

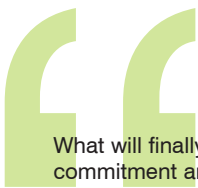
RYCO Strategic Plan 2019-2021

Regional Youth Cooperation Office
A Better Region Starts with Youth



#RYCOOPERATION
August 2018





What will finally become of RYCO will actually depend on the willingness, the commitment and the imagination of the different actors involved, and also on the cooperation and interaction between these different actors. The RYCO institution itself, the regional governments, the regional civil society actors, and the external supporters of RYCO hold the future of this novel endeavour in their hands.

From an article by Nicolas Moll entitled
'Youth Exchange as a Motor for Regional Cooperation'

Summary: The Plan in a Page //////////////////////////////////////

This strategy outlines RYCO's future plans for the coming three years. It was designed through a consultative approach with a large number of stakeholders. The document is intended for use by RYCO Secretariat staff, RYCO's Governing and Advisory Boards, and for RYCO's current and potential funding partners. The document is a reflection of RYCO's determination to instil and engender a culture of strategic thinking and ongoing planning throughout the organisation. Thus, like all viable and dynamic organisations operating in a volatile and complex context, this plan will be modified and strengthened during the coming three years as the organisation learns more about its environment, its constituency and the impact of its work with and for young people - and with those who work with them.

The plan addresses a fundamental challenge: How should RYCO balance the imperatives of quality, impact and scale?

At the core of the strategy are three strategic priorities:

- **Deliver high quality, high impact programmes** with and for young people, focusing on their access to mobility, exchange and regional cooperation
- **Build demand and a viable environment for youth** focussed programming with a wide range of stakeholders who influence and determine public policy, attitudes and behaviour
- **Invest in RYCO's competences** to ensure it delivers on its mandate and to the highest international standards of governance, leadership, representation, management and delivery.

Essentially, this strategy lays out three phases of development during the 2019-2021 planning period.

1. Programme consolidation and organisational strengthening
2. Programme development and expansion, and institutional strengthening
3. Programme adaptation and further development

In 2019 RYCO will focus on stabilising, consolidating and institutionalising its organisational and operational structures and systems in order to ensure the quality of its operations into the medium and long-term. This will mean making tough choices about balancing the temptation to respond to the many growth and expansion opportunities currently available, with the need to build a strong and sustainable organisation. Thus RYCO's growth in 2019 may not satisfy some within its stakeholder constituency who have been inspired by the organisation's success to date and who expect dramatic growth in scale of programming and organizational development and rapid reform of the youth situation in the Western Balkans six (WB6). However, RYCO would be failing its duty to its Contracting Parties, to its Governing Board and indeed to the region's youth if it were simply to grow organically without establishing the essential institutional, organisational and operational foundations and systems that it needs to assure quality, impact and scale.

Accordingly, 2020 and 2021 will build on the gains made in 2019 and will focus on programme expansion and development.



All... must unequivocally commit, in both word and deed, to overcoming the legacy of the past, by achieving reconciliation and solving open issues well before their accession to the EU, in particular border disputes.

From: 'A Credible Enlargement Perspective for the Western Balkans and
Enhanced EU Engagement with The Western Balkans'
European Commission

How RYCO Envisions the Future //////////////////////////////////////

RYCO's Vision of a Better Region

(RYCO's Programme Vision is both ambitious and pragmatic. It describes what young people will be doing in the coming years - and within the lifetime of its creators. It does not seek to describe a finality or a perfect world.)

Young people are creating a culture of mobility, intercultural exchange and reconciliation. They are active contributors to democratic development, social and economic prosperity, and European integration in an increasingly open Western Balkans region. Contracting Parties in the Western Balkans are providing proactive support to youth exchange and youth engagement within the Contracting Parties, and across the region.

RYCO's Vision of Better RYCO

(The institutional Vision describes the RYCO that its Secretariat, Governing Board and Advisory Board are building).

RYCO is becoming a model of institutional and organisational excellence. It is represented and managed by professionals of the highest calibre. Its structure, leadership, management and systems increasingly demonstrate the organisation's impartiality and its accountability to its stakeholders.

Programme Mission

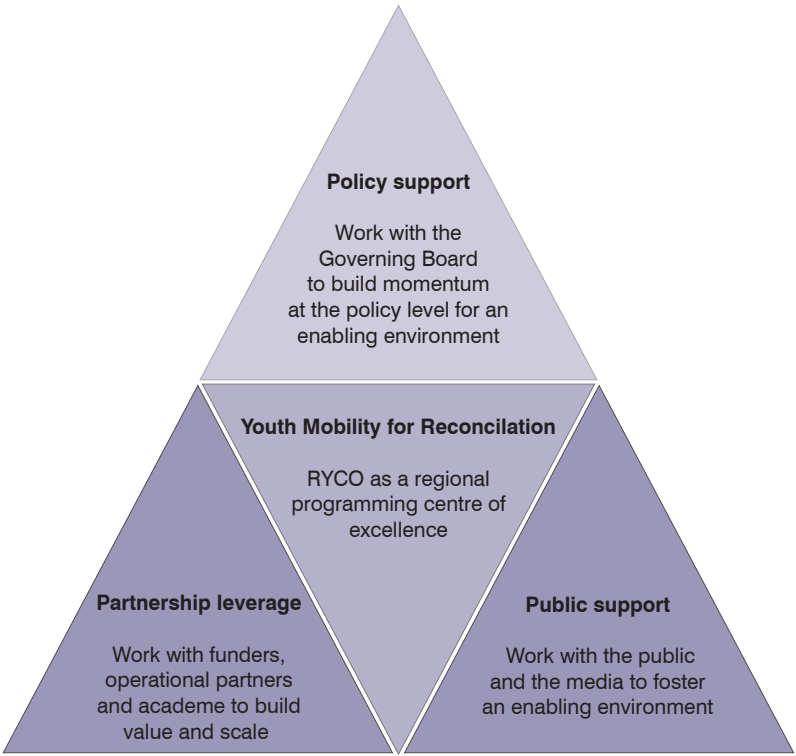
RYCO's programme focuses on creating opportunities for young people to engage in activities that build mutual understanding and reconciliation in the civic, social, educational, cultural and sports domains. RYCO initiates and participates in policy making and advocates for reform. It supports the development of a political and social environment that empowers and facilitates youth exchange. In pursuing its mission, RYCO will demonstrate its commitment to human rights, human dignity and the building of peace based on mutual respect and trust.

