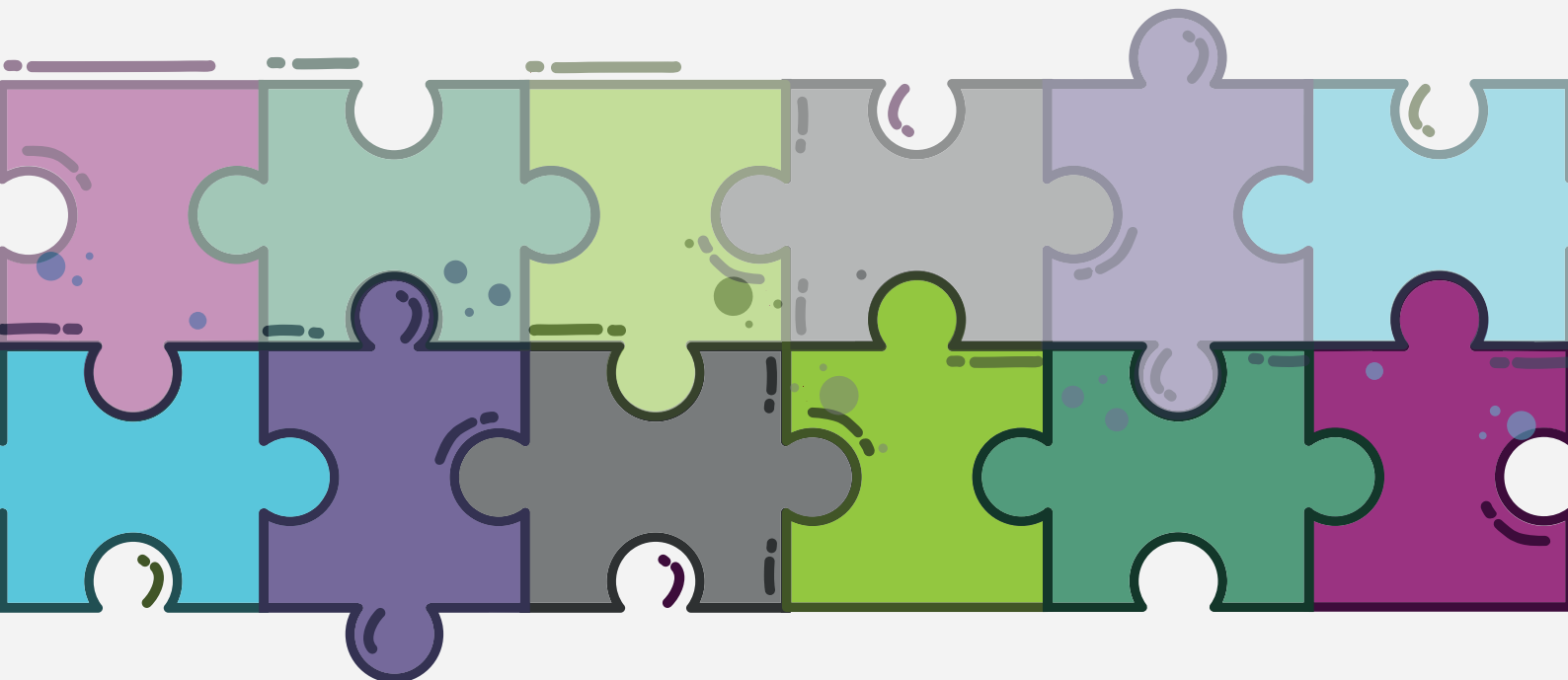


ANNUAL REPORT



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2
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A BETTER REGION STARTS WITH YOUTH

FOREWORD



Dear friends of RYCO,

I am pleased to present the Regional Youth Cooperation Office's (RYCO) Annual Report for 2023. Despite considerable challenges, we have made significant progress in implementing institutional reforms reflected in: the formal Registration of Local Branch offices across the Western Balkans region, HR policy, a new organizational structure, a new salary scale, financial regulations, procurement rules, an approvals matrix, and numerous other policies. We can confidently assert that RYCO is now firmly established on solid foundations that uphold the principles of accountability, transparency, equality, digitalization and decentralization. The completion of institutional reforms marks the start of the transition phase, with an emphasis on change management and the pursuit of exceptional productivity.

Balancing the focus on reforms with the smooth operation of projects and the creation of opportunities for regional youth has been a delicate task. However, with the invaluable support of the Governing Board, Ministers responsible for youth affairs across the Western Balkans, and youth representatives, we have established robust governance systems that is ready to partner all friends of youth. Safeguarding the neutrality and independence of such politically sensitive inter-governmental mechanism is a merit of cohesion among Secretariat and the Governing board.

The existence of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) serves as a powerful political statement, reflecting the commitment of Western Balkan leaders to collaborate based on shared values. Unlike other regional initiatives, RYCO emphasizes the importance of addressing underlying factors that hinder cooperation, such as stereotypes and prejudices. The organization firmly believes that additional efforts are necessary to overcome these obstacles and ensure successful implementation of regional agreements.

RYCO has strategically positioned itself as the primary youth policy actor in the region. Capitalizing on this position, we aim to maximize opportunities for young people in the Western Balkans.

RYCO is now a respected regional political mechanism that reflects the great willingness of our governments to cooperate on a regional level, and this is to be recognized by all political actors across the world that are willing to support the Western Balkans. As we are paving the road for our politicians and youth to cooperate even more, we are committed to welcoming all projects of other Regional initiatives and expect to be recognized as the mandated WB youth policy mechanism by all stakeholders that are willing to embark on the work with the youth in the region of Western Balkans.

Impressive achievements of RYCO are not just the high numbers you will notice in this report, but also the energy spent by all teams of RYCO and youth in order to create a culture of Peace and understanding as precondition for economic development. Wait for more, wait for the best to come because the betterregion starts with YOUth.

Warm regards,

Albert Hani
Secretary General





TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 RYCO's 2023 results in numbers

RYCO'S RESULTS: PROGRAM MISSION

2.1 Grant-making

2.2 RYCO donor-funded projects

2.2.1 Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme (Superschools)

2.2.2 Regional Incubator for Social Entrepreneurship (RISE)

2.2.3 EU-WB Students Integration (EU-WB-SI)

2.2.4 5th Open Call

2.2.5 Western Balkan Youth Cultural Fund (WB YCF)

2.2.6 RYCOgnized - YPS

2.3 Advocacy, Cooperation, and Partnership

2.4 Local Branch Offices

2.5 REL/Monitoring and Evaluation

2.6 Communications

2.6.1 Hajde Platform

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN 2023

3.1 Financial Sustainability

3.2 Procurement

3.3 Legal

RYCO PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS



AB	Advisory Board
AFD	Agence française de développement (French Development Agency)
AIESEC	International Association of Students in Economics and Business
BMZ	Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (Germany)
CBT	Capacity Building Training
CfP	Call for Proposals
CP	Contracting Party
ALB	Albania
BIH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
KOS	Kosovo*
MNE	Montenegro
MKD	North Macedonia
SRB	Serbia
	<i>*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</i>
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
Forum ZfD	Forum Civil Peace Service
GB	Governing Board
GMFA	German Ministry of Foreign Affairs
GIZ	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Agency for International Cooperation)
HR	Human Resources
HO	Head Office
LBO	Local Branch Office
HLBO	Head of Local Branch Office
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization

OC	Open Call
OFAJ	L'Office franco-allemand pour la Jeunesse (Franco-German Youth Office)
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
REL	Research, Evaluation, and Learning
RISE	Regional Incubator for Social Entrepreneurs
RYCO	Regional Youth Cooperation Office
SE	Social Entrepreneurship
SEEYN	South East European Youth Network
UN	United Nations
WB	Western Balkans
WB6	Western Balkans six
WB YCF	Western Balkan Youth Cultural Fund
YR	Youth Representative
YPS	Youth, Peace, and Security

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



2023 has been one of the most dynamic years since RYCO's establishment. The organization embarked on significant organizational changes while increasing and upgrading its programmatic activities together with its partners. During the last year, four **RYCO Local Branch Offices** operating outside of Albania were registered within the respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs, finally allowing their full operational ability in line with all domestic legal and financial regulations

Following an intensive screening process led by Deloitte experts, the RYCO Governing Board also approved a set of **internal reform documents** that set the foundation for RYCO's operations to be more functional. This involved implementing RYCO's new organigram and assigning new roles and positions for both core and project staff.

Simultaneously, all **regulatory frameworks**, including financial regulations, procurement regulations, HR manuals, and other internal policies, were gradually amended to fit the changed circumstances of the LBO registration process and institutional changes. These efforts aimed to reflect RYCO's substantial growth in the past years and facilitate the successful execution of its mission.

