequently, education and youth are becoming strategic areas of intervention as donors in the region increasingly view education and economic development as essential instruments in reversing the worrying trend of young people migrating in search of better opportunities elsewhere, outside of the region.⁵¹

⁴⁷ OECD Official Development Assistance Reports for Western Balkan per recipient economy, 2020, available at https://public.tableau.com/views/OECD DACAidataglancebyrecipient_new/Recipients?:embed=y&:display_count=yes&:showTabs=y&:toolbar=no&:showVizHome=no (Accessed October 17, 2020).

⁴⁸ This excludes 21 additional donors identified from the Arab States, China, Russia and Turkey. Open Society Institute, Report, 2019, "People on the Move, Lives on Hold: A Mapping of Donors Active in the Western Balkans. (2016-2019), authored by Aleksandra Vesić, Julia Szanton and Zorica Rašković.

⁴⁹ Open Society Institute, Report, 2019, "People on the Move, Lives on Hold: A Mapping of Donors Active in the Western Balkans (2016-2019), authored by Aleksandra Vesić, Julia Szanton and Zorica Rašković. p. 3.

⁵⁰ *ibid.* p. 3.

⁵¹ *ibid.* p.42.

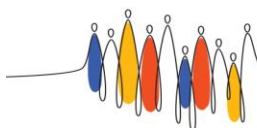


This donor mapping confirms the same pattern of an increased interest in youth and youth-related issues across the Western Balkans and among a diversity of donors. Generally, governments and the youth civil sector in the WB6 economies rely on donors' support to a large extent. Despite youth not being the primary target group of all donors' strategies, donor mapping shows that youth are generally among the key target groups of donors' programs. At the same time, youth are seen as a cross-cutting issue. Accordingly, the EU and other donors are starting to mainstream youth in all their programming and support. However, youth is the core mission of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office, South East European Youth Network, SALTO, and the European Union Erasmus+ Youth Programme.

There is a diversity in the manner, funds, and timeframes of donor support of youth in the WB6. Nonetheless, donors usually support youth in three main ways:

- a) Directly targeting youth policy and the legal framework by providing financial and technical assistance to the Governments and related bodies. For instance, the development of youth strategies, youth action plans, and youth laws. Support to legislative youth policy development and youth participation in policy and decision-making comes from the OSCE (Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia), the UN (Montenegro), embassies of the EU, and other economies (Bosnia and Hercegovina, North Macedonia).
- b) Indirectly targeting youth by providing financial and technical assistance to the Governments and related bodies on youth-related policy areas such as education, social inclusion, health, and employment (GIZ for employment, SDC for VET, USAID on participation in decision-making).
- c) Addressing issues of interest to youth by providing either financial, technical, networking, or other support to a youth organization. Some key issues include participation, civic engagement, intercultural dialogue, reconciliation, peacebuilding, education and mobility, employment and VET training, and entrepreneurship. Interventions targeting matters of interest to young people are supported by RYCO (all the WB6 economies), through different EU programs (all the WB6 economies), UN agencies/programs (all the WB6 economies), by SDC (Albania, North Macedonia, Serbia), OSCE (Montenegro), GIZ/BMZ (Albania, Serbia), USAID (Albania, Kosovo*, North Macedonia), US Embassy (Albania, Kosovo*), embassies of EU and other economies (Bosnia and Hercegovina, Montenegro), WFD (Montenegro, Albania and North Macedonia), SIDA (Serbia, Albania).

The most prominent donors in the region, such as the EU, GIZ, and SDC, primarily support education, employment, VET and entrepreneurship, and recently the environment, sustainable development, and youth. Whereas US Embassies and USAID have funded youth primarily in terms of civic and political participation, inter-ethnic relations and peacebuilding, as well as security issues related to radicalization and extremism. The mapping shows that most of the attention and funding so far by donors at the regional level has been on:



- civil and political participation of youth (supporting youth CSOs, youth groups, and CSOs working with youth, as well as policy-level changes in creating an enabling environment for youth).
- intercultural dialogue, inter-ethnic relations, reconciliation, and peacebuilding.
- human rights, minority rights, and empowerment.
- education and VET.
- employment and entrepreneurship, including returned migrants.

The EU (through the IPA, Union Programs) focuses on raising the education level and employability of youth, strengthening the participation of the civil sector in decision making, strengthening participation in democratic culture in Europe, and promoting democratic values. The EU implements programs in all the WB6.

The focus of UN agencies varies across the WB6 economies. It covers strengthening support to the development of the strategic and legislative framework for youth (in Montenegro), raising youth employability (in Albania, Kosovo*, and North Macedonia), and youth capacity building for the social, environmental, and economic prosperity of the economy (Kosovo* and Serbia). A good example of regional cooperation is supported by UNICEF 'U-report Western Balkans'. The UNICEF Offices in Albania, Kosovo* and Montenegro jointly launched this digital platform aimed at youth activism. This platform seeks to establish direct communication with youth and collect their opinions on various topics to inform the decision-makers of the challenges they face. UNICEF Serbia is developing a U-Report.

The SDC directs its funds to raise employability (Albania, Kosovo*, North Macedonia, Serbia). For example, in Albania, the SDC addresses leading vocational education and training challenges, such as low quality and status, insufficient financing, weak labor market orientation, and poor private sector engagement. The SDC is also working in the social inclusion and the health sector and, more recently, on sustainable development and climate (Albania, Serbia).

In North Macedonia, the OSCE is supporting capacity building in the local youth councils to strengthen youth decision making at the local level. The OSCE also supports the process of creation of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies in the economy. The OSCE missions support creating a legal framework, youth participation, and contribution to policy design and decision-making. It also supports various RYCO activities in the region. For example, the OSCE Missions in Serbia and Albania involve youth volunteers in their work and through meetings of the Youth Advisory Group. However, the mission in Serbia plans to establish its own Youth Advisory Body.

RYCO (Regional Youth Cooperation Office) is a regional initiative that supports youth work and youth cooperation, and is present in all of the WB6 economies. RYCO's intervention planning



should be mentioned as an example of good practice. RYCO's Strategic Plan on which all the interventions lean on has to be adopted by the Governing Board. The Governing Board (the highest decision-making authority of RYCO) is comprised of two representatives from each Contracting Party (one Government representative in direct charge of youth policy and one youth representative). In that way, critical stakeholders in the youth sector directly influence the setting of intervention goals.

USAID focuses on youth empowerment through education and educational initiatives. For example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina USAID implemented a program called "reGeneration" that is designed to make youth the principal agents of social and political change in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Project activities provide opportunities for both youth and adults to reflect on the past, be exposed to alternative narratives, and to speak with a more unified voice as advocates for positive change. The USAID Strategy for Kosovo* 2014-2018 is an example of an integrated approach to addressing youth issues, which considers education in relation to improving the situation of the youth in Kosovo*. Across the region, USAID and the US Embassy have supported active citizenship, youth engagement, and participation in decision-making.

German donors (GIZ) support youth employability and the integration of migrant youth/returnees in the labor market. For example, in Albania GIZ supports the 'Reinvest' project to integrate returnees to Albania. In Kosovo*, The project 'Youth, Employment and Skills in Kosovo*' supported by the BMZ aims to improve young Kosovars' employability between 15 and 35 years, considering the specific needs of returned migrants, all ethnic groups and minorities. In Serbia, GIZ and BMZ support organizations, hubs, and centers that provide environments that incentivize young people in acquiring entrepreneurial skills and starting their own business through the "Encouraging youth employment" project.

Additionally, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy which recently established offices in Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Albania, sees youth mainstreaming as a priority and is dedicating a great deal of effort to include youth in all aspects of the programmatic work. The foundation has a specific budget line to support youth-related projects, particularly youth participation in political life, public life, and decision making.

The French Development Agency will start to operate in the Western Balkans, starting with Albania and focusing on youth issues related to digital skills, climate change, and development.

The UK Embassy is focusing on youth and organized crime and how to prevent young people from embarking on this path through employment and education. This is a regional project currently in the inception and assessment phases. Interventions are expected to start in 2021.

SIDA has just launched a program focused on arts and culture for youth, but it is available only for Albania in the pilot phase.



5.2 Priority areas for the future in the field of youth

In terms of gap provisions, regional priority areas identified by the mapping can be classified into three groups:

- a) ongoing priority areas already receiving support, but still highly relevant:
 - youth employability, particularly NEET, returnee youth, refugee youth, marginalized youth
 - education and mobility
 - entrepreneurship and income generation: VET
 - civic and political engagement of youth and participation in decision making
 - social inclusion, empowerment, and social protection of youth (returnee youth, refugee youth, marginalized youth, LGBTIQ)
 - intercultural dialogue, inter-ethnic relations, reconciliation, and peacebuilding
- b) emerging priority areas
 - youth migration and brain circulation
 - youth and innovation: startups, digital skills
 - youth and sustainable development and environment
 - youth and security issues: extremism, radicalization, organized crime
 - youth activism in a multiethnic context and the post-COVID19 reality promoting online advocacy and activism
 - youth access to social and health care services
- c) areas where almost no funding is provided, but it is becoming a priority area
 - rural youth
 - literacy programs dedicated to youth: media, data and digital literacy
 - youth and science
 - sports
 - youth and diaspora
 - youth and climate change
 - youth cooperation beyond WB6



CHAPTER 6: GOOD PRACTICES AND GAP ANALYSIS

This chapter presents an overview of good practices in youth-related policy and programs as well as gaps in financing mechanisms in the WB6 as each economy report outlined. It analyzes the impact of COVID-19 on youth and outlines some key recommendations.