Institutional Mission

RYCO is an intergovernmental organisation that stewards and promotes regional, cross-border and intercultural cooperation within and among its six Western Balkan Contracting Parties. RYCO's unique governance system brings together government and civil society representatives to ensure young people are represented at all levels within the organisation. Its Local Branch Offices ensure RYCO is represented in all the six Contracting Parties, while its Headquarters is the organisational hub. RYCO will invest in the development and strengthening of its governing mechanisms, its leaders, its representatives, its staff team and in its internal systems in order to ensure it is governed, represented and managed to the highest international standards.

RYCO Will Leverage Its Unique Role ////////////////////

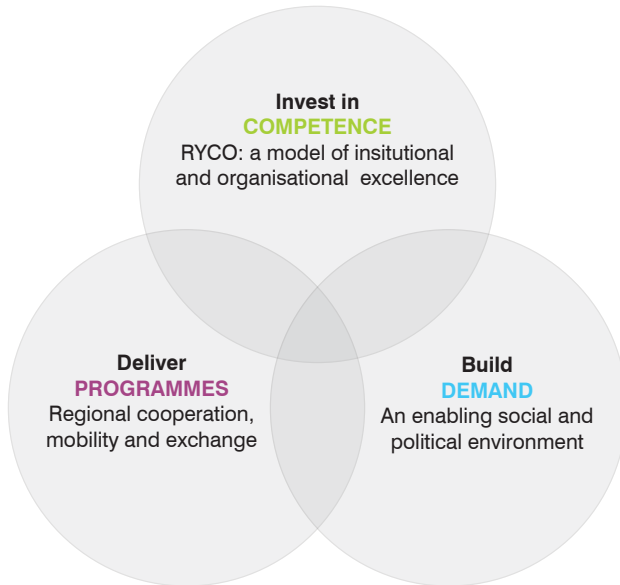
No other regional agency, organisation or structure is positioned to provide what RYCO can offer for the region's youth. No other inter-governmental initiative exists that can exert such a level of social and policy influence in support of RYCO and its objectives. No other regional structure has the programming reach or the essential access to policy-makers that is the unique nature of RYCO. Thus, RYCO's strategy will leverage the extraordinary opportunity that its six Contracting Parties have created. It will further leverage the funding and political partnership it seeks to develop with the European Union and its instruments. It will demonstrate how its work can assist the Contracting Parties in their medium and long-term accession and reform efforts. It will capitalise on a strong network of European and global partners to add value, complementarity of effort and focus on quality, and to demonstrate which programming investments work most effectively and enduringly for youth. Further it will leverage its Unique Selling Proposition to attract financial support from a variety of funding partners in order to strengthen programme quality, impact and scale.



Graphic 1. RYCO's leverage elements

An Overview of RYCO Strategic Priorities //////////////////////////////////////

RYCO strategy focuses on building and responding to demand for the unique opportunities that only RYCO can provide for young people across the region.



Graphic 2. RYCO's strategic priorities

Three strategic components form the basis of the strategy:

1. **Programmes**

Create opportunities for and access to regional youth cooperation, exchange and learning. Funding and technical support for innovative exchange projects and initiatives involving young people at every level.

2. **Demand**

Advocacy and participation with partners in policy development and reform-oriented dialogue that supports and enables a positive and supportive social, political and legislative environment for young people to engage in mobility and exchange with each other across the Western Balkans region.

3. **Competence**

Investment in the development of RYCO's people, internal systems, structures and instruments that strengthen the governance, leadership and delivery of RYCO's programme.



Reconciliation: The restoration of friendly relations

RYCO believes that building true and enduring reconciliation involves a process that brings together individuals, groups and societies burdened by past or present conflicts and negative representations and perceptions of 'the other'.

Through shared experience, cooperation and ongoing exchange, new pathways can be built to reconcile people who would otherwise remain trapped in the past.

A Region in Flux. ////////////////////////////////////// **A Youth Demographic Entrapped and Encumbered by the Past //////////////////////////////////**

Prejudice and stereotyping continue to shape attitudes and behaviour in the Western Balkans

Young people in the Western Balkans live with the pressures and influences of a social and political narrative that is distorted by prejudice, denial, revisionism and nationalism.

Inherited, negative narratives form the basis for young people's future life choices about career, residence, friendships and even the possibility of dialogue with other people; thus compounding negative narratives about 'the other'.

A culture of separation does not serve the interests of youth, the region or European Integration

In this volatile context, there is a notable lack of opportunity for young people to move within the region for volunteering, formal and non-formal education and training, or simply to meet and share experiences of being peaceably together. This lack of opportunity is also compounded by legal obstacles.

The legacy of an absence of support for change

Populations across the region find themselves entrapped in national identities and nationalist policies. A culture of mobility and exchange remains to be built. Governmental support for policies that challenge the status quo have yet to emerge. There is insufficient governmental investment in youth exchange, mobility and cooperation throughout the region. Public demand for change remains relatively weak. Young people fall prey to the narratives and agendas of those who benefit from the maintenance of the status quo. Thus, the ethnic and religious divide remains deeply entrenched.