Programmatically and still operating under the overarching organizational **Strategy 2022-2024**, RYCO achieved several milestones that are presented shortly in this executive summary and in more detail in the corresponding pages of this document. Throughout the year, RYCO stayed dedicated to its mission and values, participating in regional projects and important discussions to support reconciliation and empower youth.

Superschools exchange scheme, the flagship project of RYCO, has successfully finalized the first open call in 2022 and closed the second open call in 2023. In total, within two open calls, 77 bilateral partnerships of secondary schools were supported, out of which 47 were in 2023. Within the second Superschools open call spanning through 2023, 188 teachers participated in capacity-building activities, around 1024 young people participated in 94 exchanges organized across the region, and an additional 3688 young people were indirectly involved through local outreach activities organized by the schools.

Regional Incubator for Social Entrepreneurship (RISE) has been, since October 2019, one of RYCO's flagship initiatives supported by the French Development Agency, RYCO, and the European Commission. The 2nd phase of the project started in September 2022 and was successfully continued in 2023. Coordinated by a consortium of partner organizations and local implementing partners, the project's main achievements in 2023 were the continuation of the RISE Journey #3 (108 young entrepreneurs formed 38 teams, benefiting from extensive support, including training sessions, mentoring,



Photo from superschools

coaching, and peer learning), the RISE Bootcamp in Tirana (over 40 regional young entrepreneurs, trainers, experts, and decision-makers gathered for an intensive bootcamp from 14-17 March 2023) and the RISE Regional Forum that was held in Skopje and brought together 140 young people and stakeholders from the social enterprise ecosystem across the Western Balkans region and Europe.

In 2023, RYCO launched its advocacy efforts in line with its [2022/24 Strategic Plan](#) to promote the **Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS)** agenda across the Western Balkans. During the year, numerous initiatives aimed to empower youth, institutions, and civil society organizations and also positioned RYCO as a central hub for cooperation, knowledge-sharing, and practical engagement in youth, peace, and regional cooperation. In order to support RYCO's regional mapping of YPS stakeholders and awareness campaigns, a number of resources and tools are provided to local actors at the CP level through partnerships with National Youth Councils and Youth Umbrella Organizations. This YPS initiative is financially supported by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the project "[RYCOGNIZED-YPS Advocacy Efforts in WB6](#)."

Under this project, RYCO is also maintaining its position within the Berlin Process by organizing the **Western Balkans Youth Forum**, a side event of the Berlin Summit, which took place in Tirana, dedicated to youth and its role as active agents for positive change in the WB contributing to the EU accession. RYCO also launched and implemented its yearly **logo competition for the Berlin Process**, which produced the official logo for the Summit, designed by a young designer from the region. The YPS Conference "Education as a Peace Catalyst" was another prestigious event organized under this project, focusing on how education can serve the YPS agenda. Additionally, desktop study research as a continuation of the Shared Futures report was launched, producing a report on youth perceptions in the WB.

Lastly, a campaign to promote the YPS agenda and a knowledge hub on the RYCO website was created to establish YPS as a strategic focus for RYCO.

RYCO's **5th Open Call**, labeled under the name RYCO-necting You(th), was launched on 15 July 2023 and aimed to support both grassroots organizations and established organizations with experience in RYCO's thematic areas. The general objective of this call for proposals was to support the civil society in the Western Balkans to foster reconciliation, peacebuilding, regional cooperation, and intercultural learning by providing young people with opportunities that create space for dialogue, mutual learning, and increased understanding across communities and RYCO Contracting Parties. Out of 137 applications, 13 projects were supported, representing a compelling mix of themes and actors, in line with RYCO's ambition to deliver on its strategy.

A brand new initiative, the **Western Balkan Youth Cultural Fund (WB YCF)**, commenced on September 1st, 2023, with a scheduled implementation period until September 30th, 2026, with the support of the Federal Foreign Fund of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Despite a compressed timeframe for activity execution in 2023, the project effectively executed all planned activities as outlined in the Project Agreement. In 2023, 29 projects were successfully granted across three distinct categories: 10 Individual Grants, 13 CSO grants, and 6 Peace Champion Awards. Notably, the Kickoff event in Tirana brought together 101 attendees, marking a significant milestone for project engagement and outreach. Additionally, 7 Info Sessions and 7 workshops aimed at facilitating application processes were successfully conducted. Moreover, one Regional Training session was organized to provide essential guidance and support to grant recipients. Despite the demanding timeline, the WB YCF project demonstrated remarkable efficiency and achievement in its inaugural year, laying a solid foundation for continued success in the years ahead.

During 2023, RYCO successfully finalized the last activities and closed the EU-WB Student Integration project, implemented with the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. The project aimed to support and foster cooperation between regional student organizations, bringing together 6 student regional networks and 31 organizations, reaching 1500+ students, and organizing 6 regional students' workshops and 50+ local activities throughout 2022 and 2023. In the summer of 2023, the project beneficiaries convened for a closing event and workshop in Tirana. 19 representatives from the student organizations shared their respective successes and challenges during the implementation of their regional and local activities. Additionally, they collaborated with their regional network to develop project proposals for the forthcoming RYCO open calls.

In late 2023, RYCO also participated in the preparatory work for the upcoming Jeunes des 2 Rives (J2R) project. The project aims to empower young people from the Mediterranean basin and encourage their civic commitment through education in citizenship and international solidarity. The program is led by Solidarité Laïque and co-funded by the French Development Fund. It cooperates with a strong network of organizations and associations from France, Morocco, Tunisia, and from 2024 also Lebanon and Albania.

In addition to implementing project activities, all six RYCO **Local Branch Offices** successfully implemented their local activities (training, networking, mentorship, raising awareness and advocacy), creating partnerships with relevant youth, governmental and international organizations and bringing them together on our peacebuilding mission.

All mentioned activities were continuously promoted through RYCO communication channels and in media, complemented with the digital youth platform **HAJDE**.

On the following pages, you can read about the **main achievements of RYCO during 2023**.

RYCO'S 2023 RESULTS IN NUMBERS



5 REGIONAL PROJECTS



400+ LOCAL ACTIVITIES



46 COLLEAGUES



2 GOVERNING BOARD MEETINGS



8,500+
YOUNG PARTICIPANTS REACHED
+180 VOLUNTEERS



12 SOCIAL BUSINESSES
SUPPORTED



144 MEDIA REPORTS



COUNTLESS HOURS IN ZOOM MEETINGS



67,602 WEBSITE VISITS

2. RYCO'S RESULTS: PROGRAM MISSION DURING 2023



In 2023, RYCO continued supporting the regional exchange of youth and their sharing of ideas as a ground for future cooperation in our region based on the values of coexistence, tolerance, respect for human rights and diversity, and commitment to inclusion and security. The main programmatic priorities remained the same as last year, meeting RYCO's strategic objectives for the period 2022-2024.

With the support from RYCO's partners and donors, in 2023, even more opportunities for **intercultural learning and peacebuilding** were offered to young people through RYCO's **granting schemes**. For the 5th time, RYCO launched its Open Call for Civil Society Organizations and awarded 13 regional projects to contribute to the "RYCOnnecting" of youth in the WB6.

Announced at the intergovernmental session during the Berlin Process Summit, a major breakthrough was the launching of the Western Balkan Youth Cultural Fund, a funding mechanism for **enhancing regional cooperation between cultural practitioners and artists**. In its pilot year, RYCO supported 29 projects and introduced this initiative to different actors in the field of arts and culture.

Superschool's second cycle was implemented successfully, with 94 **bilateral school exchanges** and around 1000 high school students directly participating. All of them benefited from intercultural learning and were exposed to firsthand experiences in various local communities they had a chance to visit.

Through RYCO's partnership with the Polish government, **journalism students and young journalists** were trained on disinformation, fact-checking, transitional justice, and reconciliation. The main goal of these programs was to strengthen the professional capacities of young journalists in the media, given their crucial role in building and promoting peace.

RYCO also built advocacy capacities on the **Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda** in partnership with National Youth Councils and Youth Umbrella Organizations from the region. The first stage in building up advocacy practice was assessing the state of play and creating a shared understanding of the challenges that should be addressed through the RYCO advocacy program related to the Youth Peace and Security Agenda. To follow up their efforts to map YPS stakeholders in the region and run the awareness-raising campaign, RYCO provided the resources and tools to local actors to implement activities at the CP level. Such actions were essential to contextualize the YPS agenda according to the CP and the regional environment.