6.1 Good practices

A consultative process was used in developing youth policies and creating documents that was both broad and comprehensive (particularly in Serbia and Montenegro), and that included youth and other relevant stakeholders. Using “Dialogue with Youth” as a tool (Bosnia and Hercegovina), which is a dialogue between governmental and nongovernmental representatives, should be accentuated.

A cross-sectorial approach to the development of youth policy is noted in drafting the last youth policy documents. Full legal infrastructure in the youth sector is now present in all of the WB6. For instance, Albania and North Macedonia have had new laws on youth in place since 2019 and 2020 respectively. In Kosovo*, a draft-law on youth is in a consultation process aiming at improving the current Law on Empowerment and Participation of Youth. Additionally, Kosovo* has established functional government structures at the central and local levels that actively deal with youth issues. Also, the current “walk the talk” initiative of the OSCE Mission to Serbia represents a practical framework which includes guidelines, capacity building, and the testing of various tools in integrating youth into all areas of its work while building on the existing efforts and examples of good practice.

Evidence-based approaches to youth policy and decision-making was implemented. In Serbia, relevant data were collected through situation analysis on young people, specific studies, evaluations of previous strategies and action plans and were used in the creation of subsequent national youth policy documents. In Kosovo*, the exemplary case considers the Employment Agency that has built and implemented the Labour Market Information System that is compatible and communicates with other information systems (such as the Kosovo* Statistics Agency) and provided real time data on employment, unemployment, and vocational training. In North Macedonia, the development of youth policy based on the assessment of youth needs was a good example of evidence-based decision making.

Support to the establishment of youth policy actors is exemplary in Serbia. The Ministry of Youth and Sports provided support to the establishment of various youth policy actors on the national level, such as National Association of Youth Workers (NAPOR), National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS) and National Association of Local Youth Offices (NALYC), as well as local youth offices in 137 self-government units, which strengthened the structure for youth policy implementation. There are two cross-sectorial bodies established on the national level: The Youth Council and the Working Group for the implementation of the National Youth Strategy. The co-



management principle is applied in the establishment of the Youth Council and is regulated by the law on youth. The commitment of responsible authorities to the coordination of youth policy implementation is noted in Montenegro. The former Ministry of Sports and Youth in Montenegro is showing a strong commitment to the implementation of youth strategy. The directorate for youth is ensuring regular communication with youth Nongovernmental organizations and all other relevant stakeholders, especially local self-governments.

Youth engagement in certain programs and projects, particularly around employment, education and participation are noted in North Macedonia and Bosnia and Hercegovina - The Youth Guarantee programme in North Macedonia which ensures quality services are offered to youth (especially concerning raising employability), and the Youth club in Bosnia and Hercegovina, which is a place where young people can meet and participate in a variety of activities. A cross-sectorial approach to youth empowerment, especially youth from marginalized groups, is seen in Kosovo*'s UNICEF Innovations Lab, which strengthens social entrepreneurship, media critical thinking, and active citizenship, and in Albania through various donor-funded projects.

6.2 Gaps

6.2.1. Gap analysis: general background issues

Politics in all the WB6 economies poses great challenges to youth sectors and its stakeholders. These challenges unfold differently across the WB6 economies and are described below through four major gaps or barriers to effective development and implementation of youth policy.

The general impression is that youth are not prioritized by many of the WB6 governments. The key challenge of youth policy is the lack of prioritization of the youth field and a lack of systematic and continuous implementation of mechanisms.

Fragmented approach. In Bosnia and Hercegovina, fragmented research and policies are not responding to the needs of young people in Bosnia and Hercegovina. The youth sector in the MCA is not efficient enough to deal with all youth issues. In Kosovo*, fragmented interventions that have lacked sustainable results and impact have, in frequent cases, been accused of malpractice and politicization in all levels of the youth sector.

Distrust in institutions and processes. A certain number of youth and youth-led Nongovernmental organizations do not believe in the process of consultations and participation mechanisms because of which they refuse to participate in decision-making (e.g., in Montenegro and Albania). North Macedonia still does not have the most important regulation that will enable significant youth participation and decision-making in relation to issues related to youth, including youth law. Besides, the special issue is the fact that youth organizations were included in the wide consultation process for the creation of the strategy, but many of their comments and inputs were not included in the final version of the document.



6.2.2. Gap analysis in the youth policy framework

A national youth policy framework (National Youth Law and National Youth Strategy including Action Plan) is almost complete in all the WB6 economies, but not all structures foreseen in the legal framework are established yet (e.g., Albania has yet to set up NYC and NYRO).

Incongruence between legislative framework and practice. In Serbia incongruence is visible in establishing Youth Councils at the provincial and local levels; some of them have only a declarative nature if established at all.⁵² The current law on youth does not guarantee the active involvement of youth and relevant youth policy actors in the strategy assessment processes. Moreover, there is no legal obligation to include youth in consultative processes when it comes to the formulation of documents other than youth strategy.

Lack of systematic monitoring and evaluation of youth policy development and implementation. There is a lack of a performance monitoring framework and mechanism of the MCYS (Kosovo*), and a lack of systemic and continuous implementation of mechanisms (Serbia, Albania). In Serbia, mandatory annual reports of public authorities are not results-oriented (but activity-oriented) and are not connected with specific indicators set in the youth strategy (identified in Serbia, but also valid for other WB economies who adopted a National Youth Strategy and Action Plan).

6.2.3. Gap analysis in youth policy funding

There is no unified and coherent funding framework in place for the financing of activities and initiatives in the youth sector. Often, there is a lack of specific youth funding within the state budgets and/or budgets of the ministries in charge. Most of the donor funding comes in the form of projects implemented by donors themselves. A lack of sector budget support in all economies comes because of the lack of capacity among national authorities, particularly in the fields of finance and procurement (e.g., Kosovo*). There is a lack of systematic coordination of donor efforts in the youth sector (except in North Macedonia, where regular coordination meetings take place on a weekly basis). Moreover, there is no precise information on the total funds budgeted for the implementation of youth policy from international donor programs (e.g., Serbia).

Disbursing funds through small grants and short-term, project-based activities. In Kosovo*, the strict focus of the referent ministry in relation to youth is disbursing funds through small grants. Similarly, in Montenegro, youth programs that are implemented by nongovernmental organizations, are mostly project-funded. There are no possibilities for program funding which directly produces a lack of sustainable results and a lack of continuity in the implementation of certain services and programs. For the same reason, in Serbia and Bosnia and Hercegovina short-term, project-based activities cannot reach a great number of youth and administrative requests

⁵²137 local youth offices in Serbia, out of which approximately 80 have Local Action Plans. Number of established Local Youth Councils is 83, and around 50 are operational



(monitoring, justification of expenses, etc.) and are so complex, influencing the effects and sustainability of the projects. In Albania there is no core institutional funding for your organizations and limited funding for informal youth groups or networks.

Limited budget and insufficient resources. All national reports point to the lack of resources.

6.2.4. Gap analysis in youth participation mechanisms

Lack of functioning bodies. For example, the only state-level body in Bosnia and Hercegovina dealing specifically with youth issues (the Commission for Coordination of Youth Issues), is not functional. This means that youth issues at all levels as well as coordination between entities are delegated to the youth sector within the MCA, which lacks capacity and is not efficient enough.

Limited cross-sector approach and cooperation with other ministries. There is a limited cross-sectoral approach to youth issues (to some extent) in all the WB6 economies. Difficulties in a cross-sectorial approach mainly refer to youth policy funding and implementation, e.g., legal framework for cross-sectoral cooperation on national youth policy implementation does not legally oblige different sectors to allocate funds for youth.

Lack of relevant data, research, and an evidence-based approach in youth policy making. Fragmented research and a serious lack of credible and relevant data in the youth sector are challenges present in all the WB6 economies. Additionally, the funding for the research is often not sufficient and many local or national action plans on youth are based only on national data, without considering local needs.

The Status of National Youth Councils is not fully regulated in some of the WB6 economies. Even though consulted and engaged in many opportunities by the Governmental institutions, the National Youth Council of North Macedonia is still registered as the union of organizations, with the status of a civil society organization, and is neither recognized as an official youth representative body in the economy, nor is it supported by the State budget. In Serbia, the National Youth Council (KOMS) is currently in the process of officially regulating its status of an Umbrella Federation, stipulated in the law on youth. Otherwise, both the National Youth Council of North Macedonia, and the National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS), are members of the European Youth Federation. Albania does not yet have a National Youth Council in place.

Limited outreach. As is explicated in the gap analysis in the national report from Kosovo* concerning youth participation, a key issue is the limited outreach of youth organizations to a narrow circle of the leadership and activists of youth organizations. This has been the case mainly at the local level. Another reason may rest with the principle of voluntarism as the key form of youth engagement. Also, an important barrier for bigger outreach is the politicization of youth councils.



Issues of youth emigration. All reports emphasize the issue of “brain drain”. Namely, while education and skills gained in formal education remain insufficient for participation in the labour market in the economy, young people leave the economy and pursue careers elsewhere (mainly in EU countries).