Youth exchange across the region is not new. But until RYCO there was no dedicated, Western Balkans-specific intergovernmental mechanism that supported regional cooperation, youth mobility and exchange

Over many years considerable efforts have been invested in the region to support youth exchange. However, until recently, the principal opportunity for mobility and youth exchange focused on young people visiting countries beyond the Western Balkans. While any opportunity for cross-border youth exchange was welcome, young people who could benefit from such exchange programmes were unable to experience the opportunities and challenges of meeting their peers within their own region. While their world view may have been expanded, they returned with their attitudes and behaviours relative to their peers in the region unchallenged and unchanged. It was so much easier to arrange a connection with a stranger outside the Balkans than to face the potentially uncomfortable, but existentially essential need to build a prosperous and peaceful future with one's immediate neighbours.

Potential partnerships are not being sufficiently leveraged

Many youth organisations in the region work successfully together. However, the region has yet to benefit from sufficient alignment of like-minded institutional partners in change. Throughout the Western Balkans a myriad of organisations, initiatives and projects offer rich opportunities for agencies with similar values that seek to collaborate, add value, build linkages and prosper together. However, with some notable exceptions, the record of inter-organisation collaboration is inadequate. Opportunities for complementary programming are being missed. Limited funding is not being optimised because many organisations remain entrenched in a closed programming loop. Meanwhile their funders rarely require them to cooperate across borders, further compounding their stand-alone approach. An increased alignment of capacities and complementary approaches across sectors will be essential if the region is to leverage all the potential benefits of funding, technical assistance and political support.

Change is coming – and RYCO will play a key role in defining what it looks like

For the first time, six Contracting Parties have agreed to synchronise their efforts for youth exchange by establishing RYCO. Further, change is stirring among civil society, democracy activists and the education community. RYCO's recent Call for Proposals reveals the enormous and unprecedented interest in youth exchange within the region. The RYCO approach to Calls for Proposals brings together organisations from across the region – proof that an imaginative and innovative funding concept can kick start and foster cooperation between organisations. Meanwhile, a wealth of evidence reveals that there is considerable and growing demand among civil society organisations and indeed within public education institutions to address the causes of stereotyping, prejudice, hate speech and radicalisation.

RYCO's Theory of Change for Youth and for the Region //////////////

RYCO is predicated on the belief that by building understanding between people, especially with those with whom a conflict has damaged relations, those people will become more open to continuing dialogue, to bridging their differences, to reconciliation and to building common cause as active citizens. By helping young people to engage with each other in fields of mutual concern and interest they will develop intercultural insights, strengthen their skills, enhance their social and economic prospects and achieve personal fulfilment. This concept is outlined in the diagram presented on the next page.

→ Support for youth engagement in change

The development of social capital among young people and the facilitation of their awareness, ability and motivation to participate actively in society is a major RYCO commitment. Thus RYCO's programming will boost the competencies of young people, civil society and schools in the region. RYCO will fund initiatives that connect schools and Civil Society Organisations in the region. It will invigorate and enhance constructive dialogue. It will enable and stimulate intercultural learning and build mutual understanding. These non-formal education investments will strengthen the competences of young people and encourage their active citizenship.

→ Support for Civil Society Organisations and schools that organise the process

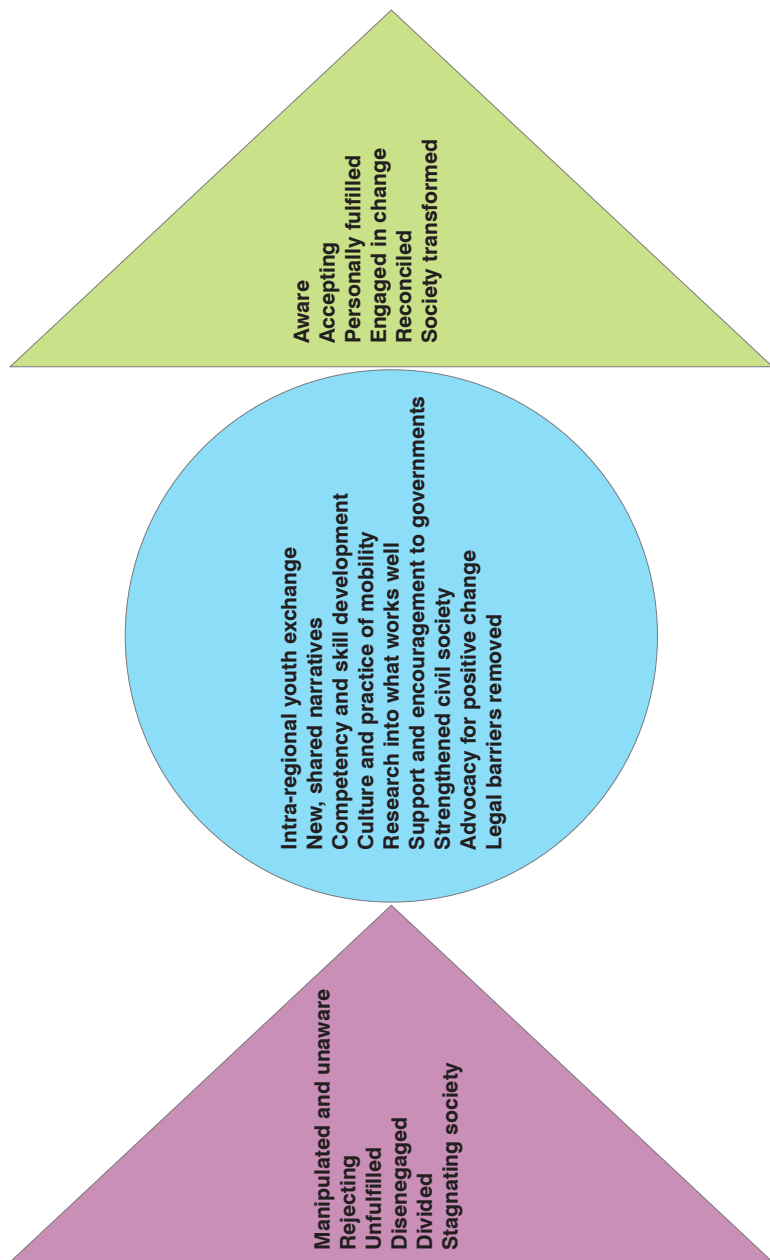
RYCO will support Civil Society Organisations, schools, and other partners to provide youth from the region with training and cooperation opportunities. The organisation will work closely with partners to assist them in building effective and enduring relations of confidence and cooperation between governments and civil society, and to encourage and foster their capacity to support youth exchange investments.