RYCO also supported **youth exchanges** of young social entrepreneurs through RISE and young journalists through the first regional edition of the "Peace Broadcasters" program. The EUWB Student Integration project further supported the **networking of student organizations** and their members. Students from Western Balkan had an extraordinary experience through the MIRAI visiting program, where they learned about peacebuilding and memorialization in Tokyo and Hiroshima.

RYCO has also remained committed to investing in capacity building and quality assurance by **supporting multipliers** to become more skilled and knowledgeable in dealing with the past, reconciliation, project writing, and project management. RYCO's Local Branch Offices organized **capacity-building training** for civil society representatives to encourage their applications for RYCO's open calls and other similar initiatives. This year, cultural practitioners attended workshops on art activism and civic engagement through culture. More than 180 teachers participated in capacity-building activities through the Superschools project.

Advocating and awareness-raising to develop an enabling environment in the WB for peacebuilding, regional youth cooperation, and improving the position of youth was also one of the priorities in 2023. The main focus was the advocacy campaign to implement the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda. RYCO's approach has been entirely in line with the principle of meaningful youth participation, and young people were given the opportunity to make decisions on the priorities for YPS in each CP.

The Western Balkan **Youth Forum** was organized on the margins of the Berlin Process Summit held in October in Tirana. The Forum once again brought the voices and perspectives of young people to the decision-making table of WB and EU political leaders. The WBYCF aspired to provide the space and platform for the region's youth to track developments from the Berlin Declaration in 2022 and provide concrete actions and activities to help such aspirations become reality.

The 2nd edition of the **Shared Futures study** was commissioned in 2023 after revising the methodology and conducting the first few phases of the research. A new design and publication of the study are planned for 2024. The study will provide a wealth of data, as during the conceptualization phase, a series of comprehensive focus groups with young people was organized in all 6 CPs.

In addition, Local Branch Offices successfully implemented their **local activities**, partnering with local stakeholders and reaching out to the number of young people in all 6 CPs, including youth from marginalized communities.

2.1. GRANT-MAKING



Grant-making has been RYCO's 'core business' since its inception, enshrined in its founding documents and programmatic strategies. Throughout 2023, efforts in grant-making have been further increased and strengthened with a new Open Call for Project Proposals for civil society organizations organized for the first time with a dedicated in-house platform, supporting a more straightforward application and evaluation process.

This marked the fifth round of RYCO's Open Call for CSOs in the region over the past seven years. The "RYCConnecting You(th)" initiative focused on two key areas: Peacebuilding and Reconciliation and Youth Empowerment and Engagement in Society. The general objective is to support the civil society in the Western Balkans to foster reconciliation, peacebuilding, regional cooperation, and intercultural learning by providing young people with opportunities that create space for dialogue, mutual learning, and increased understanding across the region.

Additionally, RYCO's grant-making portfolio was strengthened with the new initiative of the Western Balkan Youth Cultural Fund and a second cycle in RYCO's flagship project, the Superschools program.

5TH OPEN CALL "RYCONNECTING YOU(TH)"



The 5th RYCO Open Call for Project Proposals was launched on 7 July 2023, while the deadline for submission of the applications was 15 August 2023. After the 40-day application period, the total number of submitted applications was 137. One of the key criteria for applying was creating partnerships, i.e., each Lead Applicant had to apply with at least one other partner from a different Contracting Party. The total number of partners was 224. Overall, the total number of entities involved in the submitted project proposals (applicants plus partners) was 361, indicating that the average number of partners per application was 1.6.

The call aimed to support grassroots organizations to the greatest extent possible. Based on the lessons learned from the previous calls, the application process was more user-friendly, and fewer documents were asked to be submitted during the application process. In order to accommodate projects that are of less technical quality, the phase of program negotiation was added before contracting so that the grantees could receive the necessary feedback to improve the quality of the proposals, thus not losing the quality of the overall RYCO-awarded project.

For this call for proposals, differently from the previous calls, RYCO decided to have two main thematic areas as per the Strategy 2022-2024 instead of having specific objectives. Within these thematic areas, applicants could focus their project on several sub-areas, such as intercultural learning and dialogue, constructively dealing with the past, countering hate speech, social inclusion and social cohesion, and youth policy.

Moreover, this Call for Project Proposals was divided into two LOTs to support as many grassroots projects as possible. These thematic areas were designed to address regional needs and promote cooperation. The thematic areas are as follows:

37% Thematic Area 1: Peacebuilding and Reconciliation - **51** applications

63% Thematic area 2: Youth empowerment and engagement in society – **86** applications

RYCO's 5th OC		
Launch date	07 July 2023	15 Aug 2024
Contracting time/date	20 Dec 2023	
Implementation period	20 Dec 2023	31 Aug 2024
Closure		
Source of funding	RYCO Core Budget	
Overall envelope	300 000 EUR	
Target group	Non-profit-making CSO, established in one of the six Western Balkan Contracting	

SUPERSCHOOLS EXCHANGE SCHEME



The Superschools exchange scheme is a regional secondary school exchange scheme that aims to support the peace-building and reconciliation processes in the Western Balkans through school-to-school partnerships. It aims to provide the ground for creating strong and sustainable bonds between secondary schools, local communities, and young people within the region and building long-lasting ties between them.

Through the first Superschools cycle 2021-2024, and over the course of two open calls, RYCO supported 77 bilateral partnerships of secondary schools from the region and facilitated the exchange of around 1838 high school students through 154 organized exchanges. Throughout the program, 308 high school teachers from the region strengthened their capacities in RYCO thematic areas, non-formal education, and project management. Finally, an additional 3688 young people were indirectly involved through local outreach activities organized by the schools.

Superschools exchange scheme is part of the multi-donor project called “Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme,” jointly financed by the European Union and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO).

The “Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme” project is expected to continue in 2024 for the period 2024-2026, during which two new Superschools open calls are planned.

Superschools CfPs	1st Superschools Exchange Program Open call 2021	2nd Superschools Exchange Program Open call 2022
Launch date	27 September 2021	16 September 2022
Contracting time/date	February 2022	January - March 2023
Implementation period	March 2022-June 2022	April-June 2023 & September-November 2023
Closure	June 2021	November 2023
Donor	EU and BMZ	EU and BMZ
Overall envelope	336,000 EUR ⁱ	715.000 EUR
Target group	Secondary schools	

WESTERN BALKANS YOUTH CULTURAL FUND



Announced during the Berlin Process Summit in 2022, the WB YCF was successfully started in the late summer of 2023. Despite facing a highly challenging implementation period of only four months in 2023, the project successfully carried out all its planned activities. Among these activities was a noteworthy Kick-off event, which brought together over 100 cultural practitioners and stakeholders from all Contracting Parties in the Western Balkans region.

Moreover, the launch of the first open call for applicants took place on October 11th, 2023, with a submission period of one month. During this period, a series of seven Info Sessions were conducted across six Contracting Parties, providing essential guidance and information to potential applicants. Additionally, seven workshops were organized to assist applicants in composing their project proposals effectively.

Furthermore, a pivotal Regional Training session was held, offering selected Grantees invaluable insights into the implementation process of their projects. This comprehensive support structure underscores the commitment of the WB YCF project to fostering cultural development and collaboration within the Western Balkans region.

Cultural Fund		
Launch date	11 October 2023	11 November 2023
Contracting time/date	29 October 2023	29 October 2023
Implementation period	11th of December 2023	31 of July 2024
Closure	30 September 2026	30 September 2026
Donor	GMFA and Ministry of Cultures per CPs	GMFA and Ministry of Cultures per CPs
Overall envelope	1 459 020 EUR	1 459 020 EUR
Target group	Cultural practitioners,youth, and the Individuals and CSOs working with youth and in the area of culture	Cultural practitioners, youth, and the Individuals and CSOs working with youth and in the area of culture

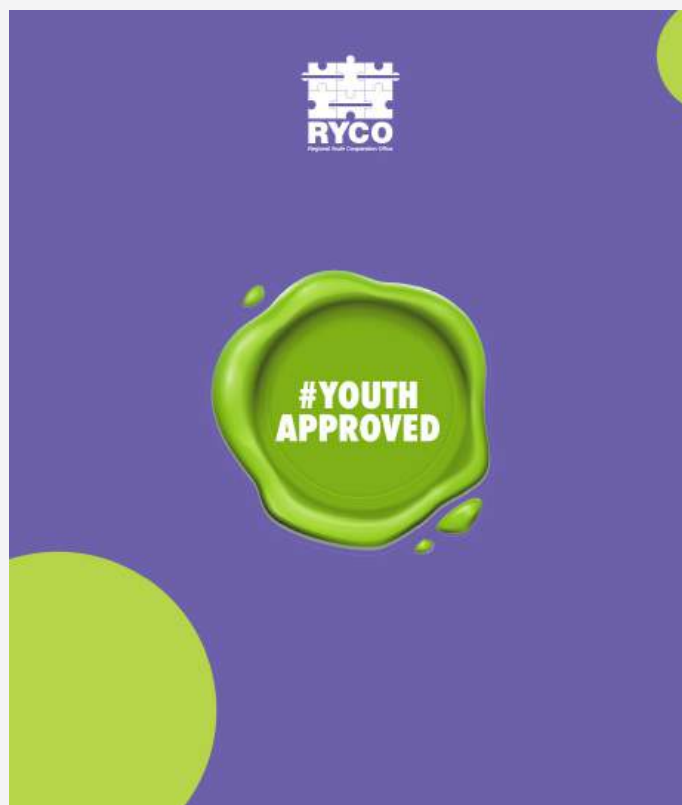
RYCO DONOR-FUNDED PROJECTS



Donor-funded projects are crucial to RYCO's mission, showcasing the organization's dedication to partnering with institutions that share its vision for empowering young people in the region through impactful activities. Like in previous years, in 2023, donor-funded projects played a pivotal role in ensuring RYCO's mandate and were in alignment with the RYCO Strategic Plan.

