



Regional Youth Cooperation Office – RYCO

Safety and Protection Guidelines for Children and Youth

Tirana, July 2018

Introduction

RYCO is an independently functioning institutional mechanism, founded by the Western Balkans 6 participants (WB6): Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, Macedonia and Serbia, aiming to promote the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation between the youth in the region through youth exchange programs. All signed and ratified conventions and national laws, by WB6, regarding children's safety and protection, are what RYCO fully respects and stand for within its work. With this, we invite everyone to fully commit, follow and advocate the legal principles for enabling safety for youth in each activity in the region.

The RYCO Youth Safety and Protection Guidelines document is binding for all grantees and partners of RYCO, especially to those implementing and organizing youth exchanges and mobility processes within the RYCO projects.

This document defines set of rules, procedures and standards which are to be followed when planning and conducting activities with young people (age of 15 to 30) that involves situation where they need legal and safety protection.

Based on this policy paper, each beneficiary/associate shall follow defined rules and will be responsible for safety of youth and their own approach of bringing safety rules to life, as well as on local and on regional levels.

Each situation has a potential risk of jeopardizing the safety of actors included. RYCO strongly believes that with quality safety procedure and responsible organisation of activities, risk can be mitigated and even excluded. Also, it is very important to emphasize the core values of safety and protection for youth involved in any kind of processes. Some of young people could be more vulnerable to abuse and other forms of discrimination and marginalisation on base of any kind of their characteristics. RYCO stands firmly against these violations and empowers its employees, associates and partners to speak against it and when noticed to immediately report it to the respective authority.

It is very important that every single person connected to RYCO activities and projects understands the risks and possible violation of rights, as well as their role and responsibility in protecting and enabling safety for youth.

Goals of RYCO Safety and Protection Guidelines

Guidelines aim to:

- prevent cases of risks and youth's abuse or violence of any kind
- protect and enable safety for all young people involved in RYCO programmes and activities
- reduce the number of possible incidents within the RYCO projects – youth exchange activity
- enhance the awareness of youth about their rights and their active role in safety and protection during project implementation (especially young underage people)
- inform youth, co-workers, community members, partners (donors, journalists, governmental authorities, third parties, etc.) about the protection legislation and related procedures (awareness, prevention, reporting, responding)
- encourage RYCO staff team and associates to improve their skills needed to contribute to each youth's development and protection,
- nurture open and honest discussions with associates/grantees about quality project implementation with focus on enabling the safety and protection of participants - young people
- enhance the frequent, secure and transparent communication channels on safety and protection of participants of RYCO programmes

*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

Our Guidelines are based on:

1. European Convention on Human Rights ([ECHR](#))
2. The Scout Association UK – [Safeguarding in Scouting](#)
3. The standards on child protection as defined by the [Keeping Children Safe Coalition – Training Toolkit](#)
4. [Child protection policy](#) of Children International

RYCO stands for safety and protection of youth within its programs

RYCO stands that each activity should be expressed and conducted with consideration of young people's best interest.

RYCO is committed to:

- Taking into account young person's wellbeing and interests in all our activities.
- Respecting the rights, wishes and feelings of the young people with whom we work.
- Protecting and promoting the human rights of all young people without exception within our activities.
- Not accepting and not justifying any kind of abuse or violence in any kind of situation.
- Notifying the civil society organizations and schools involved in RYCO activities that they are obliged to protect young people with whom and for whom they work during the implementation of activities.

RYCO recommends that:

- All suspicious and unsubstantiated claims of abuse must be taken seriously and answered promptly and adequately.
- All involved actors have the responsibility to submit reports on cases where there is objective doubt about discrimination, violence or abuse.
- All grantees which conduct program activities with partners are obliged to meet at least the minimum standards of safety and protection of involved young people in joint programs.

