

“Western Balkans meet Japan: A Bridge into the Future”

MIRAI Program 2019: Western Balkans Youth Exchange

(Mutual-understanding, Intellectual Relations and Academic Exchange Initiative)

I. Background and Team

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA), as of January 2018, started the “*Western Balkans Cooperation Initiative*” to support socio-economic reforms and facilitate reconciliation and cooperation in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. The mechanisms foreseen to achieve the predefined objectives are:

- Bilateral Cooperation;
- Promotion of Cooperation in the region;
- Cooperation with third parties.

Based on the second component, the MOFA of Japan aims to establish a cooperation mechanism with the WB through the organization of seminars and exchanges on common challenges. In continuation to bringing more nations close to Japan, the MOFA of Japan has launched the ‘*Japan’s Friendship Ties Programs*’ to promote people-to-people exchange between Japan and the various nations of the Asia-Pacific, North America, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and to encourage the understanding of Japan’s economy, society, history, diverse culture, politics and diplomatic relation. The European regional component is called ‘MIRAI Program’, which features intellectual exchange among youth across Japan and Europe.

*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

In order to further achieve a bigger impact and effectiveness in the Western Balkans, MIRAI Program is organizing for the second year this youth exchange in cooperation with the **Regional Youth Cooperation Office**, as one of the key actors working on youth issues in the region.

Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) 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'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.

RYCO granted 33 projects in 2018, implemented by NGOs and High Schools from all WB, and will support 45 new projects in 2019. The projects are designed on basis of partnership and mobility by giving the chance to the youth to travel and work closely with their fellow in topics such as Intercultural Learning and Dialogue; Youth Participation and Social Inclusion. RYCO is also supporting High Schools and NGOs in capacity building activities in each Contracting Party.

To know more about RYCO, please visit the website at: <https://www.rycowb.org/>

II. MIRAI PROGRAM 2019

“Western Balkans meet Japan: A Bridge into the Future”, is a youth exchange program, organized under the MIRAI Programs since 2018, aiming to deepen participants’ understanding of Japan and its policy, to promote mutual understandings and reconciliation through intellectual and cultural exchange, and build a basis for future friendship and cooperation between Japan and WB.

In 2018, in cooperation with the MOFA of Japan, RYCO implemented the youth exchange *“Western Balkans Meet Japan – A Bridge Into the Future”*, on 30th of October – 7th of November 2018. The program gave the opportunity to 17 young people from all the WB6 to take part in one week long intercultural learning visit to Japan. The participants had the chance to visit Tokyo, Hiroshima and Kyoto in days full of important visits (Edo-Tokyo Museum, Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, Shukkeien Garden, Golden Pavilion etc.) and discussions on intercultural dialogue, history of the region, history of Japan, Sustainable Development Goals, etc.

To know more about the 2018, please visit the following link:

<https://www.rycowb.org/?p=5491>

The participants could observe different aspects of the Japanese life and look for similarities with the situation in their region in order to emphasize possible cooperation. They drafted Action Plans three months after their return in order to share their experience and deliver their findings in their respective communities.

This year, the youth exchange will be implemented on **13th-21st of November 2019** in Japan and will gather 15 participants coming from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. The selected participants will spend 8 nights and 9 days in Japan and have the opportunity to discuss current topics,

sharing experiences with youngsters from Japan, developing intercultural skills, and visiting and exploring Japanese culture.

Program Content:

- Lectures on Japan and its policies
- Courtesy call to Ambassador in charge of the Western Balkans
- Discussions with Japanese university students
- Visit to university and lectures on intercultural dialogue
- Visits to local areas (Hiroshima)
- Hands-on experiences on traditional culture
- 2 nights' homestay in a Japanese family in Hiroshima
- Visits to historical sites and discussions on remembrance
- Presentations on the outcome by participants (including making an action plan)
- Disseminating information on Japan's positive aspects through SNS etc.

Eligible applicants:

- Being a currently enrolled student in an undergraduate or graduate program and aged from 20 to 25 years old on arrival in Japan;
- Living in one of the Western Balkans 6 contracting parties and holding a passport issued by one of the WB6 (Applicants who have Japanese nationality are NOT eligible);
- Having a good command of English;
- Neither having participated in exchange program(s) by the Government of Japan nor having lived in Japan;
- Respecting the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation in the Western Balkans;
- Having a valid passport.

In addition to the above criteria, it is desirable that applicants have interest in Japan or have been involved in study or activities related to Japan.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION: Participants from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Montenegro also need to apply for a visa to participate in the program. The organizers will inform the selected participants of the application process once decided.

Costs

Round trip international air tickets to Japan by economy class, overseas travel accident insurance, accommodation and transportation in Japan, meals during the program, and admission fees for scheduled activities in Japan are covered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (Participants are expected to cover personal expenses such as excess baggage charge and travel expenses between their residences and departure/arrival airport designated by the program.).

Please click on the following link, to access the Application Form and have the chance to be part of the program: <https://forms.gle/LmAxRVn9uvfPG23H8>

Deadline for application is **Sunday, 15th of September 2019, 23h59 CET Time.** Only selected participants will be notified.

Contact points:

Bérangère DAILLY

Program Assistant

Regional Youth Cooperation Office

berangere.dailly@rycowb.org

Rika ONODERA

Yukina ABE

Central and South Eastern Europe Division

European Affairs Bureau

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan

wbcijapan@mofa.go.jp