→ Support for the young people with fewest opportunities

Non-governmental organisations and schools are not the sole agents of access to youth. In the coming planning period, RYCO will determine how to ensure that young people who are not organised and have no access to civil society support or intermediary structures can benefit from the opportunities that RYCO provides. This will entail the development of innovative approaches that balance the need to reduce the level of bureaucracy to a minimum, while maintaining the highest standards of accountability.

RYCO notes the challenges experienced by other institutions supporting youth exchange and mobility with a focus on youth with fewest opportunities. Learning from the experiences of others RYCO will develop a good practice design and monitoring model to address this challenge.

In addition, RYCO will take a proactive outreach approach to engage and partner organizations and initiatives that specialize in supporting the participation of such youth communities, especially those that are less well established or which operate at the grass roots, adapting and developing from their good practice and innovations in methodology as appropriate



Graphic 3. RYCO's theory of change

Learning for Quality, Impact and Scale //////////////////////////////////////

Joint programming

RYCO will research, explore and exploit inter-agency partnership opportunities when they add value and potential impact to RYCO's aims and objectives. During the coming planning period, RYCO will review potential partnership opportunities across the entire region, and engage in those that add value to its strategic objectives.

A knowledge bank

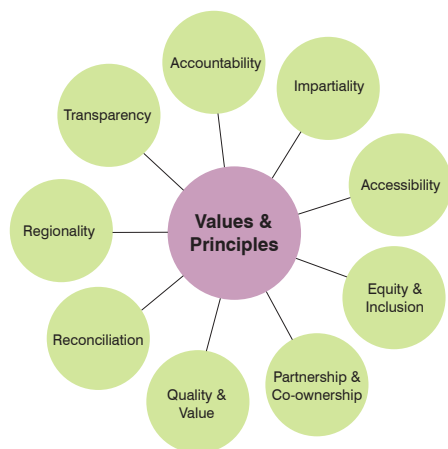
As part of its commitment to learning, RYCO will archive and share its own learning about the most effective ways to foster robust and enduring cooperation between young people. RYCO will foster the capacity of all concerned sectors to engage in regional youth cooperation, and will act as a knowledge and expertise resource on youth issues and intercultural exchange in the Western Balkans. To this end, RYCO will undertake and commission research, provide support for development initiatives, facilitate networking and peer exchange among stakeholders active in the youth exchange and mobility field in the region.

Research, Evaluation and Learning (REL)

RYCO will develop sophisticated Research, Evaluation and Learning competence. It will:

- Commission and conduct research through the staff's efforts, through contracting of specialist consultancy, with the support of the Advisory Board's voluntary efforts
- Develop a state of the art evidence-based programme monitoring system, in order to assess the value and impact of its programming investments.
- Demonstrate how impact is achieved
- Interpret and disseminate learning products as part of the organisation's advocacy and information sharing commitment and capacity building for its partners
- Make existing best practice available to operational partners and counterparts

RYCO's Values Will Inform Everything it Does



Graphic 4. RYCO's values and principles

RYCO will be guided in all its activities by the following values and principles:

Accountability

RYCO will hold itself accountable to its Governing Board, to the young people of the Western Balkans, and to the organisations that serve them. It will ensure its programme is designed and managed to the highest standards of financial rectitude.

Impartiality

As an intergovernmental organisation RYCO will be mission-driven and politically impartial in all its activities.

Accessibility

In all aspects of its work, RYCO will endeavour to involve young people as co-owners of all its efforts on their behalf and in a youth friendly manner. It will be accessible for their voices to be heard at both the policy and advocacy level and in other aspects of its programming.

Equity and inclusion

RYCO will foster inclusion and equity through all of its work. It will endeavour to build the fullest inclusion of young people at all levels of the organisation, including in its governance. RYCO is committed to gender equality. Equity and inclusion will guide RYCO policy internally and externally.

Partnership and co-ownership

RYCO is committed to building and maintaining partnerships with like-minded partners at all levels. It will leverage its own resources and expertise, and those of its partners to optimise its resources.

Quality and value

RYCO is committed to excellence in all its operations and functions. It invests in its people and in its systems in order to maintain the highest standards. The organisation will develop a state of the art Research, Evaluation and Learning system to assure programme quality and to optimise the sustainability of its programming investment.

Reconciliation

RYCO will be guided in all its internal and external activities by its declared position on reconciliation.

Regionality

RYCO will leverage its mandate to promote and implement a regional perspective in all aspects of its work.

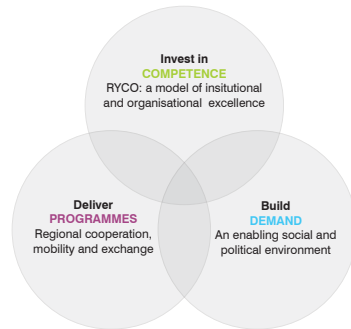
Transparency

As a public funded organisation, RYCO will demonstrate the highest standards of transparency and openness. Its accounts will be regularly audited and it will engage with the public to share information about its activities.

Key Components of RYCO Strategy //////////////////////////////////////

RYCO's Intervention Logic

RYCO will contribute to improving the availability, accessibility, quality and impact of exchange, mobility and reconciliation efforts conducted principally with and for young people and those that work directly with them. RYCO will operate with the youth, social, civic, education, culture and sport sectors, and their intersections. Its focus will be on the quality and durability of its programming outcomes.