As the year progressed, RYCO celebrated several significant achievements. The **successful conclusion** of several existing donor-funded projects, such as the EU-WB-SI initiative, marked a milestone in RYCO's journey, highlighting its ability to execute and deliver on its commitments effectively. Notably, financial audits were conducted for several closed projects with no findings, underscoring RYCO's dedication to transparency and accountability in its operations.

Moreover, amidst the closure of projects, RYCO embarked on new commitments and major initiatives that promise to advance its mission further. Most notably, in partnership with the GMFA, RYCO launched a three-year-long Western Balkan Youth Cultural Fund and the RYCOgnized project that specifically taps into the Youth, Peace, and Security agenda.



You will find more information on the individual projects in the following pages.

2.2.1.

WB6 Schools Exchange Scheme (Superschools)



The aim of the Superschools project is to create a sustainable scheme of secondary school exchanges in WB6 and to develop user-friendly, efficient, impact-oriented, and implementable concepts that will bring together several thousands of young people from WB6 through two open calls by funding 77 bilateral partnerships to organize 154 exchanges in their local communities.

Superschools exchange scheme, the flagship project of RYCO, has successfully finalized the first open call in 2022 and closed the second open call in 2023. Through the first Superschools cycle 2021-2024, over the course of two open calls, RYCO supported 77 bilateral partnerships of secondary schools from the region and facilitated the exchange of around 1838 high school students through 154 organized exchanges. Throughout the program, 308 high school teachers from the region strengthened their capacities in RYCO thematic areas, non-formal education, and project management. Finally, an additional 3688 young people were indirectly involved through local outreach activities organized by the schools.

A new cycle of the Superschools project will start in April 2024 under the same partnership of GIZ and RYCO.

Timeframe	Superschools is a three year project from 2021 to March 2024
Duration and Partners	Co-financed by the European Union and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and implemented by RYCO and the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ)
Budget	5.5 mil EUR (2.75 directly managed by RYCO)

KEY PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS:

- In 2023, 47 bilateral partnerships were funded, and 94 exchanges took place
- 188 teachers took part in capacity-building activities organized in 2023
- Around 1024 young people took part in exchanges, and an additional 3688 young people were indirectly involved through local outreach activities organized by the schools
- In total, 80 experts were involved in exchanges which contributed to the quality of the program
- Out of 47 supported partnerships, 7 were long-term partnerships
- When the Second Superschools Open Call was launched in September 2023, the number of registered schools on the platform reached 535. Out of the registrations, 161 partnerships were created, and 155 applications were received. Considering the positive results of the first Open Call for Superschools, 17 applications from 155 were received from schools already funded under the first cycle.
- Superschools project staff noted and collected some 130 media reports related to the project activities.



QUOTE



“It was a great experience for everybody involved in this project. Implemented activities helped us learn more about each other, our cultures, differences, and the similarities we share together.”

From a participant from the “Breaking Barriers and creating International Friendship” exchange:

2.2.2. Regional Incubator for Social Entrepreneurs (RISE)



Taping into the successful implementation of the first phase of the RISE project from the period 2019 - 2022, the **goal of the project** is to address a specific need in the region in relation to its current context and history: opening new spaces of reconciliation for the youth of the Western Balkans through social entrepreneurship. Due to its very regional nature, the project will tend to increase the number of cross-border interactions around social entrepreneurship during the 3 years and thereafter. The project aims to enable young project leaders to develop innovative solutions to their communities' challenges and enrich the regional social entrepreneurship ecosystem.

Timeframe	The duration of the project is 36 months, starting from 1 October 2022 to 30 September 2025.
Duration and Partners	The donors are the French Development Agency, RYCO, and the European Commission. The partners are GROUPE SOS Pulse, SEEYN, the Franco-German Youth Office, and the Institut Français.
Budget	1,363,994 Euros

KEY PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2023:

- During 2023, the RISE project selected 108 young entrepreneurs gathered in 38 teams from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia to develop their social business ideas during the 3rd RISE Journey.
- Gender equality and women empowerment are at the heart of the RISE value system. This is highlighted by the fact that RISE succeeded in attracting and engaging 67 % of female entrepreneurs from the region. Moreover, RISE Journey #3 supported 54% of youth who reside outside of capital cities.
- During RISE Journey #3 there were 33 training sessions on social business development; 20 meet-ups for community building; 142 mentoring sessions; 26 experts' consultations; 135 one-to-one coaching sessions; 6 regional peer learning business sessions; and 5 intercultural training sessions.
- A specifically organized Bootcamp was held in Tirana from 14 to 17 March 2023. The Bootcamp brought together over 40 young regional entrepreneurs (including Risers, trainers, experts, RISE consortium representatives, and decision-makers).
- Risers' business ideas covered a wide range of topics, such as health care, the circular economy, employment and social inclusion, education, culture, and eco-tourism.
- 24 selected teams were granted 2500 Euros to prototype their business ideas and an additional 500 Euros for the Regional Mobility Program.
- Another feature tapping into the project's successful history was the RISE Alumni Award. Through this competition, RISE aims to strengthen the impact of social entrepreneurs by enabling them to expand their activities, develop new innovative solutions, and reach a wider audience. Out of 130 teams that followed the RISE program, 6 were selected to present their social enterprise. Ultimately, out of the six, two social businesses were rewarded with a grant of 5,000 Euros to stimulate the economic growth of these social enterprises.

- The RISE team created and promoted 12 inspirational videos from the winning teams during the Bootcamp in Tirana, as well as testimonies and success stories that have been taking place during RISE activities.
- Several media interviews were conducted to showcase RISE's work, specifically focusing on RISE Demo Days and the RISE incubation phase.
- An additional highlight during 2023 was the 3rd RISE Regional Forum, held in Skopje from 12 to 14 September 2023. It gathered 140 young people, actors, and stakeholders from the Social Enterprise Ecosystem in the WB6 region and Europe to discuss the importance of developing support mechanisms and legal frameworks to foster social entrepreneurship as a powerful instrument for social and economic development in the region.



QUOTE FROM RISERS



The trip to Bosnia-Herzegovina gave us a better understanding of how we should run our camp in the future. Meeting people who have already developed their businesses helped us understand the next steps for our Soko Camp. In addition, we had the chance to catch up with friends we met in Albania, during the Bootcamp which made us feel part of the big RISE family.

Sara Zurovski - Co-founder of Soko Camp



The Regional Mobility - Melody Agrotourism Exchange proved to be a transformative and enriching journey, offering valuable lessons in management, leadership, coordination, and the intricacies of the agrotourism sector. The fruitful meetings with RYCO and Local Incubator opened doors to potential partnerships and collaborations for future endeavors. The visits to various agritourism sites provided us with a comprehensive understanding of the industry, igniting a passion for sustainable tourism and cultural immersion.

Melody team, Ardit Gabili

2.2.3.

EU-WB Students Integration (EU WB SI)



The **project's goal** was to support the integration of WB6 students into European Union student programs through the creation and development of branches of famous European student organizations in the Western Balkan Contracting Parties. Additionally, the project aimed to provide mentorship support and build the capacities of six new regional networks of EU student organizations so they could establish long-lasting regional cooperation.

The project was successfully closed in August 2023, and some student organizations are fully operational, showcasing its sustainability. RYCO continues to be committed to student regional cooperation and empowerment.

