

RYCO STRATEGIC PLAN 2022 – 2024



RYCO
Regional Youth Cooperation Office



Federal Foreign Office

RYCO STRATEGIC PLAN 2022 – 2024

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The Way towards a New Strategy (principles and methodology)

RYCO's strategic direction is determined in the Strategic Plan 2019-2021, which sets out its vision, mission and objectives, organisational values, development strategy and internal institutional development plans. In 2021, RYCO started the process of development of a new strategy (supported by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, approved by the Governing Board (GB) in June 2021).

This process had the objective of creating space for significant consultation. The new strategy is based on the following principles.

Key principles:

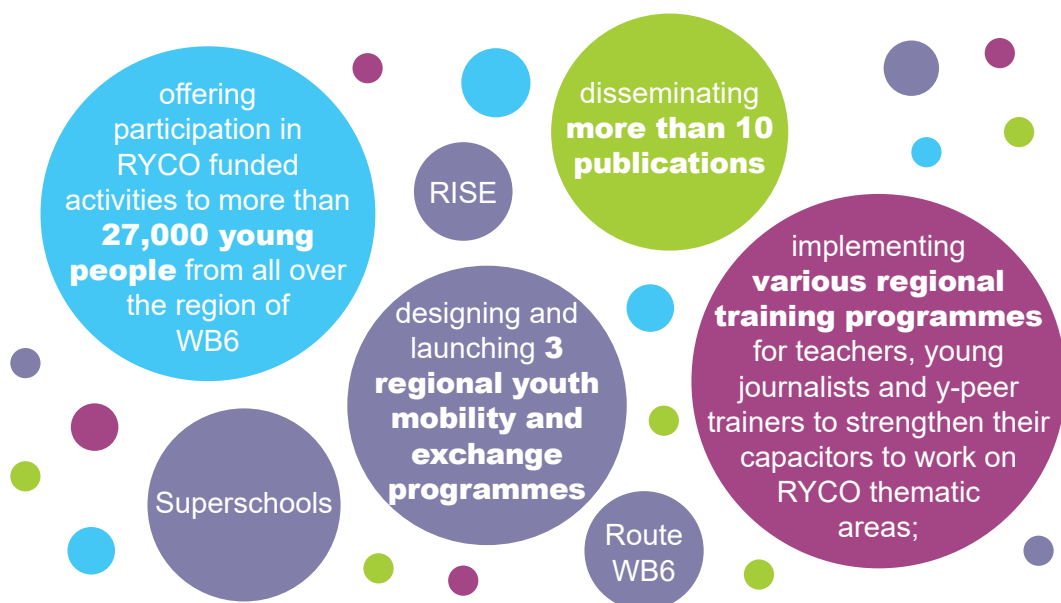
- the framework of the RYCO mission (reconciliation, peacebuilding and regional youth exchanges);**
- the needs of young people in WB6 (evidence based) and the current situation in the field of reconciliation, peacebuilding and intercultural learning in WB6;**
- the regional Study 'Shared Futures' – Youth Perception on Peace (UNPBF/RYCO 2021);**

- **RYCO outcomes, achievements and lessons learned (based on an evaluation of the current strategy, projects and partnerships);**
- **Systemic Conflict Analysis (SCA) that was produced in the process;**
- **continuity (linked with processes/projects that are already happening);**
- **participatory and inclusive approach (development of the Strategy through wide consultations of all staff, key partners (international and local), governments, GB, AB, key beneficiaries (youth organisations and schools), young people, youth workers, teachers, the donor community and experts;**
- **innovation (the methodology used for the development process is creative, interactive and interesting for all parties to be involved and to reach quality results);**
- **impact oriented (the focus of the Strategy goes beyond wishes and outputs and targets measurable impact in societies);**
- **measurable and will include monitoring and evaluation as an integral part of the new strategy, creating space for RYCO to become an effective learning based institution.**

RYCO in numbers 2018–2021

During 2018-2021, RYCO has shown that it is an accountable regional mechanism that delivers high quality programmes to promote regional cooperation, mobility and exchange in WB6. In addition, RYCO contributed to creating and promoting an enabling environment by building demand.

The last programme mission of RYCO was achieved through the following:



the engagement of around **4,500 professional and voluntary workers** from CSOs and secondary schools throughout the region in our activities

strengthening the capacities of youth and grassroots organisations and secondary schools to access and use RYCOs resources and methodologies¹ to engage in peacebuilding and social cohesion activities in WB6

asking **more than 5,400 young people** about their perceptions on peace in the WBs and voiced their concerns in the regional **“Shared Futures” study**

90% of the young people who attended our activities **self-reported positive experiences when collaborating with peers** from the WB6 region

investing **EUR 3,000,000** in support of **110 regional projects** throughout the region through **4 Open Calls** responding to identified needs of youth, CSOs and secondary schools in WB6

raising awareness among journalists and media stakeholders on RYCO priorities and on the values of intercultural exchange through a PR campaign and media briefings that increased media coverage about RYCO, as guided by its values and principles

1. The resources provided by RYCO:

1. *A Mapping of Educational Initiatives for ICLD, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation among Youth in WB6.*

2. *Intercultural Dialogue, Peacebuilding, Remembrance and Reconciliation: A Toolkit for Teachers in the WBs.*

3. *Youth Peer Education for Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation: A manual for trainers in WB6.*

4. *Regional study of social entrepreneurship.*

5. *Beginner's Manual for Project Proposal Writing.*

6. *Regional Volunteering Platform.*

Context and Rationale

Regional cooperation, peacebuilding, reconciliation and youth mobility present an ambivalent picture, without significant progress achieved, but also followed by persistent and emerging challenges. This section presents a brief overview of some of the main advances, opportunities and challenges of regional cooperation, peacebuilding, reconciliation and youth in the Western Balkans.