RYCO PRINCIPLES

Guiding Principles on Youth Protection:

1. Having zero-tolerance for abuse. (Annex 1 – what kind of violence/abuse?)
2. Protecting young people's rights and their best interests.
3. Placing the young person as the first priority when dealing with all identified or suspected cases of abuse.
4. Empowering and educating young people on their rights, personal safety and steps they can take, if there is a problem.
5. Integrating safety and protection (especially young underage persons) into all aspects of our organizational strategy, structures and work practices.

Youth protection policy

Youth Protection Policy of RYCO is one of the obligations of every relevant actor working with youth (especially young people from 15 to 18) and having them involved in our/other activities. Ultimate goal is keeping youth safe. It includes above mentioned principles as a basis for activities that are done within the RYCO projects/funds or in partnership with RYCO. It contains proposed steps and protocols, reporting incidents, concrete steps in preventing violence/abuse, working on and talking about this topic as a primary component for enabling safe environment for all actors included. What we also pay a lot of attention on is the rules we follow for using information in print and web materials and safety measures for sponsor-beneficiary interactions.

With this Guideline, RYCO is setting the minimum standards of youth protection and safety with emphasis that each organizer of activities is obliged to develop their own concrete steps in providing youth protection and safety.

Youth protection protocols

Each RYCO Local Branch Office, as well as the RYCO Head Office is obliged to follow these principles and protocols, as well as to communicate it to the grantees, stakeholders and beneficiaries. When we refer to following the guidelines we mean to follow the ultimate principles for respecting human rights and children rights and safety procedure, but including local legislation/laws on abuse (especially child and youth abuse), procedures that are required by local laws, a list of local authorities to whom abuse cases are reported, as well as a list of partner organizations to contact that can provide the appropriate support services for victims.

Organizing project activities within RYCO – youth exchanges and study visits

For the overall functioning of safety and protection of youth, especially when organizing the youth exchanges (study visits – groups of minors traveling outside of their Contracting party) it is very important to share responsibility and internally define roles of each participant in the organizational process, as well as establishing a simple organisational system and internal communication system. Every individual included in project team/activities must know his/her responsibilities and obligations.

Prior to starting the implementation of the project, it is important to notify the parents about the involvement of their children in this project and to introduce them to main goals and objectives of project.

PARENTAL LEGAL CONSENT – in written – is requested form/a written statement from children's legal representative or parents for the participation in project. This form will include:

1. General information about young person (name, surname, age, place of birth, school of attendance/membership in CSO)
2. Statement by which parents agree on having their child as participant of certain project and youth exchange in the Western Balkans. It will be emphasized that youth exchange programs will be undertaken in one of the Contracting Parties in the Western Balkans, on the basis of project concept.
3. General/short information on project and information on project leader, contact person for a respective activity.

MEDICAL HISTORY INFORMATION/SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS FOR YOUNG PERSON

We think that it is important to obtain information on medical history/special requirements for young people involved in project activities to prevent or reduce the possibility of the risk of any health issue. This is very important to obtain especially if there is a youth exchange and host family/peer. The host family should receive prior to the visit the person's recent medical history or any specific medical information. They should be informed of any special medical needs, such as medications, allergies, dietary requirements and prescription glasses or contact lenses.

Young people-participants are required to have their own medical insurance. Organizer of the activities and host family are entitled to ask for a copy of this policy and any additional medical documentation to keep on file while the person is living with them. Host families are not responsible for youth exchange medical expenses. Young people may have special dietary needs related to health, religion, or personal preference. Encourage them to try new foods, but always respect their preferences.

INFO SESSIONS – MEETING WITH PARENTAL COUNCIL/PARENTS OF YOUNG PARTICIPANTS OF THE PROJECTS

We suggest frequent communication between organizers of the activities (CSOs and schools) and parents or legal representatives of young people involved (especially for the underage young people). On these info sessions, Local Branch Offices are at disposal for grantees to participate in this dialogue and if it is necessary to present the RYCO and our policy for safety and protection.

