

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

MIRAI Program 2021/2022: 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 Regional Cooperation;
- Cooperation with third parties in the region.

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 closer 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 the “MIRAI Program”, which features intellectual exchange among youth across Japan and Europe.

In order to further achieve a bigger impact and effectiveness in the Western Balkans, MIRAI Program is organizing for the fourth 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.

*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



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of JAPAN



The Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) is an independently functioning institutional mechanism, founded by the Western Balkans 6 participants (WB6): 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 policymaking and advocates for reform. It supports the development of a political and social environment that empowers and facilitates youth exchange.

Since becoming operational in 2017, RYCO successfully organized four open calls for project proposals through which we supported 110 projects across the Western Balkans. In these youth exchanges, we invested almost 3 million Euros and directly exchanged over 6000 young people. Indirect participation goes above 10.000 participants. Moreover, through RYCO supported activities, more than 3000 civil society organizations and secondary schools in the region started cross-regional partnerships.

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



II. MIRAI PROGRAM 2021/2022

“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”**, 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, from 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 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>

In **2020**, due to the developments of the COVID-19 pandemic, no exchange took place during the year, and the activities were postponed for 2021 where 11 participants coming from Albania,



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Ministry of Foreign Affairs
of JAPAN



Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia gathered in online sessions that took place during April and May 2021. If the epidemiological situation allows, the group will be traveling to Japan with the group selected through this open call.

In **2021**, the “MIRAI 2021/2022” will be a short-term youth exchange program where 12 graduate/undergraduate students from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, will learn about peacebuilding and travel to explore Japanese culture.

The program will have an online orientation phase to take place during January and February 2022, and a visit to Japan to be conducted during either February or March 2022.

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.

The Pre-Exchange Program (Online) will consist of:

- Orientation of the program;
- Lecture on the theme-related contents;
- Virtual exchange and discussion with Japanese students/ experts.

The Exchange Program in Japan will consist of:

- 4 days in Tokyo and 2 days in another city;
- Lectures on Japan and its major policies;
- Visiting Japanese companies/ research institutes/ historical sites (Tokyo and another prefecture);
- Discussions with Japanese young students/experts at universities/think-tanks;
- Homestay (in a province).

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

In conclusion of the whole Program, participants are expected to prepare:

- Reports and Disseminations of the Program
- Presentations on the outcome by participants



- Follow-up discussions among participants
- Attend a Farewell Party, etc.

Eligible applicants:

- Being a currently enrolled student in an undergraduate or graduate program and aged from 20 years and older 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.
- Respecting the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation in the Western Balkans.
- Having a valid passport.
- Neither having participated in an exchange or similar program(s) by the Government of Japan nor having lived in Japan.
- Those who have experience residing in Japan for more than 6 months are not eligible.
- Those who have participated in “MIRAI” and/or similar programs funded by the Japanese government are not eligible.
- Applicants must be in good health both physically and mentally.

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

Applicants must understand the aims of this program and commit to sharing and disseminating their experiences and the attractions of Japan through various communication tools including social media and/or their publications after the online pre-exchange program, during their stay in Japan and after returning to home countries. Publication results should be shared with the Government of Japan’s Foreign Missions located in participants’ residential countries.

NOTE: 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 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).

Cancellation Policy: If a participant decides to cancel the participation in the program due to personal reasons, the participant shall be fully responsible for any costs associated with this cancellation.

Data Privacy: All personal information will be used only for the program's purposes. 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.

Important Notice for the Prevention of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

In response to the spread of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19), the following effective measures to prevent infection and protect the health and safety of participants and program staff members apply:

- Please wear face masks and cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or a sleeve of your clothing if you have to cough or sneeze;
- If you have symptoms of fever (about 37.0°C), fatigue, or cold during the program, please avoid going out and consulting with the staff immediately.

Please avoid the "Three Cs":

- Closed spaces with poor ventilation
- Crowded places with many people nearby
- Close-contact settings such as close-range conversations
- Please keep physical distance
- Please wash your hands frequently with hand sanitizer and gargle



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Ministry of Foreign Affairs
of JAPAN



In addition:

- Please check your health condition and measure body temperature before breakfast, in the daytime and evening;
- Please eat well and sleep well.

Applying for the MIRAI 2021/2022 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/FwUK4aMGGuZE4Gna7>

The deadline for applications is **12 November 2021, 23h59 CET Time.**

Only selected participants will be notified.

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