Timeframe	December 2021 – August 2023
Duration and Partners	Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and RYCO
Budget	167,000 EUR

KEY PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS:

- Six Regional Networks of EU student organizations selected, with different thematic concentrations: AIESEC, Electrical Engineering Students' European (EESTEC), European Law Students' Association (ELSA), Erasmus Student Network (ESN), International Federation of Medical Students Associations (IFMSA), United Nations Youth Associations (UNYA)
- Organization of a successful Summer Camp consisting of 3-day workshops and training sessions organized in Budva, Montenegro. The summer camp brought together over 25 young people representatives of student organizations, the youth Trainer, and the Deputy Ambassador of Italy in Montenegro.
- The Regional Networks organized six regional meetings focusing on different topics such as "Mental Health among aspiring physicians," "Regional Cooperation among WB," "SDG 5- Gender Equality and Best EU Practices," "Intellectual Property (IP) law," "WB Mobility" while bringing together 110 youth.
- More than 50 local activities were organized, covering topics such as mental health, regional cooperation, gender equality, mobility programs in WB, and more, contributing to the further regionalization of the networks within the WB6 region.
- The closing conference of the EU-WB-SI project was marked by a two-day event held in Tirana. 19 student representatives showcased their achievements, insights, and experiences implementing regional and local initiatives over the past year. Students shared their successes and challenges; they inspired their peers and demonstrated the significant impact that driven young individuals can have on their surroundings.

→ The EU-WB-SI project has been a transformative journey, showcasing the power of collaboration in driving positive change.

→ The EU-WB-SI project empowered me to lead and collaborate for meaningful change in our communities

2.2.5. CULTURAL FUND



The Western Balkans Youth Cultural Fund project **aims** to bring together the cultural scenes from across the region by supporting grass-roots cultural initiatives, which will serve as a valuable contribution to fostering regional cooperation and mutual understanding of intercultural dialogue, peacebuilding, and reconciliation.

Timeframe	1 September 2023 to 30 September 2026
Duration and Partners	The duration of the Project is 36 months, and the project is financed by the Foreign Financial Office of Germany and co-financed by the line ministries of culture in each respective CP
Budget	Foreign Financial Office of Germany is financing 1,099,854.00 EUR , and the line ministries of culture from 6 CPs - 359,166.00 EUR .

KEY PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS:

- The project accomplished all its objectives in a timely and efficient manner. All planned activities were executed diligently, meeting qualitative and quantitative indicators. In the short term, the project provided a platform for young individuals to explore alternative avenues, encouraging them to address challenges and pursue their aspirations in innovative ways. It is also worth emphasizing the importance of creating networking opportunities within the WB6 region, promoting reconciliation and dialogue through the small-scale projects initiated by the Grantees. Looking towards the long term, extending our focus beyond the project's immediate scope is essential. Monitoring the progress and impact of the Grantees is vital, even though it was not initially included in the project plan. This entails tracking their growth trajectory and evaluating the additional impact generated as a result of our initial support. Moreover, there's a strategic intent to identify Grantees demonstrating a promising continuation path and considering further support to ensure their sustained growth and impact, thereby fostering their long-term sustainability.

KICK-OFF EVENT:

The Kickoff Event took place on October 7th, 2023, in Tirana, boasting an attendance of 101 participants. Among the attendees were a diverse array of stakeholders, including artists, cultural practitioners, government officials from local and regional levels, donors, diplomats, youth activists, NGO representatives, and arts supporters coming from across the region.

WB YOUTH CULTURAL FUND OPEN CALL:

Following the Kickoff event, the first WB YCF Open Call was officially launched. The call spanned from October 12th to November 12th, 2023, providing a one-month window for submissions.



WB YCF INFO SESSIONS AND WORKSHOPS:

Throughout late October and early November, a series of **informative sessions** and workshops were organized across the WB6 Contracting Parties. These sessions aimed to disseminate crucial information and knowledge to potential applicants.



EVALUATION PROCESS:

The evaluation of project proposals underwent several stages, including administrative checks, eligibility assessments, and a thorough evaluation by independent experts. RYCO's Selection Committee further reviewed the shortlist based on strategic criteria, ultimately approving 29 applicants unanimously.



CONTRACT AGREEMENTS:

Following the Regional Training, grantees signed Contract Agreements with RYCO, officially commencing the implementation phase of their projects.



FIRST WB YCF OPEN CALL:

During the 1st Open Call, a total of 106 project proposals were received, categorized into three lots: Spark Funds for Individuals, Cool Arts events for CSOs, and Peace Champions Awards for local cultural activists. The selection process varied slightly for Lot 3, which involved a nomination procedure followed by evaluation according to predefined criteria.



REGIONAL TRAINING:

Subsequently, a Regional Training session was conducted from December 18-22, 2023, in Vrnjačka Banja, Serbia. This training, facilitated by two experts, aimed to provide targeted guidance and technical support to the 18 representatives or staff members of the granted entities, assisting them in effectively implementing their projects.

2.2.6. RYCOgnized - YPS



The goal of the project: The RYCOGNIZED project aims to strategically position the Advocacy pillar within RYCO's peacebuilding ecosystem, fostering sustainable institutional systems for effective advocacy efforts. By developing a comprehensive WB Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda, the project seeks to enhance RYCO's role as a regional advocacy platform, promoting cross-border dialogue and empowering youth in decision-making processes. Through this initiative, RYCO will transition from ad-hoc advocacy actions to a strategy-driven approach, ensuring alignment with overarching objectives and contributing to positive peace and regional cooperation in the Western Balkans.

Timeframe	15 July 2023 - 31 December 2023
Duration and Partners	German Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Budget	336,697 EUR

The RYCOgnized project successfully implemented various activities within its project duration, such as:

- 1. The logo competition for the Berlin Process:** The logo competition is a process that RYCO has been coordinating for several years now, and the launching of the logo competition for the Tirana Summit in 2023 followed the steps already established by the previous competitions. The draft call was designed by the RYCO Visibility and Communications Team, and the call for young designers from the WB6 was launched on the RYCO website and social media on June 2nd, 2023, with a deadline for applications until June 18th, 2023. The open call for submission of logo designs was followed by a digital campaign on social media. RYCO received 127 applications, out of which 102 applications were eligible based on the criteria published in the open call. The selected logo was shared with the Summit's organizers and the Albanian Government as well.
- 2. The Western Balkans Youth Forum 2023:** During the Western Balkans Youth Forum 2023, held over two days in Tirana, more than 100 young people, along with representatives from government institutions and young journalists, convened to discuss the implementation of the Berlin Declaration formulated during the previous year's Forum. The event took place on a train as a symbol of connectivity. Through comprehensive consultations conducted in three different groups/ wagons, participants devised a specific and detailed action plan for each of the Berlin Declaration's three chapters. The discussions encompassed a wide range of issues, with a particular emphasis on democratic engagement, inclusive peace-building, and sustainable development concerns. Drawing upon these key themes, the youth urged decision-makers to consider the proposed action points and collaborate in various capacities as follows:
 1. Resilient Democracies – Youth advocated for heightened awareness campaigns targeting hate speech and divisive narratives. They also emphasized the importance of increased opportunities for mobility and enhanced connectivity among youth institutions and organizations, including high schools and civil society groups.
 2. Inclusive Peace and Security – Participants underscored the need for governments to improve conditions for youth, such as providing travel discounts. They also stressed the importance of ongoing stakeholder dialogue on diverse issues and ensuring meaningful youth participation in decision-making processes.
 3. Sustainable Future – Youth called for integrating environmental topics into formal education curricula. Additionally, they urged governments to prioritize achieving goals outlined in the Green Agenda.