RYCO encourages youth workers, teachers, parents and associates to regularly share experiences among themselves and with the RYCO team, to present and discuss the best options for more safe and protected youth in general and within youth exchanges or some other project activities. They are also welcome to suggest any kind of reliable source and procedure that can upgrade the safety of youth.

- It is advised to establish cooperation with local institutions responsible for caring and providing various services for youth group.
- In this respect, it is necessary to establish cooperation with the local unit of the Police Administration, the Center for social work, etc., and institutions which obtain information on the treatment in case of violence against youth.
- Persons in charge of project implementation should plan their work to minimize the situation and the possibility for young people to suffer any possible harm/abuse. It is a good practice for one of the employees to be competent and trained in the area of rights and protection of human rights and as such becomes the first line of communication in all such cases.
- Also, it is a good practice to organize trainings and workshops with the rest of the project team, employees, volunteers of CSOs/schools, as well as with young people who are beneficiaries of the program.
- There should be an adequate supervision of youth (especially underage young persons) by project team at all times. This can vary depending on the needs of the group, the age of the participants, the vulnerability of young people, the gender classification and the general nature of the activities involved.
- It is necessary that CSO or school during the implementation process provides at least two people in charge/supervision for each youth group.

Reporting incidents

For all reported youth-abuse incidents, RYCO requires that the youth's best interest be the first priority. In addition, all incidents must be dealt with promptly, and they must be handled in a confidential manner that does not harm the victim or the person reporting the abuse. RYCO suggests for persons involved in programs to be proactive and not miss the identification of the signs and symptoms of violence/abuse.

- If you suspect or if you are informed that a young person is experiencing abuse NEVER try to investigate yourself further. Always seek further advice from the person that is legal representative of CSO or school (entity that is in charge of implementing the project) or from social services.

In cases when a young person finds that she/he has been abused or has abused others, do not judge. Try to support a child/young person. Keep in mind that you are there for them and that you can offer support, but you have to forward the information to the supervisor/legal representatives/authorities.

- In case of violence against young person or by a young person during the project activity organized by CSO/school, the person in charge of project should inform parents and where appropriate, the respective institution/authority.
- In case of suspicion or finding out that a young person is a victim of psychic, physical, sexual or any kind of violence/abuse occurring outside project activities organized by

CSO/school, the person in charge of project should inform the police and the Center for social work.

- If the ongoing procedure is against person in charge of project, on basis of suspicion of abuse, that person should be suspended until the end of the procedure.
- If there is a reasonable doubt that the person in charge of project abused his/her role during the study visit/youth exchange (or any activity during project implementation), he/she should be suspended and removed from further contact with participants, until the end of the procedure for determination of responsibility.

Actors in charge of acting in case of suspected violence and abuse among which there must be effective communication and cooperation are:

- Police services
- Social services
- Health services
- Judicial organs and
- Educational institutions.

Communicating the content with youth involved

[RYCO Visibility Guidelines](#) sets out the minimum requirements for a convenient communication regarding the RYCO supported projects and their activities. It contains rules and regulations for the acknowledgement of the provided support by RYCO through its open calls for project proposals.

Visibility is highly important for RYCO because of at least two reasons: firstly, RYCO aims to make a change in the region and it is crucial to assure that the successful stories of the awarded projects are well spread; secondly, the visibility is also a question of transparency – as RYCO is a governments-funded organization, all interested stakeholders have a right to be informed about its activities and given support.

Moreover, keep in mind that the visibility is a contractual obligation. Those specified requirements in Visibility Guidelines are the minimum that should be followed in all the cases, but that there can also be specific cases which can be handled on a case by case basis, having in mind the given circumstances and special context. We do believe that working with youth (especially underage persons) is a relevant fact that partially builds special circumstances of RYCO activities, especially if they are going to be published.