6.3 The impact of COVID-19 on youth

With the rapid spread of the coronavirus in the Western Balkans, governments introduced measures to protect their fragile health systems, and containment measures, coupled with the external shock, are expected to result in a notable contraction across the WB6 economies.⁵³ The World Bank Western Balkans Regular Economic Report Fall 2020 finds that as elsewhere in the world, in the Western Balkans the COVID-19 pandemic has plunged countries into deep recession.⁵⁴ The Council of Europe also reports that the COVID-19 pandemic and related lockdown measures have produced significant interruptions in young people’s lives, the impact of which is still to be analyzed and understood in the future.⁵⁵ The EU-CoE Youth partnership has set up a dedicated knowledge hub to study the impact of COVID-19 on youth, and research is being carried out in topics related to mental health, education, mobility and youth sector. Specific research and data gathering regarding the impact of COVID-19 on youth in the WB6 would also be highly beneficial to better understand the issues and propose need-based solutions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has expanded the notion of vulnerability in WB6 economies as elsewhere. So, besides Roma and Egyptian youth, minority youth, youth with disabilities, and youth in conflict with law or victims of crime, due to COVID-19, other youth groups at risk have emerged such as youth living in remote and rural areas, youth affected by the earthquake, and youth with health conditions or chronic diseases, unemployed youth, or NEET. They have inadequate access to social services, limited capacities, and opportunities to cope and adapt, and limited or no access to technologies.⁵⁶ The expansion of vulnerability and groups of youth at risk pose additional pressure on social service provision by central and local government. It requires enhanced cooperation with service providers, nonprofit organizations, business, and local government and donors to support these youth groups.

Overall, COVID-19 has had different effects on youth, ranging across changes in employment, education, health, and youth engagement. The COVID-19 crisis poses a considerable risk for

⁵³ The COVID-19 crisis in the Western Balkans, available at <https://www.oecd.org/south-east-europe/COVID-19-Crisis-Response-Western-Balkans.pdf> <https://www.oecd.org/south-east-europe/COVID-19-Crisis-Response-Western-Balkans.pdf> (Accessed January 17, 2021).

⁵⁴ World Bank, Western Balkans Regular Economic Report, 2020, available at <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/34644/153774.pdf> (Accessed January 17, 2021).

⁵⁵ Knowledge HUB: COVID-19 impact on the youth sector, available at <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/covid-19> (Accessed January 17, 2021).

⁵⁶ Ibid.



young people in the fields of employment, education, mental health and income loss.⁵⁷ In addition, the youth will shoulder much of the long-term economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 crises.⁵⁸ Young people were also indirectly affected by the crises since youth organizations were also weakened. Many projects in the youth field were delayed or cancelled, and organizations' sustainability was undermined. Meanwhile, the support provided by the state to compensate for these setbacks was very limited.

In terms of responses, not all WB6 Governments have provided youth-specific responses to the COVID-19 crisis. Some measures are noted in terms of education with the provision of remote learning and other support for online learning, as well as a few economic measures to support youth, such as in the case of North Macedonia with the Youth Farmers Support Scheme. Specific funding of youth organizations did not occur, nor was there any special funding for youth coming from either government agencies or donors. Youth was tackled as a target group in other measures related to education, economy and health.

The education of young people has been greatly affected by COVID-19. The OECD recommends that the WB6 Governments should promote remote learning and the use of online school learning platforms and continue supporting students to gain access and provide teachers with digital learning opportunities.⁵⁹ Also, it is necessary to tailor support to the needs of youth among other groups as they most probably suffer the most from business shutdowns.⁶⁰ Also, the youth representatives in the RYCO Governing Board issued a statement on the COVID-19 crisis and its impact on the youth in the Western Balkans in October 2020, urging the WB6 Governments to focus on youth, particularly in terms of education, unemployment, and enabling young people's participation.⁶¹ Also, preparing for the future will require a strengthening of the resilience of young people and youth organisations as well as the implementation of antifragility measures in public institutions together with youth.⁶²

6.4 WB6 commitments in the area of youth - Sofia Declaration of the EU-Western Balkans Summit

On the 17th of May, 2018 the Sofia Declaration of the EU-Western Balkans Summit placed special attention to the area of youth by highlighting the commitment of both the WB6 and the EU on:

⁵⁷ "Youth and COVID-19, Response, Recovery and Resilience", OECD, June 2020, available at <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/youth-and-covid-19-response-recovery-and-resilience-c40e61c6/> (Accessed January 17, 2021).

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁹ The COVID-19 crisis in the Western Balkans, available at <https://www.oecd.org/south-east-europe/COVID-19-Crisis-Response-Western-Balkans.pdf> <https://www.oecd.org/south-east-europe/COVID-19-Crisis-Response-Western-Balkans.pdf> (Accessed January 17, 2021), p. 2.

⁶⁰ *ibid.* p. 9.

⁶¹ Full statement available at <https://www.rycowb.org/?p=8646> (Accessed January 17, 2021).

⁶² "Youth and COVID-19, Response, Recovery and Resilience", OECD, June 2020, available at <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/youth-and-covid-19-response-recovery-and-resilience-c40e61c6/> (Accessed January 17, 2021).



“creating further opportunities for the youth, while ensuring that this contributes to the socio-economic development of the Western Balkans.”⁶³ This commitment was reiterated in the EU-Western Balkans Summit in Sofia in November 2020. The commitment includes several concrete instruments to support socio-economic development, placing a special focus on youth:⁶⁴

- Expand the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF) to further attract and coordinate investment from bilateral donors and International Financing Institutions.
- Significantly boost the Western Balkans Investment Framework's provision of guarantees to crowd in private investment.
- Enhance support to education, and in particular launch a pilot project for mobility in vocational education and training.
- Double Erasmus+ funding for the region, including the establishment of a “Western Balkans Youth Lab” in 2018, providing space for innovative policymaking addressing the needs of young people and tackling brain drain.
- Expand the scope and reach of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office and introduce an intra-regional mobility scheme.
- Ensure progress in the implementation of the Regional Economic Area, including stepping up work on the recognition of qualifications, and progress on trade facilitation within the Western Balkans.
- Advance Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia in their World Trade Organisation (WTO) accession processes.

This report outlines some of the key progress in this regard below, but further elaboration and monitoring is needed regarding the efforts of the WB6 towards these commitments.

Concerning, WBIF, in 2020 the EC adopted a comprehensive “Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans,” which aims to spur the long-term economic recovery of the region, support a green and digital transition, and foster regional integration and convergence with the European Union.⁶⁵ The Economic and Investment Plan (EIP) sets out a substantial investment package mobilising up to €9 billion of funding for the region. It will support sustainable connectivity, human capital, competitiveness and inclusive growth, and the twin green and digital transition.⁶⁶ Of particular relevance to youth is “FLAGSHIP 10: Youth Guarantee,” an initiative that aims to replicate the scheme that exists in the EU.⁶⁷ This mechanism is intended to support the

⁶³Sofia Declaration of the EU-Western Balkans Summit, available at https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/34776/sofia-declaration_en.pdf (Accessed January 11, 2021), p. 2.

⁶⁴ *ibid.* p. 6.

⁶⁵ “Western Balkans: An Economic and Investment Plan to support the economic recovery and convergence”, available at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1811 (Accessed January 11, 2021).

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ WBIF Meeting Minutes, December 2020, available at <https://wbif.eu/storage/app/media/Library/12.Meetings/2.%20Project%20Financiers%20Group/30thPFG/WBIF%2030th%20PFG%20Minutes%20of%20Meeting.pdf> (Accessed January 11, 2021), p.8.



development of human capital, including strengthening of high-quality education and training systems, employment, health, and social protection. The EU also aims to improve labour market participation, especially of young people and women, vulnerable groups, and minorities. The most recent WBIF steering committee meeting in December 2020 highlighted the importance of investing in youth education systems and urged the WB6 Governments to strengthen youth education system planning and capacity development and start implementing the Youth Guarantee.⁶⁸ Another major problem faced by all WB economies is the ongoing brain and skills drain and WBIF intends to contemplate measures to counter this trend, potentially under Flagship 10 “Youth Sector.”⁶⁹

In terms of the VET mobility scheme, the EU launched the first Pilot VET mobility scheme for the Western Balkans in 2019 and the second one in 2020. In the first call, EUR 2 million has been awarded to Intervet (Internationalisation of VET systems in Western Balkans).⁷⁰ This project aims to improve the culture of learning mobility in the field of VET by better informing VET teachers and headmasters about resources and opportunities in learning mobility – thereby increasing their competences in planning and managing mobility projects. The project will implement activities at two levels: mobility of VET learners and competence building of VET staff.⁷¹ The results for the second call were notified in December 2020 to selected organisations but are not public yet, and the start of the mobility projects between EU and Western Balkans in VET is expected in 2021. The available budget for the second pilot VET mobility scheme was EUR 4 million, which marks a two-fold increase compared to the first call that included Africa as well.