3. **YPS Conference: Education as a Peace Catalyst:** The "RYCOgnized vision: Education as a peace catalyst" conference convened in Sarajevo, Ilidža, Bosnia and Herzegovina from November 22nd to 24th. As anticipated, the opening ceremony featured speeches from representatives of RYCO, Bosnian and Herzegovinian authorities, delegates from the German Embassy in Sarajevo, and other prestigious stakeholders of the region. Panel discussions played a pivotal role in the conference, offering platforms for in-depth exploration of key thematic areas. These discussions underlined the importance of synergy among stakeholders and government representatives, promoting collective action and collaboration. The conference focused on youth, recognizing their indispensable role as peace-builders within the YPS Agenda and in the WB. Young participants not only inaugurated the conference with a meaningful performance but also actively engaged in panel discussions, particularly delving into the theme of Education as a peace catalyst. By centering youth voices and perspectives, the event emphasized the significance of empowering young leaders to drive positive change and foster sustainable peace in the region, aligning with the YPS principles of participation and partnership.
4. Parallel to the conference, the **Ministerial Meeting** took place in the presence of RYCO leadership and management. The YPS agenda and its pillars were presented to ensure a common understanding of YPS and its importance, especially in the context of WB6. The meeting provided important information on the current state of the art of YPS and the youth policies in place. The representatives from Ministries of Youth, Education, and Sports, as well as Accreditation Agencies, mutually agreed on the importance of YPS to be part of youth policies as well as RYCO's role as a regional coordinator in that regard that can actively contribute to regionalization of such measures and facilitate the exchange of good practices in forms such as this one. A follow-up of the discussion was agreed upon at the local level between each Local Branch Office and the respective ministries to establish ongoing communication and updates on the matter moving forward.
5. **Research Study Report:** For this purpose, RYCO engaged experts from Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia through an open call. The methodology framework for the report primarily serves RYCO as evidence-based programming and knowledge generation within the second strategic pillar (to build the capacity of practitioners in the field of peacebuilding). Bearing in mind that the new RYCO policy framework for action is the UNSCR 2250 Youth Peace and Security Agenda, it was decided that the 5 pillars of this document: participation, prevention, protection, partnership, and reintegration, will be used to design the main dimensions of the research, based on which sub-dimensions were created within each pillar by questioning their relevance within the RYCO mandate. A survey was produced through this process and was used as a tool to gather feedback from the young participants of the focus groups. Finally, the revised methodology includes a delineation of the procedure for establishing dimensions and sub-dimensions, qualitative research outcomes informing the creation of instruments, and pre-designed proposals for research instruments (both quantitative surveys and qualitative focus groups), with 60% of questions drawn from the 1st edition of Shared Future. Additionally, it features a description and quantification of the research sample along with recommendations for research agencies.
6. **YPS Local Activities and Mapping of Regional Stakeholders:** RYCO, as a significant factor in the realization of the YPS Agenda on a local as well as on a regional level, within this project, planned the establishment of sustainable partnerships for the future implementation of this policy. A series of meetings at the CP level were held to inform key stakeholders about RYCO's intentions in implementing this policy. Bearing in mind that among the principles of the YPS Agenda are meaningful youth participation and youth-led initiatives, RYCO has positioned itself at the CP level as a supporter of representative bodies of young people (National Youth Councils and umbrella organization) with which it implemented a series of meetings for joint activities planning and prepared a list of relevant actors who should potentially be involved in the process of establishing YPS as a priority on local and regional level. In this framework, local initiatives on YPS were supported financially; local meet-ups were organized, as well as YPS training in each CP.

THE MAIN OBJECTIVES WERE:



To establish a knowledge-production and knowledge-management platform for informed and evidence-based decision-making and advocacy.

To establish advocacy actions practice in the RYCO fields of influence.

To increase communications and awareness-rising actions in RYCO's advocacy pillar domain.

KEY PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS:

- More than 100 young people and stakeholders from the Western Balkans and the EU participated in the WBYF in Tirana
- 200 stakeholders informed about the Berlin Declaration content
- The official logo of the Berlin Process 2023 produced
- 6 Meet-ups and 6 trainings on YPS
- 18 Local Initiatives on YPS supported in all CPs
- 10 meetings with relevant stakeholders
- YPS subpage created on the RYCO website
- YPS Digital Campaign implemented on social media, and 6 influencers from each CP created videos on YPS
- More than 200 participants attended the YPS Conference
- Action Plan on the Berlin Declaration of the Western Balkans Youth Forum of 2022 developed
- A report on the Young People from the WB produced (follow up of Shared Futures)
- 70 communication activities aimed at enhancing the visibility and outreach of the Advocacy Pillar Portfolio, including 30 regional activities, 20 published online articles, and 20 social media posts



QUOTE

From a participant, trainer/expert, or partner for the impact of the project:



“If we don’t make a stand who else will put their hearts into making this region a better place to live for all of us?”

A young participant from the YPS Conference: Education as a Peace Catalyst

ADVOCACY, COOPERATION, AND PARTNERSHIP



In 2023, RYCO continued its commitment to advocacy, cooperation, and partnership, focusing on creating an enabling environment supportive of youth cooperation, reconciliation, and meaningful participation. Throughout the year, RYCO communicated regularly with its **key partners**, the WB governments, and our bilateral partners from the European Union and beyond.

Among our notable endeavors, RYCO sustained its fruitful collaboration with the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs within the **MIRAI project**. This is one of RYCO's most popular initiatives, and it always attracts a record number of applications due to its unique opportunity for youth exchanges with Japan. This continued partnership underscores our dedication to fostering cross-cultural understanding and global youth engagement.

Moreover, in 2023, RYCO had the honor of hosting the **meeting of regional organizations** and mechanisms. This gathering brought together representatives from seven institutions, providing a platform for deliberation, information exchange, and strategic collaboration. Discussions centered on strengthening regional cooperation, amplifying youth voices, and advancing collective efforts toward European integration and prosperity in the Western Balkans.

In addition to these key initiatives, RYCO remained actively engaged in various **regional activities** and projects, underscoring our commitment to fostering youth empowerment and regional collaboration. Examples include our collaboration with partners such as Deutsche Welle and the OSCE Missions in the region.

Throughout 2023, the RYCO leadership, including the Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General, **represented the organization** in numerous regional and European-level activities. Their active advocacy efforts aimed to promote RYCO's work and to champion the interests and aspirations of young people from across the Western Balkans. Noteworthy events included engagements at high-profile forums such as the Berlin Process Summit, Prespa Forum, Bled Forum, and a range of other events, all of which underscored RYCO's crucial role in shaping regional youth cooperation and empowerment.

RYCO remains committed to building on these achievements, forging new partnerships, and advancing our mission to empower youth, foster reconciliation, and strengthen regional cooperation in the years ahead.



LOCAL BRANCH OFFICES



Throughout 2023, RYCO's Local Branch Offices (LBOs) played a crucial role in advancing the organization's mission and objectives. Local offices served as vital hubs for disseminating information about RYCO's values and activities, acting as the primary point of contact for potential applicants seeking to engage with RYCO programs (5th Open Call, Western Balkans Youth Cultural Fund, Super-schools, RISE, etc). Offering vital support, the LBOs provided information, conducted capacity-building activities, and offered mentoring to interested parties. Additionally, they served as the initial point of contact for local and international entities seeking collaboration with RYCO and as a key liaison for local media outlets.

To promote RYCO's mission, the LBOs participated in many media appearances throughout the year, highlighting local and regional activities organized through RYCO's projects. These engagements showcased RYCO's commitment to addressing youth-related issues within the community. Furthermore, the primary focus of the LBOs was to promote RYCO's achievements and integrate the organization's efforts into the strategies of institutions at the CP level. This involved active participation in various meetings and events organized by key stakeholders (ministries, international organizations, youth umbrella bodies, NGOs) within their respective CPs and the broader region.

To bolster their effectiveness, the LBOs underwent capacity-building initiatives in 2023, participating in internal training sessions and workshops facilitated or supported by RYCO. This investment in skill development was complemented by the recruitment of new team members, such as Local Program Officers and Finance and Administration Officers, enhancing the operational capacity of the offices. Additionally, the LBOs were instrumental in contributing to the overall program and operational development of RYCO. This included supporting the implementation of the M&E system, facilitating the execution of the new organizational strategy, and aiding in other planning processes for various projects and programs.

In terms of organizational milestones, RYCO dedicated efforts in 2023 to extending the registration status of its LBOs. Progress was made as the registration process was successfully completed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, and North Macedonia. Only the finalization of the registration process in Serbia remains pending. This strategic endeavor aimed to solidify RYCO's presence and operational framework, ensuring a more seamless integration of its initiatives within the local contexts.

During 2023, the Governing Board of RYCO was chaired by Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina took over the chairmanship on the 1st of January 2024.