Key components of RYCO strategy during the planning period 2019 – 2021

RYCO strategy will focus on the achievement of measurable results within the planning period. The results - and the processes and Boards support to achieve them - will form the core of the leadership's performance targets.

Strategic priority 1

Deliver PROGRAMMES: Develop regional cooperation, mobility and exchange

Results:

→ Increased quality of regional youth cooperation, increased youth mobility and increased and diversified opportunities for active youth participation.

→ New opportunities provided for young people to engage in intercultural learning and dialogue with peers from the wide-ranging diversity of communities living in their places of residence and around the region.

→ Young people and those working with them engaged in methodologically sound processes to address their differences concerning the region's past and to challenge inherited narratives.

→ Increased level of awareness by young people of the opportunities offered by European integration and intra-regional cooperation.

Strategic priority 2

Build DEMAND: Create and promote an enabling environment

Results:

→ The legislative and political environment is increasingly supportive of reconciliation and intercultural learning, and of the implementation of youth mobility and exchange both within and among contracting parties in the Western Balkan region.

→ Public opinion increasingly favours intercultural exchange.

→ Decreased level of hate speech, negative stereotypes and prejudice among young people.

→ Increased participation by young people in influencing decision-making processes that shape the social and political development of the region.

→ Media stakeholders increasingly present positive narratives about the value of intercultural exchange.

→ Strengthened capacity of voluntary and professional workers who accompany young people in youth, education, sport and cultural activities that address reconciliation, intercultural learning and European integration-related themes.

Strategic priority 3

Invest in COMPETENCE: Strengthen RYCO institutionally and organisationally

Results:

→ RYCO's governance system (Governing Board and Advisory Board) functions according to international good practice standards.

→ RYCO's Secretariat (Tirana-based Head Office and Local Branch Offices) is structured and staffed to ensure optimum effectiveness and programme quality.

→ A comprehensive office management and financial control system is operational.

→ A comprehensive Human Resources and staff performance management system is fully operational.

→ RYCO's capacity to gather, interpret and manage data is strengthened. A Research, Evaluation and Learning is established and functional.

→ RYCO funding is increasingly diversified.

→ RYCO Open Call criteria, systems and applicant selection processes are state of the art and verifiably objective and impartial.

RYCO's Programming Instruments //////////////////////////////////////

RYCO will deploy a variety of programming instruments and approaches to achieve its objectives in the coming planning period.

These include:

a) Grant-making

RYCO will fund projects initiated by youth and by youth-support organisations. It will favour projects that are creative and innovative relative to prevailing practice, and which bring to bear the expertise of the community of practice, rather than prescribe project formats and activities.

b) Diplomacy and Policy Advocacy

RYCO will initiate and participate in policy advocacy activities that advance the cause of intercultural exchange and regional youth mobility. It will focus particularly on support for legislative reform that facilitates an enabling environment. Its advocacy role will be directed from the highest levels of the organisation.

c) Communications and Promotion

RYCO will dedicate resources to enable positive messages about its programme to reach a broad public. It will work with a variety of media to leverage and scale-up its messaging.

d) Capacity Development

RYCO will design, deliver and support targeted capacity development initiatives that empower and strengthen current and potential grantees and other partners.

e) Research and Learning

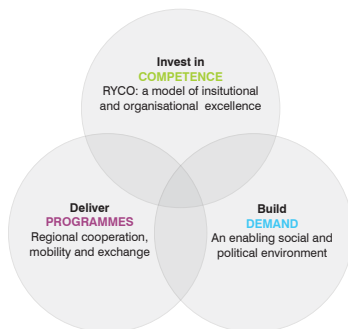
RYCO will establish a research, evaluation and learning system that permits it to assess the value and impact of its investments and to share learning with partners. RYCO's Secretariat, in collaboration with its Advisory Board, may also commission research. It will archive its learning and develop knowledge management systems as part of its commitment to build a robust evidence base.

f) Partnership Leverage

RYCO will proactively solicit strategic partnerships with counterparts and potential partners within and beyond the region. As part of its commitment to build a vibrant community of practice, it will leverage complementary expertise and resources of like-minded organisations in order to share learning about good practice, build scale, strengthen quality and increase impact.

RYCO's Constituency //////////////////////////////////////

In the coming planning period RYCO's investments and efforts will be directed towards a range of key stakeholders whose role, function and position are essential to the success of its Mission. Some stakeholders may need more time and opportunity for dialogue in order to engage substantially.



Young people (**Programme** and **Demand**)

- Young people involved in youth or other civil society organisations, or grass root youth-focused initiatives
- Individual youth activists, school or university students
- Young people with an interest in developing or participating in activities around RYCO's core issues, notably regional mobility and reconciliation
- Young people with fewer opportunities, including members of minorities, young people in remote or hard-to-reach areas and young people experiencing marginalisation

Key workers and institutions that support young people (**Programme** and **Demand**)

RYCO will assist, enjoin and collaborate with individual and institutional specialists who work with young people in a wide range of educational, leisure, volunteering, sport, cultural or civic processes, notably:

- Educators working in formal and non-formal settings,
- Volunteers, exchange programme managers and exchange programme teams
- Social workers
- Sports trainers
- Cultural specialist

Such key workers may be paid or voluntary staff from specific institutions and organisations.

The media (**Demand**)

RYCO will engage with the media at any level that is appropriate to its purposes. Thus the organisation may work with print media, TV, radio, and online media channels, engaging with those who cover topics that deal with youth issues, mobility, reconciliation and/or regional cooperation. Its constituency within the media will include:

- Journalists
- Editors
- Young media makers
- Social networking specialists

Political actors and policy-makers (Demand)

RYCO will work with political actors and policy-makers in each of the Contracting Parties and region-wide. It will engage with this constituency irrespective of ideology or political stance. Such political actors may include:

- Parliamentarians
- Members of youth wings of political parties
- Civic activists

Youth education and academia (Programme, Demand and Competence)

Through funding and other collaborative efforts RYCO will support schools and teachers who are committed to, or proactively engaged in, regional youth exchange and cooperation. It will also engage with school student associations, teacher associations, and stakeholders engaged in education system policy and governance.