In order to protect young person, even when communicating and publishing web/social media content or printing materials, here are the measures we require:

- Telling the truth of the story. This means never using manipulated or sensationalized text and/or images, and certainly not employing discriminatory or degrading language.
- Never using images of inappropriately clothed young people.
- Not publicly disclosing a person's last name, personal address or other information that could be used to locate a person within a territory.
- Not publishing health information, unless the family or individual has given us written consent.

With all of the above suggestions respected and followed, organizers/implementers of activities with youth (especially underage young persons) and individuals featured in promo materials, must ask and later on send to RYCO, the consent (or their parents or legal guardians) using their image, personal data or story prior to publication.

- RYCO is committed to enable and secure the protective and caring environment with its beneficiaries/associates, which will ensure the main goal of the RYCO existence with full safety and protection of all actors involved.
- RYCO will not support any kind of violent communication or act.
- RYCO will condemn any kind of violence and discrimination towards people on the basis of ethnic, religious or sexual orientation.
- RYCO will not be responsible for organization and implementation of youth exchange programs in the region.
- RYCO is not responsible for health and travel insurance of the children within the implementation of the project and youth exchanges.
- RYCO will not support or justify violation of legal restrains/laws in any of the Contracting parties of WB6 during the implementation of the project activities (youth exchanges, meet ups, conferences, workshops...).
- RYCO is not financing any kind of activity that includes purchase or use of any kind of forbidden substances for participants of RYCO activities.
- RYCO will raise awareness regarding children's and youth's safety and its necessity through work ethic of its staff and through experience and daily work with associates.
- RYCO will encourage grantees – project teams to be responsible and more detailed when it comes to organization of youth exchanges and generally, project activities which include young people (especially underage people) as participants.

COMMUNICATION

In case you need additional information on the rules set out in this document or you need to report on any broken rule, please contact the RYCO Local Branch Officer in your Contracting Party. The contact details of the RYCO Local Branch Officer can be found at the RYCO website's [contact page](#).

ANNEX 1

What kind of violence/abuse?

Definitions of the four main categories of abuse:

Physical abuse is the actual or potential physical harm caused by an action or lack of action, which is reasonably within the control of the parent or person in a position of responsibility, power, or trust. Physical abuse may involve hitting, spanking, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning and suffocating. It can also mean causing physical harm to a person by fabricating the symptoms of, or deliberately causing, ill health to a person. The incidents may be single or repeated.

Sexual abuse is evidenced by an activity between a young person and an adult or another young person who, by age or development, is in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power; the activity being intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person. Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a young person to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the person is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact and penetrative or non-penetrative acts. This may also include involving person in looking at, or in the production of, pornographic material, or encouraging youth to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

Neglect and neglected treatment is the inattention or omission on the part of the caregiver to provide for the development of the person: health, education, emotional development, nutrition, shelter and safe living conditions, in the context of resources reasonably available to the family or caretakers and which causes, or has a high probability of causing, harm to the person's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. This includes the failure to properly supervise and protect children from harm as much as is feasible.

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional ill treatment of a person that adversely affects his or her self-perception and development. It may involve conveying to the person that he or she is worthless, unloved, and inadequate, or there only to meet the needs of another person; or imposing inappropriate expectations upon him/her. Acts include restricting movement, threatening, scaring, discriminating, scape-goating, corrupting, ridiculing, degrading, bullying, humiliating (e.g. asking potentially embarrassing questions, demanding potentially embarrassing action) or other non-physical forms of hostile or rejecting treatment.

Bullying or Child-to-Child abuse is abuse which should be treated with special sensitivity. To work and to have constructive dialogue with young people which committed violence against his/her peers, needs sensitive and structural approach. This approach needs to enable protection to those young people affected with this abuse – victim, and on the other hand support system to young person - abuser.

Any such approach requires:

- the recognition that a young person who has abused another young person differs significantly from adults who have committed similar offences, as the young person is not fully aware of why he or she has committed abuse and what the consequences are
- keeping in mind that the best interest of the young person is the primary consideration in all decisions made - for both the victim and the abuser.