In terms of Erasmus+, the budget for the new programme period (2021-2027) was announced in December 2020. For the period 2021-2027, the European Parliament has approved the budget that includes EUR 2.7 billion for Erasmus+ to invest in young people, which marks an almost doubling of the budget focusing on youth for the upcoming period.⁷² The programme will provide new opportunities to support higher education institutions in having a successful transition into the digital age, to equip their students and staff with the digital skills necessary for them to thrive in the future and contribute to recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic. It will also be more international, simpler, and more inclusive. New opportunities will thus become available also the WBs, including the Erasmus Virtual Exchanges and new actions in the field of VET (mobility and capacity building). However, the foreseen budget for the WB6 has not been published yet.

⁶⁸ *ibid.* p.13.

⁶⁹ *ibid.* p.6.

⁷⁰ The project includes associations, VET schools and SMEs from the 6 regional partners (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia), as well as 8 partners from the EU Member States (Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Malta, Spain, Slovenia and Poland).

⁷¹ First Pilot VET Mobility Scheme EU, Africa and Western Balkans, available at https://ec.europa.eu/education/news/vet-mobility-results_en (Accessed January 11, 2021).

⁷² “EU budget 2021: A kick-start of the European recovery”, available at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2489 (Accessed January 11, 2021).



The European Union is working with the Western Balkans on a forward-looking Agenda on Innovation, Research, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport. The Agenda will outline a comprehensive, long-term strategy for cooperation with the region. The third pillar of this agenda is particularly relevant to youth as it seeks to enhance a closer regional economic integration through planned investments in human capital development and digital transformation, including quality of education and training, increasing mobility, and boosting human capital development, among other objectives. So far, more than 17,000 mobilities of young people in youth projects were funded under H2020, including the mobility of more than 47,000 students and researchers.⁷³

The “Western Balkans Youth Lab” was established and kicked off in January 2020 as a three-year project with a total of EUR 1.5 million implemented by the RCC and aiming to provide opportunities for youth to participate in decision-making.⁷⁴

In terms of widening the scope of RYCO, the EU is supporting RYCO to create a more enabling environment and new opportunities for young people to travel and explore the WB6, to get to know their peers, and cooperate on shared projects in the field of community activism, culture, sports, environment, and many more through the “*Enhancing Youth Cooperation and Youth Exchange in the WB6*” project.⁷⁵ It takes place across the Western Balkans 6, from March 2019 to November 2021 and builds on previous experience of RYCO. The focus of the project directly responds to the need to intensify regional cooperation as highlighted in the Berlin Process, the European Commission’s strategy for a credible enlargement perspective and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans, while also being in line with the RYCO Strategic Plan 2019-2021.

In terms of the implementation of a Regional Economic Area (REA) and youth, in June 2019, the RCC published a Declaration on the Recognition of Academic Qualifications in the Western Balkans, setting out the principle for attaining the mutual recognition of academic qualifications in the WB6.⁷⁶ The RCC successfully negotiated the Agreement on the Recognition of Academic Qualifications and has started the negotiations on Travelling with IDs and the Agreement on the recognition of professional qualifications.⁷⁷

⁷³ “Towards a Western Balkans Agenda”, available at https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/research_and_innovation/strategy_on_research_and_innovation/documents/ec_rtd_western-balkans-agenda-factsheet.pdf (Accessed January 11, 2021).

⁷⁴ Western Balkans Youth Lab Project, available at https://www.rcc.int/priority_areas/48/western-balkans-youth-lab-project (Accessed January 11, 2021).

⁷⁵ Enhancing Youth Cooperation and Youth Exchange in WB6”, available at https://www.rycowb.org/?page_id=7810 (Accessed January 11, 2021).

⁷⁶ Recognition of Academic Qualifications in the Western Balkans available at https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/document-library/declaration-on-recognition-of-academic-qualifications-in-the-western-balkans_en (Accessed January 11, 2021).

⁷⁷ Ministerial Meeting of the Western Balkans Platforms on Education and Training & Research and Innovation, Key Note Mrs. Majlinda Bregu, RCC Secretary General, available at <https://www.rcc.int/download/docs/Talking%20points%20Ministerial%20Meeting%2020December.pdf/aa02cc42c224fa50f05cfa208daba13c.pdf> (Accessed January 12, 2021).



In terms of the accession process of Bosnia and Hercegovina and Serbia in the WTO, EC annual reports do not mark any clear progress in this regard but recommend that both economies pursue the process.⁷⁸⁷⁹

6.5 Recommendations

Recommendations for policy makers

Availability of data and statistics in the area of youth

- It is essential to step up efforts to enhance the administrative capacities of central and local institutions on data collection and publication in terms of availability of data, open access, reliability, and transparency. The data published by public institutions both at the central and local levels regarding youth should be in line with the open data standards of the Open Government Partnership (all WB6 economies have joined the OGP).
- There should be an initiative in the Western Balkans 6 to collect data for youth age group 15 to 29, in line with the widely acceptable definition of the youth group which should provide data on number of population, distribution of population (rural/urban), employment, education, unemployment, NEET, and much more.
- Public institutions, and others such as nonforprofit organizations, academia, research centers and other organizations, should gather, analyze and publish youth-specific disaggregated data in a harmonized and regular manner (quarterly, semi-annually, and annually). This will help with consistency and comparability of data sets, thus contributing to evidence-based youth policy and research.

Evidence-based youth policy and consultation processes

- It is necessary to further improve current efforts for evidence-based youth policy making through the use of data, evidence, and research, and through structured and continuous dialogue and cooperation with youth, civil society, and academia and other stakeholders through a participatory and inclusive process.
- All WB6 governments should step up their efforts for conducting a genuine and meaningful consultation process with youth and not simply consider consultation as a formalistic, tick-the-box exercise. In this sense, Youth Structured Dialogue should be established and reinforced across all WB6 economies in light of the EU integration process as well.
- **A resource centre with the support of international donors, partners and stakeholders in the area of youth should be developed as a sound database and an evidence and research hub regarding youth with comprehensive up-to-date information based on open data standards**

⁷⁸ European Commission, Serbia Annual Report, 2020, available at https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/serbia_report_2020.pdf (Accessed January 11, 2021). p. 113.

⁷⁹ European Commission, Bosnia and Hercegovina Annual Report, 2020, available at https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/bosnia_and_herzegovina_report_2020.pdf (Accessed January 11, 2021). p. 107.



about programs, institutions, policies, procedures, and finances (including data on funds allocated and/or at a project's disposal, public calls for funds dedicated to youth and youth organizations, and expenditures for all youth institutions). The online database will guide policy planning in the field of youth and will be a useful tool for the donor community, academia, and researchers.

Legal and policy framework

- WB6 Governments should commit to complete, amend, and improve the current youth legal and policy framework, making it relevant by taking into consideration the needs of youth, COVID-19 induced contexts, proliferation of ICTs, and digitalization, European best practices and standards. This should be done by mainstreaming and prioritizing youth as a cross-sectorial policy issue and as a national and regional priority for future development of our societies and economies.
- It is important to strengthen trust in youth legal and policy making processes and relevant institutions and to invest in further development of youth friendly mechanisms for ensuring youth participation and permanent structured dialogue (Youth Structured Dialogue) between decision makers, young people and organizations dealing with youth on a local and national level.
- WB6 Governments in cooperation with international donors, civil society, academia and other stakeholders should ensure and promote a participatory and inclusive approach in youth policy development by widening the base of participation and involvement. Also, this should be done by employing innovative communication, outreach and engagement mechanisms harnessing the potential of digital tools in the involvement and participation of young people (e.g., organize online hackathons for youth-generated policy solutions).

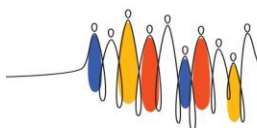
Institutions and structures

- Parliaments across the WB6 should consider increasing their efforts in holding governments accountable in terms of the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the youth policy framework. The setting up of formal or informal mechanisms of youth engagement with the legislative branch for improving legal and policy framework on youth is also suggested.
- WB6 Governments should increase their efforts in setting up institutions related to youth as envisaged in the law particularly youth umbrella organisations and National Youth Councils, or support the functioning of existing in terms of provision of an enabling environment for them to operate, including space, infrastructure, resources, capacity development, coordination, and outreach.
- Across all WB6 economies, local structures dealing with youth and youth related issues should be strengthened for achieving long term goals in terms of the provision of an enabling environment for them to operate: space, infrastructure, resources, capacity development, coordination and outreach.