RYCO will commission research from specialist individual researchers and other members of the academic community engaged in the generation of knowledge about the issues central to RYCO's mission.

Civil Society Organisations involved in key sectors (Programme and Demand)

Through funding and collaborative activities, and in line with its mission and values, RYCO will support regional, national and local Non-Governmental Organisations, Civil Society Organisations, religious institutions, unions who focus on the wellbeing of young people, and who deliver services and/or campaign for and with youth. Such organisations may be formally registered or may be informal groupings with their own youth or youth-focused constituencies.

Business community (Demand)

RYCO will explore appropriate, collaborative opportunities with the business community within the region. It may engage with young entrepreneurs and associations of young professionals.

Counterparts (Demand and Competence)

RYCO will build linkages and associate itself with networks of like-minded organisations at the European and international level, in order to learn, to share learning and to leverage joint efforts towards policy reform.

Funding Partners (Demand)

RYCO will forge new relationships with potential funding prospects at the bilateral, multi-lateral and foundation level in order to diversify its funding dependence and optimise its independence of action.

Planning and Re-Planning in a Changing Context //////////////////////////////////////

This strategy document will guide RYCO's programme for the foreseeable future. Its objectives will inform the performance targets of all RYCO's team members. However, a strategic plan should not be immutable - is only of substantial value if it the expression of a vibrant strategic culture.

Given the rapidly evolving regional environment, the strategy may need adjustment, modification or revision, even within the current planning period. Thus, RYCO will propose changes to refresh the strategy as and when required, informed by an ongoing process of context and opportunity assessment and risk analysis. Further, and as part of its commitment to co-ownership and transparency, RYCO will continue to consult with a wide range of stakeholders and partners to solicit their views and suggestions about such changes.

Mitigating and Managing Risk //////////////////////////////////////

RYCO faces substantial external and internal challenges to the achievement of its mission and strategy. As part of its strategic culture, the Secretariat will conduct a rolling risk assessment throughout the planning period in order to advise the Governing Board about proposed changes to strategy.

Current risk factors include those of a political, reputational and institutional and organisational nature, as follows:

Political			
Risk	Potential Impact	Probability	Mitigation
Pressure on staff to show favour to nationalist agendas	High	Medium	→ Make RYCO policy and values clear in all communications → Build a strong, internal team management, communications and support mechanisms that enable staff members to bring such pressure immediately to the notice of leadership → Leverage the credibility of the Governing Board to favour regional agenda
Loss of support from Contracting Parties	High	Low	→ Build high level of relationship management and information sharing with the Governing Board → Maintain close linkages with institutional funding partners → Promote the work of RYCO and the value of its status as an inter-governmental organisation
Unresolved policy conflicts between Contracting Parties influence their decisions about RYCO and regional cooperation and mobility	High	Medium	→ Engage with Contracting Party representatives to influence policy decisions → Support Contracting Parties in progressive policy development. → Publicise and promote RYCO value and success → Enjoin youth to engage in political activism
Legal barriers to youth mobility remain entrenched	High	High	→ Advocate for policy reform at all fora where a potential constituency for change is present → Work with the Governing Board to promote and advocate for policy and legal reform

Reputational			
Risk	Potential Impact	Probability	Mitigation
RYCO policy on grant application acceptance and rejection is perceived as subjective or politicised	High	High	→ Clarify and communicate RYCO Open Call policy and grant management instruments to all applicants → Leverage RYCO grant making policy as part of an ongoing region-wide campaign to demonstrate RYCO values and functional impartiality
Internal stakeholders may seek to influence RYCO policy because of its funding capability	Medium	Low	→ Communicate funding policy and strategy proactively to the widest possible constituency → Build a strong, internal team management, communications and support mechanism that enables staff to bring such pressure immediately to the notice of leadership
Unrealistic expectations about RYCO's potential to grow its portfolio, and to affect or influence policy reform. Pressure to expand the programme portfolio without sufficient means and human resources to deliver a good balance of quality, impact or scale.	High	Medium	→ Communicate RYCO's record of work to both Boards and to funding partners and to the grantee constituency → Refuse, delay or postpone expansion opportunities until such time as RYCO has all the required institutional, organisational and operational instruments in place → Consolidate and strengthen RYCO governance and management system
As RYCO becomes more visible and more successful it will be negatively targeted by revisionist media	Medium	Medium	→ Promote a positive image of RYCO's work to a broad public, and particularly through media that are influential with policy-makers → Invest early in building positive relationships, including with media and constituencies that might be hostile to RYCO's mission, values and strategy

Institutional and Organisational			
Risk	Potential Impact	Probability	Mitigation
RYCO's Statute both over-legislates and under legislates in key areas of the organisation's functions, rendering good operational practice problematic	Medium	High	<p>→ Work within the existing Statutes for the coming 12 months, while conducting an in-depth review and case for change.</p> <p>→ Present a case for change with potential adjustment and improvement areas to the Governing Board in 2020</p>
<p>Staff members are increasingly overburdened.</p> <p>Staff members do not function on the basis of formal performance criteria.</p>	High	High	<p>→ Reconfigure staffing to optimise the capacities of all staff and the performance potential of all staff positions.</p> <p>→ Work with the Governing Board to allow for staff expansion to an adequate number to manage the programme and the organisation.</p> <p>→ Review and revise staffing structure and functions.</p> <p>→ Build Management by Objectives system, based on strategy.</p> <p>→ Do not take on new programming burdens until staffing issues have been resolved.</p>
Potential partners and counterparts may position themselves as opponents, even passively	Low	Medium	<p>→ Take a dynamic and proactive approach to partnership development across and beyond the region</p> <p>→ Communicate the value potential of collaboration with RYCO</p> <p>→ Demonstrate and communicate RYCO distinction in comparison to the offers of other stakeholders</p>