Peacebuilding and reconciliation among the youth has seen progress

Requests for stepping up peacebuilding and reconciliation are not new for the Western Balkans. At the same time the foundation of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office has meant a substantial innovation and major/massive step forward in this field. Among the advancements of this process is the sustained growth in the number of young people throughout the region attending RYCO activities and afterward continuing their engagement in the sector. Participants of RYCO activities state that their engagement in youth exchanges was life-changing.² Some of the programmes

2. A better region starts with youth, p.44

even enabled them to challenge the status quo in the region.

Based on research findings of researchers from the University of Vienna monitoring RYCO's programmes and their impact on Youth, it is clear that young people feel that the youth in the region are being enabled to create a sense of community on the regional level, allowing them to learn more about each other³. Based on the results of the After Activity Questionnaires (2020), 90% of young people attending our activities self-reported positive experiences of collaborating with peers from the WB6 region. Increasing people's knowledge and supporting the capacities of those working with youth and young people in the areas of peacebuilding, reconciliation and dealing with the past were other important working areas for RYCO that paved new ways for exchange and mutual understanding. In total, 78.93% of young people and 85.12% of voluntary and professional workers self-reported increased knowledge about youth reconciliation, mobility and cooperation after their participation in RYCO funded activities. Hence, this contributed to more peaceful and increased cooperation in the region. Increasing people's knowledge and supporting the capacities of those working with youth and young people in the areas of peacebuilding, reconciliation and dealing with the past

3. University of Vienna Study on RYCO, p. 20

were other important working areas for RYCO that paved new ways for exchange and mutual understanding. In total, 78.93% of young people and 85.12% of voluntary and professional workers self-reported increased knowledge about youth reconciliation, mobility and cooperation after their participation in RYCO funded activities. Hence, this contributed to more peaceful and increased cooperation in the region.

It is without doubt that young people are and will continue to be crucial actors when it comes to building sustainable peaceful societies and as such RYCO is indeed promoting their involvement in all processes. As part of the #SharedFutures study, young people shared many commonalities and saw that their hopes and values are closely aligned⁴. This created space for meaningful programmes to be realised through this Strategic Plan. Young people have shown that the region's divisions and conflicts have not left them entirely untouched. However, a significant percentage of young people expressed openness to friendship with members of different groups and thus validated the positive impact of our work.

We are aware that peacebuilding and reconciliation work is a long journey that requires continuous commitment

4. Shared futures study — Key messages.

and patience. Peace and reconciliation are being challenged daily throughout the region. Hence, they should not be taken for granted and further work to safeguard them through innovative, flexibility and adaptive approaches are urgently required.

Challenges for the youth regarding the region's sustainable peacebuilding and reconciliation process

Inherited divisive narratives and stereotypes constitute one of the main challenges to peacebuilding and reconciliation. Young people continued to cite their parents and other family members as the most important source of information regarding other peoples in the Western Balkans. Next to that, social media play an important role⁵. Different to these often one-sided ways of gathering information, participants of youth encounters had the chance to grasp the concept that the “other” does not necessarily meet their previous expectations and preconceptions⁶. Therefore, RYCO is following a clear approach to engage the youth against stereotypes and hate speech in the region. Personal encounters of young people from different communities and capacity building, among others,

5. Shared Futures, pp. 112-113.

6. University of Viena Study on RYCO

bring up the question of (social) media literacy, which is one of the major ways to counter the current problem of fake news and increasing division.

Even more deep-rooted than general stereotypes are different narratives regarding a shared but also dividing past in WB6. Although on average young people tended to be willing to forgive other groups for past wrongdoing, some were less prone to do so, and an important proportion in each society was resolutely unwilling”⁷. The acknowledgment of committed violations in a meaningful way would facilitate the approach to forgiveness based on the principles of 'Dealing with the Past' outlined by Joinet-Orentlicher⁸. At the same time, there is a lack of remembrance work employing multiple perspectives in the region's societies. It is therefore of utmost importance that RYCO continues to focus its thematic work on peacebuilding and to constructively deal with the past and the issue of reconciliation.

On the other hand, it is not only important to deliver programmes to the WB6 youth. Currently young people in the region often feel and actually are left out of political decision making processes in their communities. A high level of distrust towards public institutions

7. Shared futures study, pp. 103-104

8. A Conceptual Framework for Dealing with the Past, Swiss Peace

widespread among them⁹. RYCO is creating space for meaningful youth involvement in all levels of its function. The new Strategy aims to step up advocacy and awareness raising work in order to improve the overall involvement of young voices. RYCO encounters can become a vivid testing ground for this involvement.

Closely linked to the lack of involvement of youth in decision making is also their wider representation in their societies. Currently, only a minority of youth in the Western Balkans states is actively involved in civic engagement or civil society activities, while many more young people have expressed interest in being involved¹⁰. RYCO aims at becoming an important stepping stone in creating space for the meaningful involvement of the youth within their civil societies and beyond through means of youth exchanges and mobility volunteering programmes.

A last context to be taken in consideration regards the future of the Western Balkans is that young people are overwhelmingly pro-European and consider joining the EU as the most important factor in creating long-term peace and stability in WB6¹¹. At the same time more than half of the region's youth envisions their mid-term

9. FES Study, pp. 65-68 and Shared Futures

10. Shared Futures, pp. 53-57

11. Ibid, p. 15.

future outside the region, preferably in Western Europe, whereas only a minimal number of young people consider moving within the region¹². RYCO aims to achieve closer regional cooperation regarding the current issues. It stands behind its commitment to support the efforts of the region's societies regarding their path towards EU integration. Furthermore, it strives to discover the potential of exchange in order to support young people in living and contributing here.