Funding mechanisms



- In terms of funding, continuing direct support to youth is essential as well as intensifying such support particularly in emerging priority areas. In addition, it is necessary to provide institutional funding for youth sector (organisations, associations, groups, networks and other forms) to ensure sustainability of operations through supporting with financial means and skills development.
- The model of Youth Guarantee, still nascent in North Macedonia, should also be implemented across WB6. Another funding mechanism may be the support for Structured Youth Policy Dialogue by considering achievements and challenges in the case of Serbia, that is the only one in WB6 that has made progress in terms of Structured Youth Policy Dialogue. Supporting youth engagement in the knowledge square or Quadruple Helix by funding their cooperation with academia, research, civil society, media, policy and business sector.
- The youth would benefit significantly from the increased youth fund allocations for grassroots youth organisations, youth groups and youth nongovernmental organizations in the periphery should be further supported with capacity building for project proposal writing and implementation so as to benefit from the youth fund.
- Capacity building efforts and increased staff should be provided to public institutions in charge of management of youth funds to develop standard operating procedures regarding grant giving (call for applications, selection of projects, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, youth projects data).
- A dedicated unique program budget for youth must be set up, in addition to current provisions across different ministries as a cross-cutting policy issue. It would be an added value to the development of youth if other sources of funding from public institutions such as funding for civil society, culture, art, sports, employment, entrepreneurship, innovation, research, and science would also reinforce their approach in targeting youth in particular. This unique budget programme for youth which should allow for cross-sectorial measures on youth and areas related to youth. This should be accompanied by a comprehensive system of data gathering and funds management, so as to trace, analyze, monitor and analyze total funds dedicated to or spent on youth and/or youth related issues.
- The youth nongovernmental organizations, networks, informal groups, and platforms should also be further supported in terms of organizational development, project management, fundraising, networking, advocacy, lobbying, digitalization, communication, and outreach.
- WB6 economies should consider European best practices and lessons learnt from the region regarding the Youth Guarantee and Youth Card implementation across the region.
- It is necessary to further improve the employment and education programs, including VET, to better match education with the needs of the labor market. It is also necessary to mainstream and prioritize digital skills for youth as well as upskilling and reskilling in light of post COVID-19 labor market changes.
- Provide sustainable and continuous funding for youth policy through investing in human resources and funds in long-term projects and programs implemented by youth and for youth (core institutional funding), but also to create more flexible mechanisms for financing youth-led initiatives, keeping in mind the needs and demand (individuals, activists, informal groups,



networks). The amount of funds allocated for youth policy-related projects and programs of civil society organizations, especially in the areas of non-formal education, volunteering, and the participation of youth (social, economic, and political both offline and online), needs to be increased.

- It is necessary to create flexible mechanisms for the implementation of youth-driven ideas and a mechanism to speed up the implementation of new emerging ideas and actions from events.

Accountability and transparency

- Accountability and transparency mechanisms in youth policy and funding should be reinforced. It is essential to ensure a transparent, fair and competitive grant giving process through youth funding to finance youth programs, initiatives, activities and youth organisations.
- Institutional and individual capacities must be strengthened for monitoring of youth policy implementation at the national and local level, and focused indicator-based and performance-based reporting by all relevant stakeholders that implement youth policy must be encouraged. The increased usage of digital tools for monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and procedures should be promoted.

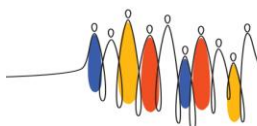
Inter-institutional and cross-sectorial approach and coordination

- Across the WB6, better coordination between formal (central and local government, donors, the business sector, nongovernmental organizations, the media, academia) and non-formal actors (families, youth groups, community leaders) should be ensured.
- Across WB6 it is necessary to improve the coordination and inclusion of relevant stakeholders at all governance levels in youth. The youth would benefit from a harmonized inter-institutional and cross-sector approach on youth policy and funding. Institutions should unify the approach and implementation of youth policies and also better coordination between the central and local government is encouraged.
- A more comprehensive sector-wide approach and better coordination among the different relevant ministries on youth-relevant policies are needed, as well as cross-sectorial cooperation and flexible and cross-sectorial mechanisms for realization and implementation of youth policy.

Regional cooperation

- WB6 Governments should continue their investment in regional cooperation in the field of youth (funding RYCO, Erasmus+ Programme, WBF and other initiatives) and increase efforts for implementing all commitments of the EU-Western Balkans Summit (Sofia, 2018), particularly regarding mobility, recognition of qualifications, tackling brain drain and the provision of space for the participation of young people.

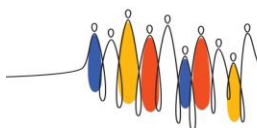
Donor coordination



- The public institutions directly responsible for youth, should better coordinate the policy need at central level and better coordinate development assistance in the field of youth in order to harmonize donor practices, coordinate funding for effective aid delivery.

Recommendations for donor community

- Continued support to the WB6 Governments and associated bodies on youth and youth-related policy areas, but with particular attention to the provision of support in the following dimensions:
 - Structured Youth Policy Dialogue by engaging policy makers at the central and local level youth organizations and civil society organizations in the field of youth.
 - Further improvements in legal and policy framework, set up of relevant institutions and the strengthening of transparency and accountability through ameliorated monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.
 - Emerging priority areas: Impact of COVID-19, including the impact of the Governments' response and recovery policy measures on youth, and the way forward in a post-pandemic reality; Rural Youth; Media, data, and digital literacy; Health and social protection; Youth and Science; Youth and Diaspora; and Youth Migration / Brain Drain / Brain Circulation / Expansion of vulnerability of youth groups / Participation and Empowerment.
 - Evidence-based youth policy, making use of data and digital technologies.
 - Monitoring, evaluation and learning, capitalization of knowledge and promotion of good models at central and local levels.
- Provide institutional funding for the youth sector (organizations, associations, groups, networks, and other forms) to ensure sustainability of operations through supporting with financial means and skills development in a flexible way.
- Continue direct support to youth by evaluating progress, identifying best practices, and customizing support based on assessed needs and demands from the youth sector.
- Intensify direct support for the youth sector (organizations, associations, groups, networks and other forms) in priority and emerging areas: Employment, income generation, start-ups; VET; Digital Skills; Impact of COVID-19 and the way forward in a post-pandemic reality; Rural Youth; Media, data, and digital literacy; Health and social protection; Youth and Science; Youth and Diaspora; Youth Migration / Brain Drain / Brain Circulation / Expansion of vulnerability of youth groups / Participation and Empowerment.
- Provide support (financial and capacity, skills, networks, advocacy, mobility, exchange, and mentoring) for Youth in the Quadruple Helix: Youth engagement with academia and research, civil society, the policy sector, media, and the private sector.
- Youth issues and needs should be recognized in donors' overall strategic priorities and plans, while trying to change the approach from “mainstream” or “integrated” youth issues across other sectors to including a specific horizontal youth component.



- It is necessary for donors and WB6 Governments to support the creation of a donor coordination database in the field of youth, and to enhance monitoring and the comprehensive evaluation of projects or programs worth millions.

Recommendations for youth organisations / civil society / youth

- Youth organizations should focus on strengthening sustainable and trusting relations with diverse groups of youth and channel their interests, needs, and demands into decision making.
- Youth organizations should enhance efforts for networking, cooperation, and partnership-building with one another and other civil society actors.
- Well-established youth organizations and networks should provide peer-to-peer support, guidance, and mentorship for smaller, grassroots organizations and youth initiatives from rural and remote areas.
- Youth organizations should further develop their capacities, both in terms of human and organizational capacities, and particularly regarding organizational development, project management, fundraising and networking, advocacy and lobbying, digitalization, communication and outreach. Youth organizations and networks working in policy advocacy need to further develop their research expertise.
- Youth organizations should identify new streams of financial resources to become financially sustainable and break the cycle of donor-dependency.
- Youth organizations must be more proactive in communicating with relevant government institutions responsible for youth issues.
- The youth organizations should develop a clear mission and develop a strategic plan for the organizations that guide priorities for the short-term and long-term periods. In addition, youth organizations should prepare members or staff with the necessary information to support youth causes.
- Organizations should strive to reach a wide spectrum of youth particularly rural youth, marginalized youth, those living in periphery or in dire economic situation.



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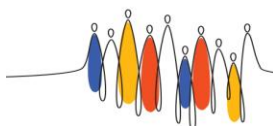
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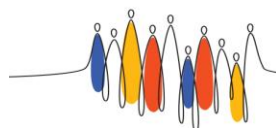
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¹ Knowledge HUB: COVID-19 impact on the youth sector, available at <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/covid-19> (Accessed January 17, 2021).



ANNEXES

Annex 1 - Regional Initiatives on Youth: networks, organizations, programs and projects

Regional networks and platforms

Western Balkan Youth Cooperation Platform

The Western Balkans Youth Cooperation Platform (WBYCP)⁸⁰ is a grassroots regional youth platform implemented by the Cooperation and Development Institute (CDI in Tirana, Albania), together with the umbrella youth organizations of the six Western Balkans Countries – the National Youth Congress of Albania, the National Youth Council of Macedonia, the National Youth Council of Serbia, the High School Students Union of Montenegro, the Central Youth Action Council of Kosovo, and the Bosnia and Herzegovina Association for the United Nations. It was established in 2017 to promote youth connectivity in the Balkans. The WBYCP serves as a resource center and marketplace, where youngsters from the region meet, plan, organize, implement and give voice to their action. The WBYCP is supported by the German political research foundation, the Hanns Seidel Foundation. The WBYCP does not provide funding for youth. It provides tools for cooperation such as a partner search database, library and idea space. WBYCP organizes frequent events with youth and stakeholders to discuss issues of interest to youth such as the impact of COVID-19, youth advocacy, youth dialogue in the WB, education, employment and others. It has organized annual events and supports youth participation in other regional or European youth events.

Western Balkans Alumni Association

The Western Balkans Alumni Association (WBAA)⁸¹ is a regional association of alumni from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Kosovo * and Serbia who have spent part of their studies, traineeship or voluntary activities in one of the Erasmus+ Programme Countries, either as an EU or non-EU economy scholar or as a self-funded individual.