RYCO's support to each CP in numbers during 2023	ALB	BiH	KOS	MNE	MKD	SRB
Number of the LBO staff	4	4	4	4	4	7
Number of teachers participating in School Exchange Program (Superschools) 2nd cycle	32	36	22	14	30	58
Number of students participants in the exchange activities in School Exchange Program (Superschools) 2nd cycle	173	196	110	78	163	292
Number of students participants in the follow up activities (Superschools) 2nd cycle.	454	977	200	220	368	1006
Number of implemented projects per CP under RYCO's Superschools Program 2nd cycle	16	18	11	7	15	27
Number of awarded projects from 5th OC per each CP	2	2	2	1	2	4
Number of info sessions (online & on-site) organized for 5th OC per each CP	2	4	4	3	2	5
Number of participants attending info sessions organized for 5th OC per each CP	57	71	68	63	30	72
Number of partners from each CP	3	6	4	4	8	4
Number of awarded projects from WB YCF per CP	5	5	4	4	5	6

RYCO's support to each CP in numbers during 2023	ALB	BiH	KOS	MNE	MKD	SRB
Number of participants attending WB YCF Kickoff Event per CP	39	7	8	9	11	13
Number of info sessions organized for WB YCF per CP	1	1	1	1	1	2
Number of participants attending info sessions organized for WB YCF per each CP	19	41	17	14	20	46
Number of workshops organized for WB YCF per CP	1	1	1	1	1	2
Number of participants attending workshops organized for WB YCF per CP	20	25	18	14	25	23
Number of YPS Local Activities per each CP	7	6	4	6	6	7
Number of participants attending YPS Local Activities per each CP	204	105	70	128	93	213
Number of RISE teams during Ideation phase	10	8	8	7	9	8
Number of RISE teams during Incubation phase	3	3	3	3	3	3
Number of participants attending The "RYCOgnized vision: Education as a peace catalyst" conference	26	36	20	15	31	48
Number of young people reached through the LBO local events	460	268	832	265	255	255

LOCAL BRANCH OFFICE IN ALBANIA



LBO Albania experienced a successful year, marked by a wide range of activities in terms of topics and diversity of participants. We continued focusing on engaging with diverse local communities and expanding our reach to youth throughout Albania, resulting in fruitful partnerships and a stronger network of young people informed on RYCO's mission.

In 2023, Albania assumed the [Chairmanship of RYCO's Governing Board](#), and LBO Albania facilitated the organization of two Governing Board meetings in Tirana, held in July and December, respectively. Moreover, RYCO welcomed the new Youth Representative from Albania to the Governing Board, Mr Klajdi Priska. Additionally, we organized or co-organized the following activities:



Co-organized the 9th edition of the Youth Trail, titled “Fostering Dialogue between Youth and Decision-Making Institutions,” in cooperation with the OSCE Presence in Albania. The special edition highlighted the work of the Youth Trail Alumni, who developed recommendations that were later shared with the Albanian Parliament.

In partnership with World Vision in Albania, we organized the annual Youth Festival 2023: A World of Opportunities for Young People, offering a dynamic platform for youth to articulate their ideas and further discuss employment and labor market needs.

Organized **three editions of RYCO Youth Talk** in the cities of Tropoje, Patos, and Koplik, reaching out to more than 45 young people. The topics included were interreligious dialogue, youth activism, intercultural learning, regional cooperation, etc.

In the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda (YPS) framework, we supported the United Nations Association Albania (UNAA) in organizing the Youth Peace and Security Meet Up and Capacity Building Activity. Additionally, we supported the implementation of five local initiatives aimed at empowering the local YPS network and other youth interested in the topic.

We organized one informative session targeting cultural practitioners and CSO activists and one workshop focused on positive social change through arts and culture in Tirana to promote the first open call of the Western Balkans Youth Cultural Fund. We also organized two Informative Sessions to promote the “RYCConnecting You(th)” Open Call for project proposals dedicated to CSOs.

The LBO, in concert with the Head Office, organized the Western Balkans Youth Forum 2023 under the theme “Balkan Youth Express” as a side event of the Berlin Process. The whole day of activities engaged more than 100 young people in fruitful discussions with each other and with policymakers in the region.

Through its work and activities, **LBO Albania directly reached more than 460 young people, and 220 of those working with youth** (teachers, representatives of CSOs, trainers, decision-makers, etc.). LBO staff initiated and participated in more than **95 meetings** and events organized by local, regional, and European partners. LBO Albania engaged in **five events organized by partner organizations as either a speaker or panelist**, such as the RAYS Symposium on Youth and Criminality and the Tirana Connectivity Forum. Additionally LBO AL participated in **two media appearances** to promote Superschools and discuss peacebuilding and dealing with the past topics.

LBO Albania maintained consistent communication with its Governing Board members, the Ministry of Education and Sports of Albania, civil society representatives, and stakeholders involved in youth affairs. Additionally, the LBO office enhanced its collaboration with various embassies, including those of France, Germany, the UK, and Japan in Albania, as well as with the European Union Delegation. Furthermore, partnerships were strengthened with organizations such as the Austrian Development Agency, OSCE Mission in Albania, and UN Agencies, among others.



QUOTE



" This experience has taught me how to interact better with others, become more tolerant, open to peaceful dialogue, and share the values and knowledge I have gained with my community."

Young participant from Elbasan in the Superschools Exchange Program

LOCAL BRANCH OFFICE IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA



For **RYCO LBO Bosnia and Herzegovina**, 2023 was an extremely fruitful and thriving period with a wide range of activities, meetings, and presence in multiple cities and communities within the Contracting Party. The main aim of the office was and will always be to enable equal opportunities for all youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Through the local activities, a total of **268** young people have participated.

From the period of July to December, **six RYCO Youth Coffee Talks** were held on multiple topics with different partners and in different local communities. A total of **184** young people participated in the Youth Coffee Talks. Topics addressed circulated on topics that youth underlined as important to them, such as mental health, community engagement, Youth Peace and Security, the role of culture, and many more. The Youth Coffee Talks were organized in **Sarajevo, Prijedor, Mostar, Brčko, Banja Luka and Tuzla**.



Symbolically in celebration of International Youth Day on August 10th, LBO BiH, in cooperation with the Institute for Youth Development KULT has organized You(th) can lead, a guided discussion that aimed to ignite the passion of young individuals in decision-making processes and shed light on the humane aspects of diplomacy and politics. In this activity, our panelists were experienced diplomats from the Delegation of the European Union in BiH, the Embassy of the Slovak Republic, and the Embassy of Italy, who provided valuable insights into their journeys to esteemed positions. In this discussion, 61 young people have participated.

True Allies was a three-day activity that took place from November 10th to 12th in the city of Mostar. There **were 23 young participants from 20 different local communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina who** had the opportunity to learn more about organizing young people and how to improve their local communities. Through this activity, the goal was to continue empowering the next generation to become initiators of positive change, providing young people with tools and the opportunity to recognize ideas for improving the community and everyday life.

A significant milestone that has happened in 2023 is that as of December 9th, 2023, the LBO of Bosnia and Herzegovina has been **registered as a diplomatic mission**. Besides the new status, the seats of governing board members of Bosnia and Herzegovina have been filled with the appointment of a new government representative, **Mr. Ivan Čubela**, and a new youth representative, **Ms. Zorana Tovilović Glavaš**.

The staff of LBO Bosnia and Herzegovina has participated in **over 60 meetings and over 50 events** with stakeholders at the local, regional, and international levels, with the goal of strengthening RYCO's mission and vision in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

LOCAL BRANCH OFFICE IN KOSOVO



In 2023, the RYCO Local Branch Office in Kosovo achieved unprecedented success with diverse activities, reaching a record number of young people and fostering impactful engagement like never before. LBO in Kosovo organized, co-organized, and supported 10 activities, reaching out to 832 young people and those working with young people who participated in RYCO's implemented and supported activities.



The **Tree of Dialogue**, which was implemented by RYCO LBO Kosovo and the French Embassy in Prishtina together with "Lille Métropole," Métropole européenne de Lille, in order to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Elysée Treaty. **Two young participants**, one coming from the Albanian community and the other from the Serbian community, adopted a tree as an emblem of friendship and solidarity that serves as a lasting testament to their shared pledge for peace.

Closing Ceremony of 2nd Cycle of Peace Broadcasters Program - LBO Kosovo, in collaboration with Deutsche Welle (DW) and the Association of Kosovo Journalists (AJK), successfully completed the second cycle of the program "Peace Broadcasters: Empowering Journalists as Peace Reporters" in Kosovo. There were **48 participants**, and the three best stories were awarded during the closing conference "Journalists as Catalysts of Peace Building in Post-Conflict Societies/Areas. Besides the awarding ceremony, two insightful panels were organized during the closing conference. In the panel discussion "Behind the Headlines: Journalists' Perspective on Reporting from Conflict Situations," panelists shared with the public personal experiences and overall perception of the importance of the journalist role and the hazards of such occupation. While in the second panel, "The Role of Journalists in Promoting Transitional Justice in Post-Conflict Societies," panelists emphasized the importance of transitional justice and how journalists are one of the key factors that would help for this justice to be ensured. It was concluded that the region would benefit from putting more effort into working towards dealing with the past, peacebuilding, and putting justice in place

Solidarity Action Day in Kosovo - RYCO LBO Kosovo joined forces with many other partners to support the Solidarity Action Day, which was implemented by NGO TOKA and in which **456 young people participated**. Solidarity Action Day represents an innovative partnership between young people, businesses, and civil society to promote youth activism in society.