12. Ibid, p. 129.

RYCO's Mission¹³

RYCO is an intergovernmental organisation that was established through the Berlin Process by six Western Balkans governments in 2016 with the following mission.

- To support the regional exchange of youth and their sharing of ideas as a ground of future cooperation prospects in our region, based on the values of co-existence, tolerance and respect for human rights and diversity as well as the commitment to inclusion and security.
- To step up regional cooperation among youth and youth dedicated institutions and ensure implementation on of joint programmes for young people with the focus on the principles of democratic governance, sustainable economic development, education and innovation.
- To coordinate youth cooperation in the Western Balkans.

13. From the RYCO Statute and Establishing Agreement.

RYCO's Vision

In 2025 the Western Balkans will have a more visible and impactful youth culture of reconciliation, including substantial dialogue among young people in the whole region. Regional Youth Cooperation will be strengthened by a high share of young people experiencing inner-region mobility, built up capacities and networks of multipliers in regional youth work and an enabling political and societal environment for sustainable peacebuilding and youth engagement. Youth will be established as a cross-cutting and regionally approached policy field.

RYCO's Values and Principles

In 2025 the Western Balkans will have a more visible and impactful youth culture of reconciliation, including substantial dialogue among young people in the whole region. Regional Youth Cooperation will be strengthened by a high share of young people experiencing inner-region mobility, built up capacities and networks of multipliers in regional youth work and an enabling political and societal environment for sustainable peacebuilding and youth engagement. Youth will be established as a cross-cutting and regionally approached policy field.

Meaningful Youth Participation and Co-Ownership

RYCO truly believes that its work can only be delivered through the profound involvement of young people as co-owners of all its efforts. It will ensure the participation of young people at all levels of its function in a youth-friendly manner. Starting from the decision-making process, it will strengthen the independence of the youth representatives on its Governing Board, continue

to involve young people in the co-design of projects and programmes supported and run by RYCO, strengthen their capacities to support and deliver its mission and as the final beneficiaries of all its work. Finally, it commits to make young voices heard in regional policy making.

Regional Approach

As a regional organisation RYCO leverages its mandate to promote and implement a regional perspective in all aspects of its work through programming, advocacy and its operations. RYCO's structure and its Governing Board as well as the Secretariat, including both the Head of Office and staff from all over the region and its six Local Branch Offices, will strive to implement this approach to the fullest.

Dealing with the past, constructive remembrance and reconciliation

Since its establishment RYCO has and continues to believe that reconciliation is a process that involves bringing together individuals, groups and societies burdened by the effects of the past or present conflicts, negative representations and perceptions of 'the other'. 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. Reconciliation results from a comprehensive approach to dealing with the past. The apprehension and application of the Joinet-Orentlicher principles¹⁴ by policy makers is fundamental and essential if reconciliation is to have any chance of success in the region. RYCO will promote these principles amongst policy makers. Fundamentals of RYCOs work on DwP are based on the Joinet - Orentlicher principles which focus on raising awareness on the right to: to know, reparation, justice and non-recurrence.

Through its programming and advocacy, RYCO will build new pathways to rebuild trust and reconcile societies and people in the Western Balkans . Resultantly, ruptures to previous relationships that were caused by conflict, injustice and/or other forms of violence are repaired by employing mutual recognition and responsibility. In the framework of its reconciliation work, RYCO aims to 'deal with the past' and consequently develop a constructive remembrance. The aim of educating for remembrance and reconciliation is to enable younger generations to acquire the skills needed to distinguish between facts and opinions about the past, to think critically about received narratives, to listen to

and consider additional perspectives and narratives, to reflect upon the roles and choices of various actors, to weigh those choices within the balance of universal human rights and ethics, and to choose to become positive actors in proactively shaping a better future.

European Spirit of Cooperation, Understanding and Tolerance

RYCO will promote the European identity of the Western Balkans through all of its programming and advocacy, aiming to enhance mutual understanding and tolerance, leading to strengthened and sustainable cooperation. In pursuing this mission, RYCO will demonstrate its commitment to human rights, human dignity and the building of peace based on mutual respect and trust. RYCO fully supports the efforts of the region's societies regarding their path towards EU integration.

Inclusion and diversity

RYCO will foster inclusion and diversity through all of its work. This means ensuring that individuals and groups with different backgrounds and capabilities are culturally and socially accepted, welcomed, valued and enabled to participate equally. All activities aim to be framed through an inclusive perspective. When organising

youth activities, it is key for RYCO that every person has equal opportunity as a perquisite, regardless of their origin, age, race, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, educational level, socioeconomic status or capabilities.

Impact and quality driven

RYCO is committed to deliver and invest in the high quality impact of all of its programmes and operations. It will develop a state-of-the-art research, evaluation and learning system to ensure quality programmes and to optimise the sustainability of its programming investment.

Innovation oriented

RYCO seeks to be innovative in its approach and programming in order to reach more young people and to make them part of its activities, projects and programmes. The digital field opens various options for young people, but at the same time it is difficult to grab their attention for RYCO related topics. RYCO will provide new approaches, tools and methodologies to ensure that it reaches young people in the region. It is open to and encourages innovative and explorative approaches within the organisation and among its partners.