Officially launched in March 2018, WBAA was born from the EU's Western Balkans Platform on Education and Training in 2014, where the Ministers of Education of the 6 Western Balkan countries agreed on the need to establish a regional network of alumni. It offers opportunities for engagement and it is based on the feeling of community. It conducts research, activities, and awareness raising.

ALDA Balkan Youth - Balkan Network for Local Democracy

The Balkan Network for Local Democracy (BNLD)⁸² is a regional network promoting active citizen participation, democratic governance principles, local development, and co-operation between civil society organizations and local public authorities in the Western Balkan Region. The BNLD is founded by the European Association for local democracy (ALDA) and the 7 Local Democracy Agencies (LDA) from the Western Balkans (except for Albania), aiming to support regional cooperation. BLDN receives funding from the European Union. Open dialogue between youth and stakeholders in their communities, but also in Balkan region countries, is the main objective and position of youth, which the creation of the platform seeks to achieve.

The BNLD is a good example of involvement of youth as core actors in the decision-making process. The Regional Youth Working Group is an informal group of young people working closely with the LDAs. The role of these young people is to enhance the network and coordinate on activities with the goal of increasing and

⁸⁰ For more visit <https://connecting-youth.org/home.php> (Accessed October 20, 2020).

⁸¹ For more visit <https://www.western-balkans-alumni.eu/about-wbaa/> (Accessed October 20, 2020).

⁸² For more visit <http://www.alda-balkan-youth.eu/> (Accessed October 20, 2020).



improving youth participation and dialogue within their communities. The members of the Regional Youth Working Group are participating in the activities of the network and have an advisory role for the LDAs for all actions related to youth. The participation in the Regional Youth Working Group is on a voluntary basis.

UN Women Youth Engagement Network

UN Women Europe and Central Asia has initiated a UN Women Youth Engagement Network⁸³ that focuses on gender equality. In October 2020 it opened a call for expression of interest, inviting youth organizations, youth leaders, youth platforms, schools, and universities representing young people from diverse groups across intersectional complexities of marital status, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, sexual characteristics, indigenous and ethnic identities, age, and refugee or migrant status in the Western Balkans, Turkey, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe Partnership countries to be part of the UN Women Youth Engagement Network. The aim of the network is to map and connect with youth-led and youth-serving organizations and platforms engaged in gender equality and women's empowerment from the region as part of the preparations for the [Gender Equality Forum](#) in 2021.

Youth Balkan Hub – Western Balkan and Turkey

Youth Bank Hub Western Balkans and Turkey (YBHWBT)⁸⁴ was initially founded in 2016 by five youth organizations: Partners Albania for Change and Development (Albania), Mladiinfo International (North Macedonia), Prima Association (Montenegro), Ana and Vlade Divac Foundation (Serbia) and Community Volunteers (Turkey). Now it represents a network of 20 youth organizations from the Western Balkans and Turkey whose objective is to ensure greater involvement of young people in Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey. YBHWBT collects data on youth, monitors and follows the involvement of youth in the WBs and Turkey. It seeks to support youth policy changes to achieve a higher participation of young people in the political, economic, and social life in each economy. The Hub is funded by the European Union.

YBHWBT has initiated two interesting initiatives:

First, the Youth Participation Index, measuring the level of opportunity the young people have, to be involved in the decision-making process. However, the index has been published only for 2017 and 2018. Producing this index on an annual basis and sharing it with diverse stakeholders would be an added value.

Second, Youth Banks, which consist of local organizations of young people who design and run their own projects, while also supporting other youth local initiatives in fundraising, project managing and promotion of their projects. The particular value of the model is that it brings together local municipalities, the business sector, and young people. The impact and success of these initiatives are not entirely clear in the project website.

Youth Bank Hub Western Balkan and Turkey produces policy papers, reports, and analysis, but it needs more cooperation with other stakeholders so their recommendations can reach decision makers.

Mladiinfo

⁸³ For more visit <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/10/announcement-call-for-participation-youth-engagement-network> (Accessed October 20, 2020).

⁸⁴ For more visit <https://ybhwt.eu/> (Accessed October 20, 2020).



An online platform providing information for youth, work on youth empowerment and social entrepreneurship, Mladiinfo.eu provides information for youth on education, grants, scholarships, projects, and so on.

European Youth Portal

The European Youth Portal⁸⁵ offers European and national information and opportunities that are of interest to young people who are living, learning and working in Europe. It provides information around eight main themes, covers 35 countries and is available in 28 languages. The information in this website is arranged by theme, such as education and training, creativity and culture, health and well-being, etc.

Think for Europe Network

The “Think for Europe” Network of Think Tanks and EU Policy Research Centers in South-East Europe (TEN)⁸⁶ was established in 2013. TEN members are brought together by the values of good governance and rule of law as primary drivers of the development of our societies. Its members are non-profit, independent think-tank or policy research organizations focusing on the EU integration process and committed to evidence-based policymaking and advocacy. The members of TEN are think tanks with solid policy research portfolios and policy communication and advocacy capacities.

TEN is implementing the project “Making a Future Together: EU and the Western Balkans from the Youth Perspective,”⁸⁷ funded by the European Union, 2020-2022. This Project is implemented in partnership with the members of the Think for Europe Network, the [Institute for International Affairs in Rome](#), the [Bronsilav Geremek Foundation Centre](#) in Warsaw and the [European Policy Centre](#) in Brussels. This project directly contributes to inclusive and participatory policymaking at the European Union (EU) level by bringing citizens’ input into the formulation and redefinition of EU enlargement policy to the Western Balkans. More specifically, it aims to engage youth from the Western Balkans in the Future of Europe Debate.

Balkan Civil Society Development Network

The Balkan Civil Society Development Network was established in 2001 as a pilot program for capacity building and has undergone significant transformations. Today it is a network of stakeholders aiming to empower civil society and influence European and national policies towards a more enabling environment for civil society development in order to ensure sustainable and functioning democracies in the Balkans. They work in four main areas:

- Monitoring the enabling environment for civil society development and producing periodical Monitoring Matrixes in cooperation with local CSOs, which are now reference points for assessing the position of CSOs in WB countries
- Improving EU policies for Civil Society Development in Enlargement Countries
- Capacity-Building of Civil Society
- Influencing Donor Strategies and Practices

BCSDN work is supported by various donors but primarily the EU and the Government of the Republic of Croatia. The Regional Civil Society Development Hub is established by BCSDN through the project “Protecting

⁸⁵ For more visit https://europa.eu/youth/about-us_en (Accessed October 20, 2020).

⁸⁶ For more visit <https://www.thinkforeurope.org/about-us> (Accessed October 20, 2020).

⁸⁷ For more visit <https://www.thinkforeurope.org/projects/make-future-together-eu-and-the-western-balkans-from-the-youth-perspective> (Accessed October 20, 2020).



Civic Space – Regional Civil Society Development Hub”, funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). The Hub aims to be a regional center with a global impact that will create and share knowledge and innovation on CSOs’ role in promoting democracy and supporting the development of civil society in the Western Balkans in the long term.

BCSDN provides information, resources, analysis, reports and useful links and contacts for CSOs in WB.

SALTO-Youth - South East Europe Resource Centre

SALTO-YOUTH is a network of seven resource centers working on European priority areas within the youth field. It stands for Support, Advanced Learning, and Training Opportunities for Youth. It works within the Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps programs.

The SALTO South East Europe Resource Centre promotes co-operation between the Program Countries and Western Balkan Partner Countries in the frame of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action Programme and European Solidarity Corps.⁸⁸

South East Europe Youth Network

South East European Youth Network is a network organization in the field of youth working on youth activism, volunteering infrastructure, non-formal education, youth employment, mobility, as well as social innovations, and youth in community development. It has four core pillars:

1. Peace and Democracy Development.
2. Community Development And Solidarity.
3. Employment and Entrepreneurship.
4. SEE BRIDGE - cooperation with EU and other regions.

It receives funding primarily from European Union: Europe Aid program, IPA program EACEA - Erasmus+.

EU-Council of Europe youth partnership

The aim of the EU-CoE youth partnership⁸⁹ is to foster synergies between the priorities and programs pursued by the two partner institutions in the youth field. It contributes to their respective work: for the EU, on implementing the aims of the EU Youth Strategy to engage, connect, and empower; for the Council of Europe, on the 2020-2021 priorities of the youth sector: young people’s access to rights, youth participation and youth work, and inclusive and peaceful societies, as well as the Council of Europe Youth Strategy 2030.

The partnership offers a platform for their cooperation and functions as a “think tank” and a laboratory, gathering and producing knowledge, translating it for an effective use in youth policy and practice, developing and testing new approaches, and considering traditional themes and innovative trends.

Some activities are targeted to Western Balkans.

Key pillars of work:

1. Youth research: developing knowledge on youth to better understand current and upcoming challenges and trends in the lives of young people, and their implications for youth policy and youth work.
2. Youth policy: informing youth policy by offering relevant evidence, knowledge, and building capacity of the youth policy actors.
3. Youth work: promoting and strengthening youth work and recognition of its contribution to, inter alia, youth participation and social inclusion of young people.

⁸⁸ For more visit <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/see/> (Accessed October 20, 2020).

⁸⁹ For more visit <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/about-us> (Accessed October 20, 2020).