Potential funding prospects may perceive RYCO as European Union instrument or proxy, and thus decline to support RYCO financially	Medium	Medium	<p>→ Adopt an assertive and proactive relationship management posture with potential funding partner prospects</p> <p>→ Communicate clear messages about the role and function of the organisation, and its funding status</p> <p>→ Leverage Governing and Advisory Board member goodwill as advocates of RYCO's independent status as an intergovernmental organisation that belongs to the six Contracting Parties</p>
Funding dependency on a limited number of partners will limit growth and endanger sustainability of effort	High	Medium	→ Diversify funding, while adhering to the Contracting Parties policies on funding proportionality
Youth representatives on the Governing Board may become marginalised or instrumentalised	High	High	<p>→ Design good practice standards for both Boards.</p> <p>→ Provide good practice technical support for the Governing Boards</p> <p>→ Work with the Governing Board to clarify the role and function of its youth representatives</p> <p>→ Take advice from institutions with a strong track record in the implementation of co-managed bodies</p>
Both Boards continue to function without formal Terms of Reference, thus weakening their potential value to the organisation	Medium	High	→ Assist both Boards in the development of Terms of Reference that clearly explain the parameters and complementarity of their responsibilities, roles and functions

Appendix 1. //////////////////////////////////////
Context Overview //////////////////////////////////////

This section is informed by a Desk Study commissioned by RYCO, and by RYCO’s own analysis after extensive consultation with a comprehensive stakeholder constituency.

a) Society does not know enough about itself

A RYCO-commissioned mapping of available research strongly indicates that there is a considerable amount of data available on political, social, economic and technological phenomena in the region. However, there are major gaps in knowledge on critical issues about how society functions, thus leaving opinion formation open to the voices of extremism, manipulation, exclusion and division. In the absence of sufficient empirical and accessible evidence on issues like youth and school mobility, ethnic distance and youth participation, and in the absence of a ‘home’ for such data to be gathered, interpreted and made easily available online, policies on such issues will continue to be inadequately informed, and resources inadequately targeted. Worse, much of the research currently undertaken is hard to access, and is unavailable to policy makers, the media or to the public. Much of it overlaps, thus exacerbating the difficulty for any organisation that seeks to understand how best to serve the interests of young people in the Western Balkans. There appears to be little incentive to bring the learning together and to make it available for the benefit of society. Thus, a pressing need is apparent for a trusted and impartial centre of excellence where policy-makers, the public, the media, and indeed young people themselves can deepen their understanding of their region.

b) An absence of available good practice makes it hard to know what investments work best: funding partners do not use standardised assessment, monitoring or evaluation instruments when they invest in the region’s youth

Throughout the region, and even before the signing of the Dayton Peace Accord, a plethora of funding partners have funded youth programmes, projects, initiatives, nascent networks and organisations. They used a wide variety of needs assessment tools, indicators, progress monitoring, impact measurement instruments and evaluation criteria. The overall result of such incoherence is an atomised and hard-to-access mass of data, and a highly complex and sometimes contradictory series of conclusions about context, needs, outcomes and impacts of youth-related interventions. This situation represents a significant missed opportunity for policy-makers and implementers to learn about what works, and about how to upscale successful investments in the region’s youth. RYCO’s externally-sourced research strongly recommends that RYCO itself should introduce a rigorously transparent evaluation instrument, guided and informed by good practice from other institutions working in youth exchange and mobility. In this way, all its grantees would be held accountable to a set of standardised and objective criteria, thus assuring two key outcomes over time:

- a) Rigorous quality assurance and value for funding partners’ investment.
- b) Demonstrable objectivity in a political environment where some stakeholders may seek to call RYCO’s professionalism or impartiality into question.

c) Accession to the European Union is a powerful leverage opportunity for RYCO

Although the Western Balkan six have demonstrated significant commitment and political will to advance the European Union's reform agenda, key findings from several European Union progress reports reveal that they struggle with these issues. Attempts to address reform agenda problems are now reflected in the Union's 'Strategy for the Western Balkans' as flagship initiatives. Youth mobility is a key component. Meanwhile the European Commission has made clear on numerous occasions that success on the path toward accession will be contingent on the Western Balkans both committing to and demonstrably adhering to the Union's fundamental principles, notably regarding the rule of law, justice and fundamental rights. In his State of the Union address 2017, Jean Claude Juncker said that these principles are given 'utmost priority in the negotiations.' Further, European Union systems and structures now focus increasingly and substantially on youth empowerment, as indicated recently at the Sofia Summit on the Western Balkans and the new European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027.

Thus, and from an accession perspective, RYCO is well-positioned to leverage its role as an enabler and facilitator of political progress towards accession for all six of its Contracting Partners.

d) High expectations: RYCO in the context of the Berlin Process

The 2014 Berlin Conference of the Western Balkans marked the 100th anniversary of the beginning of the World War 1. The Conference focused on the need for the Western Balkans to work jointly on opposing distorted historical narratives, while preserving and respecting the cultural heritage of each. This was perceived as a prerequisite for faster integration into the European Union. Subsequent summits followed in Vienna 2015, Paris 2016, and Trieste 2017, where the Berlin process as it came to be known, deepened and developed dialogue among the Western Balkans. To date, RYCO is one of the Berlin Process' only tangible results. The German and French governments who initiated and financed it remain committed to its principles and goals. Thus, RYCO occupies a special and highly visible place in the consciousness of the Berlin Process' stakeholders. It is perceived as a promising mechanism for faster economic and political cooperation, as well as one that can contribute to stability, peace and reconciliation in the region. At the same time, RYCO's success hinges on the direct and dynamic support of the six Contracting Parties (Full reference for Moll's article).

e) A legacy of past conflicts colours and distorts perceptions at all levels

Reconciliation and the development of productive neighbourly relations are a pre-requisite for the social, economic, and cultural renewal of the region and for the European integration of the Western Balkan region. This has become a truism for many within the political sphere, but little action is being taken to move from theory to practice. Reconciliation cannot be achieved in a void or as a cosmetic political measure. Reconciliation results from a comprehensive approach to dealing with the past. However, the Joinet-Orentlicher 'Dealing with the Past' (see Appendix 2) principles remain only a dimly understood concept for many policy-makers. Their application is fundamental and essential if reconciliation is to have any chance of success in the region.