Impartiality

As an intergovernmental organisation RYCO strives to be an independently functioning institutional mechanism for youth cooperation among the Western Balkans six, which will be mission driven and politically impartial in all of its activities.

Accountability and transparency

RYCO will hold itself accountable to its Governing Board and all other stakeholders with which it is engaged, such as donors, young people in the Western Balkans, schools, CSOs and the general public. It will ensure that its programmes are designed and managed to the highest standards of financial rectitude. RYCO will demonstrate the highest standards of transparency and openness. Its accounts will therefore be regularly audited and it will engage with the public to share information about its activities.

Partnership and accessibility

RYCO is committed to building and maintaining partnerships with like-minded partners at all levels in order to ensure the accessibility of its programmes and networks. RYCO wants to engage with its partners on the basis of mutual respect and on eye-level and is open

adjusting its work to meet the relevant needs. It will leverage its own position, resources and expertise and those of its partners in order to optimise its work and build networks among its partners in the whole region.

The Joinet–Orentlicher Principles of Dealing with the Past¹⁵

As mentioned in the RYCO's previous Strategic Plan 2019-2021, reconciliation is not a stand-alone issue, as evidenced by the Framework at the end of this section.

In 1997, the United Nations Human Rights Commission approved 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:

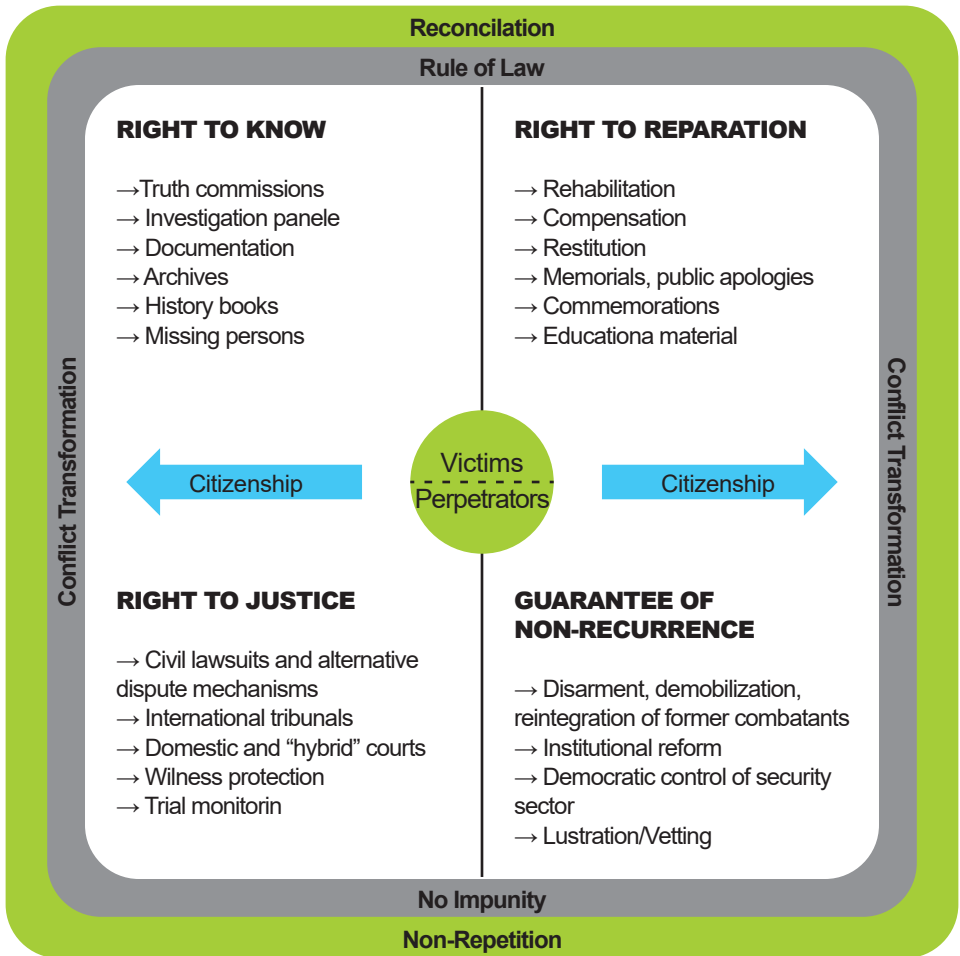
15. RYCO Strategic Plan 2019-2021, pp 27-28

- 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:

[A-Conceptual-Framework-for-Dealing-with-the-Past-Essential-16-swisspeace.pdf](#)



Graphic 1. Joinet–Orentlicher principles of dealing with the past
(Inspired by the Joinet–Orentlicher Principles by FDFA / Swiss Peace, 2006)

Thematic areas

- 1. Peacebuilding and reconciliation*
 - a) Intercultural Learning and Dialogue*
 - b) Constructively Dealing with the past*
 - c) Countering Hate Speech*
- 2. Youth Empowerment and Engagement in Society*
- 3. Social Inclusion*
- 4. Social Cohesion and Youth Policy*

Peacebuilding and reconciliation

Peacebuilding and reconciliation in WB6 are crucial to the foundation of RYCO. Therefore, they form the most important thematic area of RYCO's work. They contribute to establishing the foundations for sustainability within and between our societies that have experienced significant social conflict, violence and/or war. Through peacebuilding and reconciliation RYCO commits to ensure that the relationships between diverse individuals and groups are grounded in and protected by agreements, policies, institutions, cultures and modes

of behaviour that are non-violent, respectful of diversity, inclusive, equitable and just. Building peace and consequently reconciliation thus depend on acquiring a universal and integrative worldview in which the shared humanity and interdependence of all peoples is valued and the barriers to the full development and well-being of all members of society are recognised and transformed. In order to deliver properly in this direction, RYCO will invest in enhancing its competency in conflict analysis, conflict transformation and unity building. Furthermore, the following three focuses are tackled in the area of peacebuilding and reconciliation.