The European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCYP)

The European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCYP)⁹⁰ is an on-line database intended to provide the youth sector with a single access point to reliable knowledge and information about young people's situation across Europe. The EKCYP aims at enhancing knowledge transfers between the fields of research, policy, and practice through the collection and dissemination of information about youth policy, research, and practice in Europe and beyond.

Regional organizations

Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO)

Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO)⁹¹ is an independently-functioning institutional mechanism, founded by the Western Balkans 6 participants (WB 6): Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, aiming to promote the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation between the youth in the region through youth exchange programs. RYCO has launched 4 call for proposals so far. Its headquarters are in Tirana, Albania, but it has local branches in all the capitals across the region.

European Fund for the Balkans

The European Fund for the Balkans⁹² is a joint initiative of European foundations ([Erste Foundation](#), [Robert Bosch Foundation](#) and [King Baudouin Foundation](#)) that envisions, runs and supports programs aimed at strengthening democracy, fostering European integration and affirming the role of the Western Balkans in addressing Europe's emerging challenges. Key priority areas: empowering citizen's engagement, enhancing regional cooperation, boosting European integration.

EFB supports the following initiatives at the regional level:

The Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG) is a cooperative initiative of the European Fund for the Balkans (EFB) and the Centre for Southeast European Studies of the University of Graz, (CSEES) with the aim to promote the European integration of the Western Balkans and the consolidation of democratic, open countries in the region.

The Fellowship at the Austrian Parliament, The EFB Fellowship at the Austrian Parliament is a practice-oriented educational program for civil servants working at the national parliaments of Western Balkan countries. The purpose of the program is to give impetus to the EU integration-driven reforms of the Western Balkan parliaments' administrations, by means of building the capacities of individual agents of change. It is financed by the ERSTE Foundation.

The Social Dimension Initiative of EFB, ASB Serbia and Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung for Southeast Europe launched by ASB in August 2018, aims to stress the necessity of better social and employment policies in the enlargement process of the Western Balkan countries beyond the framework of the EU social acquis.

The Berlin Process Resource and Information Center designed as a one-stop info point for all information pertaining to the Berlin Process since 2017.

⁹⁰ For more visit <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/knowledge/-/ekcyp> (Accessed October 20, 2020).

⁹¹ For more visit <https://www.rycowb.org/> (Accessed October 20, 2020).

⁹² For more visit <https://balkanfund.org/> (Accessed October 20, 2020).



The Civil Society Forum is a platform enabling dialogue between Balkan citizens and regional and European decision-makers, within the Berlin Process. Its goal is to ensure civil society participation in the deliberation and creation of policies tailored to bring the countries of the region closer to each other and to anchor them in the European Union.

Balkan Trust for Democracy

The Balkan Trust for Democracy (BTD)⁹³ is an initiative that supports democracy, good governance, and Euro Atlantic integration in Southeastern Europe. This award-winning public-private partnership was created in 2003 by the German Marshall Fund of the United States, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. BTD's original ten-year mandate came to an end in May 2013. BTD then entered into its second mandate (2013-20) with structural changes to geographic coverage and grantmaking scope.

BTD Grants

The Balkan Trust for Democracy (BTD) awards grants to support projects addressing themes of democracy and good governance, policy dialogue and networking, and regional cooperation and European integration. BTD's grantmaking activities focus primarily on six countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia. BTD also support relevant regional initiatives that promote benefits of pan-Balkan network, including civil society stakeholders from Western and Eastern Europe, and in particular those based in Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania. Priority areas within these themes include:

- Civic Engagement
- Youth Leadership and Empowerment
- Government Accountability and Transparency
- Culture of Giving
- Euro-Atlantic Integration
- Dialogue and Reconciliation
- Leadership Development

BTD is committed to developing the next generation of Balkan leaders by providing a range of opportunities to train, network, and travel with their peers across Europe and the United States. Programs that BTD implements throughout the Balkan region include: the [Young Transatlantic Network](#), the [Marshall Memorial Fellowship Program](#), and the [Transatlantic Inclusion Leaders Network](#). With these programs, there are opportunities for established, mid-career, and next generation leaders to hone their own leadership and professional skills, as well as to forge partnerships that develop sustainable solutions to global problems.

Western Balkan Fund

The Western Balkans Fund (WBF)⁹⁴ is an international organization located in Tirana, Albania, founded by the governments of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo *, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. Its establishment (2017), as an all-inclusive and regionally owned initiative, is considered as a clear sign of a new cooperation spirit taking roots in the Balkans.

⁹³ For more visit <https://www.gmfus.org/program/balkan-trust-democracy> (Accessed October 20, 2020).

⁹⁴ For more visit <http://westernbalkansfund.org/about-us/> (Accessed October 20, 2020).



WBF aims to promote cooperation and the common values between citizens, civil society and people to people contacts, by providing funding for small and medium projects, in the following key areas: Sustainable economic development; Education exchange and cooperation; Cultural cooperation. Youth, cross-border cooperation, European integration and gender, are overarching issues, covering all WBF areas of cooperation. The Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs is the supreme body of the Fund. It meets once a year and is composed by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Contracting Parties or their duly authorized representatives.

The Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs approves the annual and long-term plans regarding activities of the Fund, the budget of the Fund, annual statements and clearance of budget presented by the Council of Senior Officials. No particular youth participation in governing bodies is in place.

Westminster Foundation for Democracy: Western Balkan Democracy Initiative

The Western Balkans Democracy Initiative (WBDI)⁹⁵ works with eight parliaments, public institutions, political parties and civil society organizations across six countries to improve representation of women, young people and persons with disability in political processes that impact on their lives. WBDI will support political parties to make their internal structures more democratic and responsive to marginalised groups policy needs. WFD has offices in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia that work at the national level to improve democratic process in the region. WBDI is based and managed out of Belgrade.

Regional programs

Young European Ambassadors

The Young European Ambassadors (YEA)⁹⁶ platform is a creative network of future young game changers from across the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia) and the European Union (EU). The aim is for YEAs that come from different backgrounds, to share an interest in learning about the EU's values, and to promote the opportunities that the EU offers. Most importantly, YEAs are open to sharing ideas and developing their talents – towards inspiring change within their communities, the Western Balkan region, and across the EU. The new team of 60 YEAs announced in autumn 2020 is made of five Ambassadors and five Attachés from across the Western Balkans: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. YEA has set a good example in the selection process of ambassadors every year, with a four-stage process: Call for Application, Online Voting, Jury Selection and an Announcement. The Young European Ambassadors platform is coordinated on behalf of the EU institutions by the EU Regional Communication Programme for the Western Balkans.

Western Balkan Initiative

International Institute for Peace (Vienna, Austria) has established the Western Balkan Initiative: *Young Generations for the new Balkans 2030: Towards Alternative Horizons*,⁹⁷ setting the spotlight on youth, their progressive stances, and their hopes for the future. Together with local and international partners, these series discuss and analyze the overall situation of the Western Balkans and the countries' cooperation with the international system, the EU, and NATO through workshops, seminars, panel discussions, policy

⁹⁵ For more visit <https://www.wfd.org/programs/western-balkans/> (Accessed October 20, 2020).

⁹⁶ For more visit <https://www.webalkans.eu/> (Accessed October 20, 2020).

⁹⁷ For more visit <https://www.iipvienna.com/western-balkan-initiative> (Accessed October 20, 2020).



recommendations, and art in order to understand the reality and set trends for a positive future of our neighboring region.

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Dialogue Southeast Europe

Since 2015, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung has established an infrastructure to coordinate the FES' regional work: the Regional Dialogue Southeast Europe (Dialogue SOE).⁹⁸ To that end, Dialogue SOE provides analysis of shared challenges in the region and develops suitable regional programs and activities in cooperation with the respective FES offices. Our work is conducted in close cooperation with colleagues and partners across the region. Activities are jointly implemented and overseen by either an FES office or Dialogue SOE. Furthermore, we integrate our regional work into joint initiatives with our colleagues in Berlin and Brussels. We aim to inform and be informed by the efforts of both local and international organizations in order to further our work in southeastern Europe as effectively as possible. It focuses on social democratic politics and values, social and economic justice, and progressive peace policy. Youth is a key part of SOE activities. The FES released groundbreaking reports on the experiences and attitudes of youth in Southeast Europe, providing an insight into young people's views in different realms of life such as education, employment, migration, political participation & values, leisure, and so on. The studies intend to address the lack of channels by giving youth a voice on topics that could substantially impact their future.⁹⁹ In addition to a regional youth study, national studies and policy papers are developed and Fact Sheets are disseminated.

Western Balkans Enterprise Development & Innovation Facility - Youth Employment

The EU is providing support as part of the initiative 'EU for Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship,'¹⁰⁰ implemented under the Western Balkans Enterprise Development and Innovation Facility (WB EDIF).

The Western Balkans Enterprise Development and Innovation Facility (WB EDIF) is a comprehensive financing platform combining loans, equity, guarantees, incentive grants and technical assistance to support SME growth. Since 2012, the EU has provided over €190 million through the WB EDIF, supporting 113,000 jobs and 5,400 SMEs across the Western Balkans.¹⁰¹

The WB EDIF is an EU funded initiative which aims at increasing the financial resources made available to SMEs based in the Western Balkans, as well as to support services for private sector development, to support socio-economic development and EU accession across the Region.