Young people in the Western Balkans lack access to the infrastructure, support, and encouragement that would enable intra-regional youth cooperation, mobility and exchange. This situation colours their apparent lack of motivation for inter-regional mobility and reinforces the erroneous notion that their need and desire for mobility and cultural exchange is exaggerated. It also limits their opportunities to flourish as citizens and to achieve their potential as individuals and as contributors to peace and prosperity. Meanwhile, large numbers of young people in the region are excluded from mainstream mobility and exchange programmes because such opportunities are not made available to marginalised, vulnerable or minority groups. The legacy of recent conflicts weighs heavily on social discourse, and is at the core of what passes for political debate. Few genuine initiatives to deal with the past have gained real traction within the region, or even at a national level.

Thus, it is no surprise that Western Balkan societies continue to manifest high levels of blaming, stereotyping and prejudice towards each other, and indeed among their own diverse communities, further perpetuating conflict and hindering the development of social peace and development. Young people continue to inherit narratives about the region's past that focus on blame and division rather than reconciliation and cooperation. They lack access to participation in social and economic processes that affect their lives and the future development of the region, as well as opportunities to develop the competencies they need to engage more actively. Young people are effectively an excluded 'minority' at the social, political and economic level.

f) For young people, the barriers to progress are numerous and ubiquitous – and most efforts to promote their mobility are having little impact

Legal and social barriers to regional youth cooperation, mobility and exchange still impinge significantly on efforts to open up the region to young people in the Western Balkans.

Professionals and volunteers who engage directly with young people in the youth, education, culture and sport sectors indicate that they struggle to provide the support that is needed, largely because their own work is not recognised or resourced. This nascent community of professionals and volunteers faces a lack of investment in its capacity to initiate or drive a processes of intercultural learning and reconciliation that adequately takes into account the principles of 'Dealing with the Past' outlined by Joinet-Orentlicher. The sector needs substantial investment in its capacity if its enthusiasm and commitment are to yield tangible results.

g) Youth are susceptible to the old narratives of ethnocentrism and division

Youth's access to a broader range of media does not protect them from the forces of revisionism and division, but its openness provides them access to alternative narratives that foster new thinking. Recent studies on the drivers of radicalisation, stigmatisation, religious bigotry and negative attitudes to immigration all demonstrate that two key factors empower youth to challenge received wisdom about 'the other' and to behave differently from previous generations, notably:

→ **Education and awareness:** It is clear that young people more exposed to civic education programmes have different attitudes and behaviours than less educated young people, and than older generations. Empirical evidence shows that these attitudes and

behaviours change in direct correlation with the level of education. However, it is not simply academic education that seems to be the determining factor. Social, informal and political education are key factors.

→ **Contact:** The more a young person has regular exposure to and contact with people from different groupings/ethnicities/religions/lifestyles, the less such young people are likely to be prone to radical attitudes and behaviours.

Appendix 2. ////////////////////////////////////// The Joinet-Orentlicher Principles of Dealing with the Past //////////////////////////////////

Reconciliation is not a stand-alone issue, as evidenced by the Framework on the next page.

In 1997, the United Nations Human Rights Commission approved of a set of principles that were recommended by the UN Special Rapporteur Louis Joinet in his report on the issue of the impunity of perpetrators of human rights violations. The principles were further developed in partnership with Diane Orentlicher hence the terms Joinet-Orentlicher principles. The Joinet-Orentlicher principles have influenced many countries foreign and domestic security policies and have had a major impact on global debate about how to address a legacy of conflict. The principles call for major efforts in four areas that have subsequently become recognised as the principal pillars of a holistic approach to dealing with the past, notably:

- The right to know
- The right to justice
- The right to reparation
- The guarantee of non-recurrence.

The Conceptual Framework on Dealing with the Past is based on these principles and recommendations. It captures the four main areas and mechanisms of a holistic Dealing with the Past approach, indicating that all areas mutually influence and depend on each other. The central focus is on victims and perpetrators and their transformation into citizens with equal rights. The diagram further suggests that Dealing with the Past is a long-term process that aims at establishing a culture of accountability, rule of law and reconciliation. Moreover, the Dealing with the Past Framework's focus on 'Guarantees of Non-Recurrence' focuses on key areas of fundamental societal and political reform as an essential measure to transform conflict and build enduring reconciliation. It clearly indicates that reconciliation is not a stand-alone issue, but rather the consequence of an interrelated and holistic approach to dealing with the past.

The full background paper can be found on this website:

http://archivesproject.swisspeace.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/archivesproject/Publications/DwP_Conceptual_Framework_October2012.pdf



Graphic 5. Joint-Orentlicher principles of dealing with the past

(Inspired by the Joint/Orentlicher Principles by FDFA/swisspeace, 2006)

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Disclaimer

Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent those of the Balkan Trust for Democracy, the German Marshall Fund of the United States, or its partners.

On RYCO

Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) is an international organization, founded by the Western Balkans governments, aiming to promote the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation between the youth in the region through youth exchange programs.

Find more about our work at the organization's website: www.rycowb.org

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