Intercultural learning and dialogue (ICLD)

One of the main thematic areas of RYCO's work over the past years has been Intercultural Learning and Dialogue. Through the ICLD, RYCO will continue to build positive relationships in the present-day societies of the Western Balkans, particularly between those that have experienced conflict by using communication skills that enable mutual understanding and cooperation. RYCO believes that ICLD is a way of communicating and listening that enables people to bridge different points of view and to constructively navigate the diverse perceptions, needs and priorities that often make sensitive and controversial issues difficult to discuss

by investing in ICLD, RYCO enables young people to gain a better understanding of the history, cultures and worldviews of other peoples and to develop more informed views on the social and political context of contemporary intergroup relations. Investing towards intercultural learning and dialogue through youth exchanges focuses on divided communities and communities that are lacking connections and opportunities for youth cooperation due to being isolated from one another, particularly between those that have experienced violent conflicts. RYCO will work with its partners in the direction of eliminating barriers to participation in youth mobility projects.

Constructively dealing with the past (DwP)

RYCO's aims through educating for remembrance to enable younger generations to acquire the skills needed to distinguish between facts and opinions about the past, to think critically about received narratives, to listen to and consider additional perspectives and narratives, to reflect upon the roles and choices of various actors, to weigh those choices within the balance of universal human rights and ethics and to choose to become positive actors in proactively shaping a better future. Please see the values section and Joinet-Orentlicher principles for more information.

Countering hate speech

Considering the increased level of hate speech throughout the world and the region, RYCO promotes and strives for zero tolerance of hate speech. Hate speech is all forms of expression that spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and any other form of hatred based on intolerance, including intolerance expressed through aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants, and people of immigrant origin (EU Council of Europe youth partnership). According to the “Shared Futures” study, hate speech both online and offline was the most reported form of violence or discrimination for 12% of young people in the Western Balkans¹⁶. Therefore, during this strategic period, this thematic area will be addressed and tackled constructively in RYCO’s programming aimed at reducing risky behaviour and increasing (social) media literacy.

Youth empowerment and engagement in society

‘A better Region starts with You(th)’ has been RYCO’s motto since the previous SP and it will continue to be

16. Shared Futures, Youth Perceptions on Peace in the Western Balkans, UNDP, 2021, p. 12. Available at <https://shared-futures.com/survey-findings/>.

so for this strategic period. According to the “Shared Futures” study, an average of 19.5% of youth participate in civic activities. Therefore, there is still huge potential for civic engagement with over 65% of young people across the region reporting interest in being actively involved. Youth empowerment and their engagement in society is another crucial line of work that RYCO focuses on through its programming. Youth empowerment includes strategies that offer young people opportunities for meaningful involvement and participation. RYCO will ensure the participation of young people at all levels of its function in a youth-friendly manner. Starting from the decision-making process, it aims to strengthen the independence of youth representatives on its Governing Board and continue to involve young people in the co-design of projects and programmes supported and run by RYCO, to strengthen their capacities to support the delivering of its mission and as the final beneficiaries of all its work. Finally, it commits to making young voices heard in regional policymaking.

Social inclusion

As mentioned in the section on the values and principles of our work, RYCO will foster inclusion and diversity through all of its work. This means ensuring that individuals and groups with different backgrounds and

capabilities are culturally and socially accepted, welcomed, valued and enabled to participate equally. All RYCO activities are framed through an inclusive perspective. When organising youth activities, it is of utmost importance for RYCO to ensure that every person has equal opportunity as a perquisite, regardless of their origin, age, race, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, educational level, socioeconomic status or capabilities.

Social cohesion and youth policy

RYCO will continue to work to ensure social cohesion and to support youth policies throughout the region. Social cohesion is the capacity of a society to ensure the welfare of all of its members, minimising disparities and avoiding polarisation. A cohesive society is a mutually supportive community of free individuals pursuing these common goals through democratic means. RYCO believes that social cohesion is not only a matter of combating social exclusion and poverty but also about creating solidarity between the societies of the Western Balkans so that exclusion will be minimised. Whereas youth policy is a strategy implemented by public authorities with a view to providing young people with opportunities and experiences that support

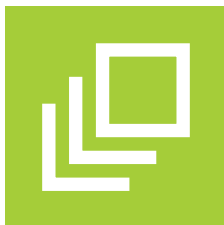
their successful integration into society and enable them to be active and responsible members of their societies as well as agents of change¹⁷, RYCO is committed to a more active role in supporting and influencing youth policies in line with its values and principles.

17. Youth Policy Essentials — Youth Partnership between European Union and Council of Europe (revised 2019).

Strategic priority areas



**Providing
Opportunities
For Youth**



**Supporting
Multipliers**



**Advocating
and Raising
Awareness**

Strategic objectives

Strategic objective 1

To initiate, support and foster regional cooperation and intercultural learning, peacebuilding and mobility opportunities for young people in the Western Balkans.

Strategic objective 2

To enhance the capacities, resources and networking of multipliers in the Western Balkans that contribute towards and are engaged in intercultural learning, peacebuilding and other RYCO thematic areas.

Strategic objective 3

To advocate for the development of an enabling environment in the Western Balkans for peacebuilding, regional youth cooperation and improving the position of youth.

Area I.