The WB EDIF was launched in December 2012 by the European Commission, the EIF, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the European Investment Bank (EIB), acting as co-lead international financial institutions.¹⁰²

WB EDIF Guarantee Facility – Youth Employment (WB EDIF GF Youth)

Building on the successful results of WB EDIF GF and WB EDIF GF II and in parallel with a currently ongoing facility aimed only at Serbian SMEs, a dedicated Youth Employment window is now open to improve access to finance for SMEs in all Western Balkan Beneficiary Economies, with a view to support youth employment in the region. WB EDIF GF Youth is a window of the Western Balkans EDIF Guarantee Facility, under which EIF

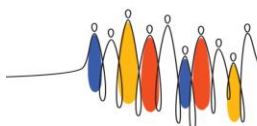
⁹⁸ For more visit <https://www.fes-soe.org/about-us/dialogue-southeast-europe/> (Accessed October 20, 2020).

⁹⁹ For more visit <https://www.fes-soe.org/features/youth-studies/> (Accessed October 20, 2020).

¹⁰⁰ For more visit https://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/youth-strategy/employment-entrepreneurship_en (Accessed October 20, 2020).

¹⁰¹ For more visit <https://www.pubaffairsbruxelles.eu/the-eu-boosts-youth-employment-in-the-western-balkans-with-e10-million-for-small-and-medium-enterprises-eu-commission-press/> (Accessed October 20, 2020). (Accessed October 20, 2020).

¹⁰² For more visit https://www.eif.org/what_we_do/resources/wbedif/index.htm (Accessed October 20, 2020).



will provide first-loss capped guarantees to selected Financial Intermediaries that build up a portfolio of debt instruments to SMEs established and operational in the Western Balkans region.

Regional projects

Western Balkan Youth Lab Project

The three-year EU funded Western Balkans Youth Lab Project that kicked-off in January 2020 aims to provide opportunities for youth to participate in decision-making. The project covers the Western Balkans Six economies (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Serbia and North Macedonia) in which youth constitute 21.27% of the overall population. It is implemented by the Regional Cooperation Council.¹⁰³ The WB Youth Lab Project consists of four components which are interlinked with each other:

- Mapping of Youth Policies and Identification of Existing Support and Gaps in Financing of Youth Actions in Western Balkans
- Western Balkans Youth Policy Labs
- Strengthening the National Youth Councils in the Western Balkans
- Participation of Western Balkan youth in regional and international events

Supporting the Western Balkan's Collective Leadership on Reconciliation

The overall goal of the project is to foster social cohesion and reconciliation, enhance attitudes of tolerance, and reduce prejudice and discrimination among youth in the Western Balkans, through supporting RYCO in building its institutional capacity and partnerships with civil society, education institutions (schools) grassroots youth organizations, and youth in general. The project strengthens RYCO as a regionally owned mechanism with the mandate to promote reconciliation, mobility, diversity, democratic values, participation, active citizenship and intercultural learning.¹⁰⁴

The project is implemented in partnership between RYCO – Regional Youth Cooperation Office, UNDP – The United Nations Development Programme, UNFPA – The United Nations Population Fund, UNICEF - The United Nations Children's Fund, with the financial support of the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund. The project runs from October 2018 to December 2020, across the Western Balkans 6.

Enhancing Youth Cooperation and Youth Exchange in the WB6

The European Union is supporting RYCO to create a more enabling environment and new opportunities for young people to travel and explore the WB6, get to know their peers, and cooperate on shared projects in the field of community activism, culture, sports, environment, and many more.

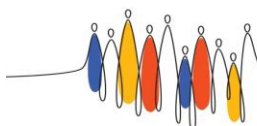
The project builds upon the RYCO's previous experience in grant-making and innovates it by making it more participatory for youth. The project aim is to include young people in informing the priorities of RYCO work, increase their awareness about opportunities for youth participation across the region, and work on strengthening the capacities of CSOs in the WB for the implementation of regional youth mobility projects. It takes place across the Western Balkans 6 from March 2019 to November 2021.¹⁰⁵

ROUTE WB6

¹⁰³ For more visit <https://www.rcc.int/youthlab> (Accessed October 20, 2020).

¹⁰⁴ For more visit https://www.rycowb.org/?page_id=7704 (Accessed October 20, 2020).

¹⁰⁵ For more visit https://www.rycowb.org/?page_id=7810 (Accessed October 20, 2020).



The overall aim of the project is to promote long-term and short-term cross-border volunteering as a tool that will contribute to the reduction of social and ethnic distance among young people in the region, as well as to strengthen their pro-social and European values that will lead to the reconciliation, stability and prosperity of the WB6 region.

The project is implemented across the Western Balkans 6 by a consortium led by the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) in association with the following organizations from the WB6: Beyond Barriers, South East European Youth Network, Lens, Youth Cultural Center Bitola, Association for Democratic Prosperity Zid and Young Researchers of Serbia. The project activities have started on 1 January 2019 and will end in December 2021.¹⁰⁶

Regional Youth Compact for Europe

The Balkan Network for Local Democracy is implementing the Regional Youth Compact for Europe,¹⁰⁷ which is a cooperation initiative launched by 14 CSOs from the EU, Western Balkans, and Turkey with the aim to enhance the effective participation of civil society and youth organizations in the EU integration and accession negotiation process through capacity building, awareness raising, and advocacy actions organized at local, national, and regional levels. This initiative is implemented by the Center for Democracy Foundation based on the experience of the European ALDA network and the ALDA – Western Balkans Network for Local Democracy, including also CRTA from Serbia, Youth Act from Albania and SODEM from Turkey. This project is funded by the European Union and the Balkan Trust for Democracy, a project of the German Marshall Fund of the United States.

Regional Incubator for Social Entrepreneurs

The objective of the project is to address a specific and crucial need in the region in relation to its current context and history: opening new spaces of reconciliation for the youth of the Western Balkans through social entrepreneurship. The project, due to its very regional nature, will tend to increase the number of cross-border interactions around social entrepreneurship during the 3 years of the project and thereafter. This project is implemented by RYCO, in partnership with GROUPE SOS Pulse, SEEYN, the Franco-German Youth Office and the *Institut Français*. It is a three-year project that started on 1 October 2019 and is being implemented across the Western Balkans 6. This project is co-funded by the French Development Agency.¹⁰⁸

Western Balkan Civil Society Organizations for Youth Employment Support

The WeB4YES (Western Balkan Civil Society Organizations for Youth Employment Support)¹⁰⁹ project has been supported under the framework of the Civil Society Facility and Media Programme 2016-2017, Consolidating Regional Thematic Networks of Civil Society Organizations by the European Commission. The WeB4YES Project will last for 36 months starting from January 2018. This Project represents a regional-scale initiative designed to deliver innovative cross-sectoral approaches and provide young unemployed citizens of the Western Balkan region opportunities for employability enhancement and employment. The project coordinator is Belgrade Open School and the partners on the project are: Beyond Barriers Association (Tirana, Albania), Association for Democratic Prosperity – ZID (Podgorica, Montenegro), the Institute for Youth Development KULT (Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina), NGO Lens (Pristina, Kosovo), the National Youth

¹⁰⁶ For more visit https://www.rycowb.org/?page_id=7813 (Accessed October 20, 2020).

¹⁰⁷ For more visit <http://www.alda-balkan-youth.eu/Youth-Compact> or <http://www.centaronline.org/en/project/1775/project-regional-youth-compact-for-europe> (Accessed October 20, 2020).

¹⁰⁸ For more visit https://www.rycowb.org/?page_id=7816 (Accessed October 20, 2020).

¹⁰⁹ For more visit <https://www.web4yes.eu/about.html> (Accessed October 20, 2020).



Council of Macedonia (Skopje, North Macedonia), and the Olof Palme International Center (Stockholm, Sweden).

WeB4YES is a successful example in the provision of capacity building for grassroots organizations targeting youth unemployment and empowerment. It has provided not only capacity building, but also sub-granting for grassroots CSOs across the region.

U-Report Western Balkan Voice Matters

The Western Balkans U-Report is the first of its kind as a sub-regional U-Report and it includes the UNICEF Offices in Albania, Kosovo*, and Montenegro.¹¹⁰ U-Report is a free and anonymous digital tool, created by UNICEF Global, where young people can freely and safely speak out on topics that are important to them and to their community. U-Report directly interacts with young people ages 15 and higher, with a focus on those ages 15 to 24, who sign up to become U-Reporters through simple polls sent via Facebook Messenger or Viber. These polls are focused on topics and challenges that are most relevant to U-Reporters in their respective communities, and they give youth the means and a channel for stating and discussing their opinions and satisfaction with regards to children's rights, equality, socio-political and economic developments, and any other areas that are relevant to them in their respective communities.

Moreover, U-Report promotes dialogue, freedom of expression, and gives youth the platform and the voice to actively participate in and help shape policy development, and to become more informed about matters that are important to them so that they can make a difference in their communities. The goal of the Western Balkans U-Report is to serve as a platform that facilitates the flow of information and analysis at national and sub-regional levels, providing many quantifiable and reliable metrics for evaluating and steering national and regional policy development and integration, and for gauging progress on SDGs and on other global indicators such as gender equality, human rights, inclusion of youth in decision-making processes and others.

¹¹⁰ For more visit <https://westernbalkans.ureport.in/about/> (Accessed October 20, 2020).

