

Project title: *ROUTE WB6, supported by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD)*

Background:

RYCO is an intergovernmental organisation that stewards and promotes regional, cross-border and intercultural cooperation within and among its six Western Balkan contracting parties. The Agreement on establishment of RYCO was signed by the WB 6 Prime Ministers on WB Summit held in Paris, on 4th July 2016, within the Berlin Process. 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 Head Office is the organisational hub situated in Tirana.

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.

RYCO's programming is boosting the competencies of young people, civil society and schools in the region. RYCO is funding initiatives that connect schools and Civil Society Organizations in the region. It invigorates and enhances constructive dialogue. It enables and stimulates intercultural learning and builds mutual understanding. These non-formal education investments are strengthening the competences of young people and encouraging their active citizenship. RYCO supports Civil Society Organizations, schools, and other partners to provide youth from the region with training and cooperation opportunities. The organization is working 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.

RYCO Intervention logic through ROUTE WB6 project

The cross-border volunteering for peace and reconciliation is a tool that combines community engagement and peace education, both essential for strengthening civic and intercultural competence, a decisive element for reconciliation as well as democratization of WB societies. Throughout the project, RYCO and its implementing partners will use the cross-border volunteering as a mechanism for reducing social and ethnic distance among young people in the region and raising pro-social and European values to foster reconciliation, stability and prosperity in the WB6 region.

RYCO will carry out this project in consortium with the following organizations from WB6 – Beyond Barriers, Youth Communication Center Banja Luka, South East European Youth Network, Lens, Youth Cultural Center Bitola, Association for Democratic Prosperity Zid and Young Researchers of Serbia. These organizations, Lens excepted, have been active for over 15 years in the establishment and development of the volunteering infrastructure in WB6 region.

The advocating strategy can be divided into three project outcomes:

1) Volunteering policy reform – to promote an enabling policy environment for volunteering development in order to increase the outreach of young people who volunteer; this will contribute to creation of the regional policy foundation on volunteering that partner organizations (National volunteer services – NVSs in WB6) will use as the framework for advocacy efforts on volunteering policy reforms in WB6.

2) Establishment of the Regional Volunteer Service and regional volunteer program ROUTE WB6 – The Regional Volunteer Services will serve as the regional resource center on volunteering that will collect resources and coordinates the work of the National Volunteer Services in each of the Wb6 with a purpose to: make available regional volunteering practice, ensure regional advocacy effort for volunteering policy; promote cross-border volunteering for peace and reconciliation; maintain regional program ROUTE WB6; provide capacity building to CSOs and youth beneficiaries of the regional program as well as to monitor and evaluate regional volunteer programs.

3) Scaling up of the Regional Volunteer Program ROUTE WB6 – newly designed regional program will be scaled up through RYCO 1st granting round for volunteering available for the organizations and schools in WB6. 50 individuals will have the opportunity to get involved in long-term exchanges and around 400 young people will participate in group volunteer exchanges. These exchanges will consist of both a community engagement and an education component to further reconciliation and intercultural dialogue.

The Project supports RYCO's work in partnering with civil society, education systems and schools, grass-roots movements, youth institutions and youth in general. Project activities focus on strengthening and consolidating RYCO's competences as a regionally-owned mechanism promoting reconciliation, mobility, diversity, democratic values, participation, active citizenship and intercultural learning.