Intercultural Learning and Peacebuilding Opportunities

Strategic Objective 1

To initiate, support and foster regional cooperation and intercultural learning, peacebuilding and mobility opportunities for young people in the Western Balkans.

Bringing together young people from the Western Balkans, organising their exchanges and having tailor-made programmes for their intercultural learning and dialogue, peacebuilding and/or for constructively dealing with the past is recognised as 'best practice' in the work of RYCO and constitute its approach towards realising the RYCO mission.

Through different grant schemes, the recently initiated Superschool Project (Western Balkans School Scheme), continuation of the work of the regional volunteers programme 'Route WB6' and the Regional Incubator for Social Entrepreneurship (RISE)

and other new initiatives in sport, culture and activist youth exchanges, RYCO with its partners plan to provide opportunities to at least 20,000 young people from the region to meet, work and learn together and create joint initiatives that will also promote the region, intercultural learning and dialogue, peacebuilding, regional cooperation and youth activism.

Strategic Objective 1 Output

1.1 At least 20,000 young people from the WBs increased their intercultural competencies by participating in RYCO funded and supported mobility programmes. A minimum of 75% of young participants self-reported positive experiences from their collaboration with their peers from different cultural backgrounds in WB6. (Baseline: 91.76% in 2021; total of 23,497 young people reached in all activities during 2019-2021)

1.2 At least 30 regional youth exchange projects implemented by CSOs and 100 school exchanges supported in the WBs.

1.3 At least 36 social businesses and young entrepreneurs supported through RISE.

1.4 12 faculties of journalism in WB6 actively cooperate via the Hajde digital platform with the formation of Hajde clubs for students of journalism.

1.5 A minimum of 20% of the young people attending RYCO funded and supported mobility programmes self-report as being part of marginalised groups and at least 25% of participants for the first time. (Baseline of 2021 for self-reported as marginalised: 31.12%, while for the first time the participants 27.39%)

Actions

- supporting regional youth projects of CSOs through RYCO grant schemes;
- the WB School Exchange Scheme ‘Superschools’;
- individual and group volunteering through the regional volunteer programme ‘ROUTE WB6’;
- Regional Incubator for Social Entrepreneurs (RISE);
- programs for university students (e.g., the HAJDE platform for students of journalism);
- the program for youth in political wings;
- the program of internship and intercultural learning for young professionals in partnership with the business community;

- special regional and local mobility programmes on music, culture, art, festivals and sport for peacebuilding and intercultural learning;
- other international, regional and local partnerships that support youth exchanges and intercultural learning.

Area II.

Supporting Multipliers

Strategic Objective 2

To enhance the capacities, resources and networking of multipliers in the Western Balkans that contribute towards and are engaged in intercultural learning, peacebuilding and other RYCO thematic areas.

Multipliers can be the following actors: civil society organisations for youth, youth and student organisations, local and regional umbrella organisations and networks as well as youth workers, educational institutions and teachers, social workers, incubators, local authorities (youth officers), youth peer educators and other actors that work directly with young people in the field of intercultural learning, peacebuilding, reconciliation and other RYCO related fields. All of these multipliers are strategic partners and RYCO will support their work and their networking and foster collaboration in order to enhance their impact in the region.

Through the further development of peace education tools, manuals, courses, mentorship and training programmes and materials, the pool of experts, specific grant schemes for regional networks, establishment of the RYCO Peace Academy as educational standardised programme and through mobility programmes for professionals and networking RYCO will contribute towards building and developing a vibrant and quality community of interlinked multipliers to are work directly with young people in the Western Balkans towards reaching our mission.

Strategic Objective 2 Outputs

2.1 At least 1,500 multipliers have developed and improved essential capacities for their effective work on regional youth cooperation, peacebuilding and intercultural learning through RYCO activities.

(2,970 of those working with youth were involved in RYCO activities from 2019-2021, among them 1,151 attended CB activities during this period.)

(75% of multipliers self-reported that they now know more about youth reconciliation, mobility and cooperation as a result of their participation in RYCO funded capacity building activities. The baseline for 2021 is 82%. 70% of multipliers self-reported incorporating knowledge acquired during RYCO funded capacity

building activities into their work one year after their participation in the training. (The current baseline for 2020 was 70% to 86%.)

2.2 Increased capacity for the regional long-term cooperation of at least 15 regional networks in the field of youth, peacebuilding and intercultural learning in the WBs.

2.3 The RYCO REL Unit with the Methodology Hub with a recognised library and pool of experts is developed and accessible to multipliers (including methodologies, research, tools, manuals, training materials, etc.), including the branded RYCO Youth Peace and Security Academy programme.

Actions

- RYCO Youth Peace and Security Academy;
- peace and ICL education tools and materials;
- digital e-courses and training programmes;
- RYCO pool of trainers and mentors;
- peer education programmes;
- mobility and job shadowing of professionals;
- networking and match-making opportunities;
- grant scheme for regional networks in the field of youth and peacebuilding;
- establishment of the Research, Evaluation and Learning (REL) unit of RYCO.

Area III.

Advocating and Awareness Raising

Strategic Objective 3

To advocate for the development of an enabling environment in the WBs for peacebuilding, regional youth cooperation and improving the position of youth.

The current environment and political atmosphere in the region is still full of tension. Youth do not have trust in the institutions with 57% wishing to leave the region and 81% of youth not active in society, while youth policies as a holistic systemic approach remains underdeveloped¹⁸. Given the existing narratives against regional and interethnic collaboration and hate speech, particularly in the digital space, there is a huge need for RYCO to give strategic focus to advocacy work on developing an enabling environment for peacebuilding, regional youth cooperation and improving the position of youth.

