



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

MIRAI Program 2020/2021: Western Balkans Youth Exchange

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

I. **Background and Organizing 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 Western Balkans (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 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. The program aims to promote mutual understandings, enhance intellectual discussions and build a basis for future friendship and cooperation between 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 this youth exchange for the third time, in cooperation with the **Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO)** as one of the key actors working on youth issues in the region.

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 program 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. Furthermore, it supports the development of a political and social environment that empowers and facilitates youth exchange.

In the last years, RYCO has launched four Open Calls for Project Proposals and has granted over 100 projects, implemented by non-governmental organizations (NGO) and high schools from the region. The projects and initiatives implemented by RYCO are designed on the basis of partnership and mobility by giving youth the chance to travel and work closely with their peers in topics such as intercultural learning and dialogue, youth participation and social inclusion. Moreover, RYCO is also supporting high schools and NGOs in capacity building activities in each of its Contracting Parties.

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



I. **MIRAI PROGRAM 2020/2021**

“Western Balkans meet Japan: A Bridge into the Future”, is a youth exchange program, organized under the MIRAI Program 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 the WB.

In 2018, in cooperation with the MOFA of Japan, RYCO implemented the youth exchange *“Western Balkans Meet Japan – A Bridge into the Future”*, from 30 October to 7 November 2018. The program gave the opportunity to 17 young people from all the WB6 to take part in a 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, and many more.

In 2019, in cooperation with the MOFA of Japan, RYCO implemented the second youth exchange *“Western Balkans Meet Japan – A Bridge into the Future”* which gathered 15 young people from across the region, during 13 to 21 November 2019. Participants visited the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in Tokyo, where they engaged in discussions on a variety of topics on Western Balkans, Japan, cultural diversities and development.

During these two exchanges, participants observed various aspects of the Japanese life and looked for similarities in their region in order to emphasize possible cooperation. Upon the completion of the exchanges, they drafted Action Plans in order to share their experience and deliver the findings in their communities.



To know more about the past activities organized in 2018 and 2019, please visit the following links: MIRAI Program 2018 - <https://www.rycowb.org/?p=5491> and MIRAI Program 2019 - <https://www.rycowb.org/?p=7325>

Due to the developments of the COVID-19 pandemic, planned activities for the year 2020 were postponed for 2021.

This year, the youth exchange will take place from **10 to 18 May 2021** in Japan, and will gather 11 participants coming from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. The selected participants will have the opportunity to discuss current topics, sharing experiences with youth from Japan, developing intercultural skills, and visiting and exploring Japanese culture.

Please note that due to the situation of the pandemic or unforeseen events, the program may be suspended, or the implementation period/format may be changed.

Program Content:

- Online pre-exchange program before departure (scheduled in April 2021).
- Lectures on Japan and its major policies.
- Courtesy call on senior ranking officials of MOFA.
- Discussions with Japanese young students / researchers at universities / think tanks.
- Visiting historical sites.
- Learning cutting edge technologies.
- Visiting local industries and provinces.
- Homestay and learning about traditional culture.
- Presentations on the outcomes of the exchange by participants.
- Follow up discussions among participants and dissemination of information on various communication channels.
- Farewell Party.

The language of the program and content will be in English.



Eligible applicants:

- Being a currently enrolled student in an undergraduate or graduate program and aged from 20 to 25 years on the 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 or similar 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 eligibility criteria, it is desirable that applicants have interest in Japan or have been involved in studying 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.

Important Terms and Conditions

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 shall pay their personal expenses, including passport, visa acquisition, vaccination, excess baggage charge, travel expenses between their home and the designated airport, and purchase of souvenirs/personal goods before or during the program).



Cancellation Policy:

If a participant decides to cancel the participation in the program due to any personal reasons other than a medical or other unavoidable circumstances, the participant shall be fully responsible for any costs associated with this cancellation. The cancellation fees will be charged to the participant if his/her application has already been accepted and the flight and/or other bookings are completed. In the event of cancellation due to a medical or other unavoidable circumstances, cancellation fees may be waived upon presentation of a relevant certificate or evidence requested by the organizers.

Data Privacy:

All personal information will be used only for the program purposes and shall be treated in compliance with the Personal Information Protection Law and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). By participating in the program, the participant agrees to grant permission to the organizing partners of the program to use photos, videos and documentation materials from the activities in writings, photographs, films, and recordings collected during the program.

Applying for the MIRAI 2020/2021 Program

To apply and have the chance to be part of the program, all interested and qualified participants should fill in the Application Form available on the following link:
<https://forms.gle/6MMkUwsZz9vE8bJo8>

Deadline for applications is **22 February 2021, 23h59 CET Time.** Only selected participants will be notified.

Contact points:

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