18. The regional study Shared Futures.

This strategic objective is in line with and will promote the UN Youth Peace and Security Agenda¹⁹, which states that throughout the multilateral system and within both the regional and local contexts the critical role of youth in driving positive change in society is increasingly recognised. Young people are described as key agents of change in the 2030 Agenda and as crucial actors in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (20 targets across six SDGs are specifically directed at youth). The meaningful inclusion of young people is also key to the commitment in the 2030 Agenda to “leave no one behind” and the role that young people play in advancing peaceful, just and inclusive societies in particular (SDG 16) is fundamental and more widely acknowledged. The European Union announced 2022 as the European Year of Youth and RYCO will align its activities and cooperation with EU in this respect, particularly as a partner of DG NEAR, the OSCE missions in the region and other partners. As part of this strategy, under this specific area, aligned with its values²⁰ RYCO will strongly focus towards

19. The recognition of young people as a positive force in preventing and resolving conflict and building sustainable peace has gained significant momentum since the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security (YPS) on 9 December 2015.

20. As mentioned in European Spirit of Cooperation, Understanding and Tolerance value, RYCO will promote the European identity of the WB through all of its programming and advocacy, aiming to enhance mutual understanding and tolerance, leading to strengthened and sustainable cooperation. In pursuing this mission, RYCO will demonstrate its commitment to human rights, human dignity and the building of peace based on mutual respect and trust. RYCO fully supports the efforts of the region's societies regarding their path towards EU integration.

Europeanisation and advocating to bring the region closer to the EU and also will aim to become a partner of different EU institutions working with youth and WB6.

To be effective in its advocacy work RYCO will implement the following actions and initiatives: organisation of regular regional high level political gatherings that will also include young leaders, organisation of WB youth forums that include connections with the European Union, offering a regional pool of knowledge and experts for youth policy development in the WBs, creating special connections and networking with young parliamentarians and the media and also by piloting cooperation with religious communities, the business sector, diaspora and by facilitating donor coordination and establishing the 'Regional Youth Peace Capital' network for municipal cooperation (based on the experiences of the European Youth Capital Tirana and previously in Novi Sad). In parallel to this, RYCO will implement various creative and youth friendly campaigns at the local and regional level and provide everyday content through its media channels and also through the new digital platform Hajde in cooperation with young journalists and the network of the faculties of journalism across the region.

Strategic Objective 3 Outputs

3.1 The Regional Youth Peace Security Agenda as an advocacy initiative developed with the active involvement and partnership of governments, parliaments, media professionals and networks, the business sector, religious communities, diaspora and other stakeholders in the WBs.

3.2 A network is created for the involvement of towns and municipalities and the general public in the peacebuilding and youth empowerment field through the Regional Youth (Peace) Day and the Regional Youth (Peace) Capital.

3.3 Youth policy development in the WBs is supported through the established regional pool of experts and practices.

3.4 At least 500 media and media stakeholders increasingly present positive narratives about the value of intercultural exchange.

3.5 A total of 3,000 content items produced through the HAJDE digital youth info platform in cooperation with the Hajde students' clubs and 500,000 web users.

Actions

- Regional Youth Peace Security Agenda as an advocacy initiative;
- the traditional annual high level decision makers forum on youth regional cooperation (e.g., the Ministerial Forum);
- WB Youth Forum (as an official part of Berlin Process, Italian MFA WB-EU initiative, etc.);
- Youth Policy support in the WBs (pool of experts and practices);
- the Programme with Young Parliamentarians;
- Regional Youth Peace and Security Agenda in partnership with media professionals and networks, the business sector, religious communities, diaspora and other stakeholders in the WBs;
- Regional Youth (Peace) Day and the Regional Youth (Peace) Capital (cooperation with towns and municipalities on the RYPS Agenda and the partnership with the European Youth Capital Tirana 2022;
- the second edition of the regional study “Shared Futures” (2024);
- regular media presence
- HAJDE digital youth info platform in cooperation with the Hajde students’ clubs.

Methodology and interventions

RYCO will deploy a variety of programming instruments and approaches to achieve its objectives under this Strategic Plan. All of these instruments shall be employed in line with the values and principles of RYCO and will highlight in particular meaningful youth participation in all stages of programming.

Grant making

RYCO will conduct grant making in all of its three strategic pillars to fund projects initiated by youth and by youth-support organisations. It will favour projects that are creative and innovative relative to the prevailing practice and those that bring to bear the expertise within the community in practice rather than relying on prescribed project formats and activities.

Capacity development

RYCO will design, deliver and support targeted capacity development initiatives that empower and strengthen current and potential grantees, further groups of

multipliers and other partners. Through the establishment of the Research, Evaluation and Learning unit capacity building will gain a set of different services ranging from a training programme, the pool of mentors and trainers, educational tools and manuals to job shadowing.

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 what it learns with partners. RYCO will continue to commission research. It will strengthen its monitoring and evaluation approach in order to archive its learning and improve the knowledge management systems as part of its commitment to further develop a robust evidence base.

Advocacy and policy work

RYCO will initiate and participate in advocacy activities that advance the cause of intercultural exchange and regional youth mobility. It will focus in particular on support for policy reform that facilitates an enabling environment but also support for youth policy development aimed at regional knowledge.

Communication and promotion

RYCO will dedicate resources to enable positive messages about peace and cooperation in the region that reach the broad public. RYCO will work together with the media, young journalists and faculties of journalism and will have a special digital platform for youth Hajde.media.

Regional and local work

Besides of regional projects that RYCO runs, a special part of the work is led by RYCO's six Local Branch Offices. They organise local activities, have local partnerships and support RYCO activities in the field and its mission by ensuring that the programme opportunities provided by RYCO are close to the actual needs of young people.

Networking

RYCO will be active in enlarging and sustaining its networks within the region and beyond, especially in terms of contact with the European Union. Furthermore, it will continue to strive to support networking among organisations and multipliers from within the region and to offer a broad range of tailor-made opportunities.

Partnership leverage

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

Target groups and stakeholders

Young people from the region

RYCO considers young people (aged 14-30) from the region as both its main target group and its stakeholders. When working with and for this group, RYCO especially wants to ensure the inclusion of marginalised, hard to reach and vulnerable youth²¹. Furthermore, it is aware of the current situation and the high level of unemployment among the youth (which increased during the pandemic) that has led to a worrying level of brain drain. Regarding its work, RYCO considers one of the main obstacles to be the fact that young people in the region tend to live segregated lives and do not have proper opportunities to meet each other in formal or informal settings.

21. Among the marginalised, hard to reach and vulnerable youth for whom RYCO will work to ensure equal representation/opportunities to interventions are, but not limited to, persons with physical disabilities, persons with developmental challenges, gender minorities, ethnic minorities, religious minorities, Roma, LGBTQ, persons living in poverty, persons living in remote area with limited or no access to social structures, youth services, persons living in remote area without internet connection, immigrants and refugees, youth not in employment, education or training, youth without parental care, youth exposed to conflict, violence and/or bullying and youth in conflict with the law and youth discriminated against on the basis of race as well as others as self-reported.

RYCO therefore aims through its work to unveil the potential that young people represent in terms of peace and conflict resolution.

Governments and public institutions in the WBs

The governments in WB6 founded RYCO and remain a core stakeholder in its work. Their cooperation is crucial for advancing the peace building process within the region. As an intergovernmental organisation RYCO strives to be an independently functioning institutional mechanism for regional youth cooperation. In order to deliver on this, RYCO works with the respective ministries for youth and education, political actors and policymakers in all of its contracting parties and throughout the region. Regarding its future involvement, RYCO aims to deepen and broaden its current engagement and in particular with the education authorities, cultural institutions and local governments (municipalities) in the region.

Media in the region

Media outlets and social media can act as open spaces for inter-community collaboration and mutual understanding in the region but also contribute to segregation, stereotypes and even hate speech. RYCO

will therefore engage with the media at all levels appropriate to its purposes. Thus, the organisation will work with print media, TV, radio and online media channels to engage with those who cover topics that deal with youth issues, mobility, reconciliation and/or regional cooperation. RYCO's digital platform hajde.media in particular will ensure the involvement of young journalists.

Multipliers within the region's youth sector

RYCO believes in the potential of the region's youth sector, which at present is still in its development phase and requires better institutional support, networking and capacity building. RYCO will assist, enjoin and collaborate with the respective organisations and both individual and institutional multipliers²² that work with young people on a wide range of educational, leisure, volunteering, sport, cultural and civic processes.

22. Notably, RYCO considers those working with youth as multipliers. Multipliers or civil society organisation for youth and youth organisations, local and regional umbrella organisations and networks, educational institutions and teachers, youth and social workers, incubators, local authorities (youth officers), youth peer educators and other actors that work directly with young people in the field of intercultural learning, peacebuilding, reconciliation and other RYCO fields are strategic partners and RYCO will support their work, their networking and foster their collaboration and their impact. This can, among others, be educators working in formal or non-formal settings, volunteers, exchange programme and project managers and exchange programme teams, sports trainers and cultural specialists.

Schools

Secondary schools are a key target group with which RYCO works to bring the youth of the Western Balkans closer. They allow the most comprehensive outreach to young people independent of their social background. Through its exchange programmes between schools, RYCO will pave the way for creating strong and sustainable bonds between secondary schools within the region aimed at establishing long-term partnerships.

Civil society involved in key sectors

RYCO recognises that civil society is a key factor in both reconciliation and youth work in the region. By funding capacity building, networking and collaborative activities RYCO will support regional and local non-governmental organisations, religious institutions and other unions that are in line with its mission and values. Such organisations can be formally registered or informal grass roots groupings with their own youth or youth focused constituencies.

The international community

RYCO has since its foundation been supported by the international community most explicitly by the European

Union and a number of its Member States as well as international organisations (different UN agencies and programme and the OSCE), various embassies and different ministries of foreign affairs. The international community plays an important role regarding the stability and prospects of the region. RYCO will continue to strengthen its relationship with current donors and work to forge relationships with new donors in terms of cooperation at the bilateral, multilateral and foundation level in order to diversify its funding sources and to optimise its independence of action.

The business community in the region

In order to broaden its constituency, RYCO aims to further explore appropriate collaborative opportunities with the business community in the region. To date, business has not been strongly involved in peacebuilding activities but considering the economic situation of young people in the region and the existing linkages between the region's economies there is high potential for cooperation. Next to operating businesses, RYCO will continue to engage young entrepreneurs and associations of young professionals throughout the region.

Other stakeholders

Next to the already named target groups and stakeholders, RYCO aims to explore such possibilities with other actors and networks in the region that have so far not been included in the work of RYCO but are considered important for peacebuilding and reconciliation within the youth sector throughout the framework of the Strategy 2022-2024. Next to the diaspora and religious communities, this also comprises the families of victims and missing persons, communities of former persecuted people and communities of war veterans as well as political parties as possible actors for peacebuilding, reconciliation and future cooperation.