Harmony Hero Awards 2023- On the occasion of International Youth Day 2023, the Local Branch Office in Kosovo, in close cooperation with the German Embassy in Kosovo, recognized and honored young individuals who have significantly contributed to peacebuilding processes through the establishment of the "Harmony Hero Award." Nominations from all individuals and organizations who knew young heroes actively promoting peace and harmony in their communities in Kosovo and beyond were received in 5 different categories, for which different experts were invited to evaluate the nominations. The Harmony Hero Awarding ceremony gathered around **100 young people and stakeholders** in the field of youth and education in Kino Armata, Prishtina, on the 10th of August, with the aim of celebrating together the achievements of young people following a diverse agenda filled with speeches, movie screening, award dissemination and concert show of a young local band.

Regional Edition of Peace Peace Broadcaster Program - was officially launched in Prishtina in December 2023 through an inauguration ceremony that gathered **52 participants** from all over the region. In cooperation with DW, LBO Kosovo organized the first regional capacity building for 20 young journalists on intercultural dialogue, transitional journalism, and constructive journalism, with young journalists coming from all over WB6. In this activity, there were 24 participants in total.

Mitrovica Volunteer Festival 2023 - RYCO LBO in Kosovo, in cooperation with the OSCE Mission to Kosovo, supported the first edition of the Mitrovica Volunteer Festival, which was implemented by Social Space for Deconstruction and in which **100 young people** from different communities living in Mitrovica participated.

The RYCO Local Branch in Kosovo organized **two RYCO coffee talk formats, reaching more than 50 participants**. The talks tackled reconciliation, youth participation, regional cooperation, and inclusiveness at local and regional levels.

LBO Kosovo staff participated in more than 30 events organized by partners at the local, regional, and European levels and had more than 55 meetings with governmental, non-government, and international partners to synchronize and coordinate RYCO's work at the local level.

LOCAL BRANCH OFFICE IN MONTENEGRO



The year 2023 marked a significant milestone for RYCO LBO Montenegro with its registration as a diplomatic mission in Montenegro. This achievement solidifies RYCO's presence and engagement in Montenegro, enabling more effective collaboration with local and international partners. Throughout the year, RYCO LBO Montenegro organized **10 local events, gathering 265 young participants**. Additionally, LBO staff actively participated in approximately 70 meetings and activities organized by various stakeholders, further strengthening connections within the community. RYCO LBO Montenegro partnered with organizations such as the OSCE Mission to Montenegro, French and German embassies, Council of Europe, UN agencies, and "Hilfe von Mensch zu Mensch," Centre international de formation européenne (CIFE Nice/Berlin), Crossborder factory (Berlin/Sarajevo), etc. These collaborations facilitated the successful implementation of regional projects and local initiatives, enhancing RYCO's impact in Montenegro and beyond.



In cooperation with the OSCE Mission in Montenegro, LBO MNE has successfully implemented the camp "Competencies in Sports," which gathered 20 young professionals from seven different sports associations to increase their knowledge and understanding of intercultural competencies and foster youth cooperation in the field of sports.

LBO MNE has organized Capacity Building Training for CSOs from Montenegro in cooperation with the OSCE Mission, which brought together 14 representatives of the civil society sector. The training allowed participants to work on developing universal elements of the project applications and become familiar with the concepts of intercultural learning, reconciliation, youth participation, and social inclusion, as well as the possibilities of creating regional partnerships.

Another important event organized in cooperation with the OSCE Mission was Capacity Building Training with young journalists in the field of intercultural dialogue and professional standards in media reporting, which brought together 14 media representatives from different parts of Montenegro.

The "Youth Talks" organized in cooperation with German and French Embassies in Montenegro on the occasion of celebrating the **60 Anniversary of the Elysee Treaty**, brought together over 50 young people from various parts of Montenegro to discuss the importance of regional cooperation, intercultural dialogue, youth activism, EU integration process of Montenegro, etc.

LBO Montenegro, in cooperation with Youth Network of Montenegro, organized “Capacity Building Training in the domain of the UN Agenda 2250 “Youth, Peace and Security.”” gathering 17 young representatives from various CSOs, youth organizations, alongside representatives of Montenegro’s relevant institutions. This training is part of a series of initiatives under the UN Agenda “Youth, Peace, and Security” organized by RYCO in Montenegro. Previously, **three local workshops** gathered more than 80 young people in Bijelo Polje, Podgorica, and Bar, during which young people had the opportunity to share their challenges regarding peace and security in their communities. **Meet-up** with stakeholders in Podgorica brought together international and local stakeholders who are dealing with the implementation of activities and realization of the priorities listed in UN Agenda 2250, “Youth, Peace and Security.”

LBO Montenegro in cooperation with NGO Euromost organized a three-day Intercultural Youth Eco Camp, for the fourth year in a row. The Camp took place in Gusinje (valley Vusanje, Prokletije) and Plav, gathering more than 50 young people from Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

RYCO Local Branch Office in Montenegro, in cooperation with the Centre international de formation européenne (CIFE Nice/Berlin), Crossborder factory (Berlin/Sarajevo), and with the support of the Franco-German Youth Office (OFAJ/DFJW) organized 3rd editions of the project ‘**Friday, Saturday, Sunday for Future’ – Perspectives from the European Youth in Podgorica**. The event brought together around 20 young activists and students from 12 different societies, aiming to raise awareness of climate change’s causes and consequences in the European Union and the Western Balkans and define concrete actions for young citizens in their direct environment.

In addition to the aforementioned activities, RYCO LBO Montenegro organized two info sessions within the first cycle of the WB Youth Cultural Fund and capacity-building training tailored for cultural workers, artists, and young individuals interested in culture.

Within the Fifth Open Call RYCONnecting Youth, three info sessions were conducted during the summer, targeting potential grant applicants across Montenegro.

Through the Second Cycle of the Superschools program, seven schools from Montenegro were awarded.

RYCO LBO Montenegro organized a “Meet the Superschools” event, bringing together school principals and teachers from the awarded schools to facilitate collaboration and knowledge exchange. Lastly, RYCO LBO MNE has successfully implemented Regional Superschools Teachers Training, which gathered around **100 professors and headmasters awarded within the second cycle of Superschools**.

LOCAL BRANCH OFFICE IN NORTH MACEDONIA



During 2023, the Local Branch Office (LBO) in North Macedonia was dedicated to enabling opportunities for youth development in various aspects of their societal life. This proactiveness led to several accomplishments at the national and regional levels. Our office was actively involved in the development of the concept and process of the last product of the Berlin process - the **Regional Youth Cultural Fund**, which began with its implementation in September 2023, resulting in **5 grants** being awarded in the First Open Call to organizations and individuals from North Macedonia. Within the **Superschools** project last year, the general number of schools almost doubled, resulting in 15 schools from North Macedonia being involved in **30 exchanges**. We continued the support of the CSOs with the 5th Open Call of “RYCONnecting Youth,” through which **2 leading and 8 partner organizations** from North Macedonia were granted. Through the **RISE** project, the LBO in North Macedonia hosted the second **RISE Regional Forum for Social Entrepreneurship**, which gathered more than 150 social entrepreneurs from Europe and the WB6 region to exchange good practices and support mechanisms for the region’s social and economic development.



Advancement was reached with the **RYCOgnized** project, through which the UN Agenda for Youth, Peace, and Security was introduced to local stakeholders from the civil society sector and, more importantly, the **Youth Wing of Political Parties**. In addition, a joint **Declaration on youth participation** and cooperation was signed by **6 Youth Political Wings**, and as a result, an **action plan** was developed in accordance with the Declaration.

In a local context, numerous youth-led activities were supported in cooperation with the (youth) civil society in North Macedonia. For the **YPS Agenda**, one capacity-building training was conducted for representatives of various organizations. In addition, a total of **5 organizations** – Peace Action, Horizon Civitas, MUNA Skopje, Center for Education and Development, and Multikultura, were supported to implement YPS activities through local workshops and media products. In partnership with the Youth Educational Forum, the LBO in North Macedonia improved the reach to university students through the fair event Student Station:8, on which RYCO's opportunities for youth engagement were presented with more than 100 attendees. A total of **4 Youth Talks** events were organized jointly with the National Youth Council of Macedonia, the Union for Youth Work, and the Youth Centers in Tetovo and Probishtip. With these Youth Talks events, more than 100 participants were engaged in discussions aimed at improving the positioning of the youth in the decision-making processes. The highlight of the local work was the implementation of the Regional Summer Camp in Mavrovo in partnership with Forum ZFD and GIZ North Macedonia, with the support of the Peace Corps in North Macedonia. The camp gathered **55 participants** from Montenegro, Serbia, Kosovo*, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia.

Throughout 2023, RYCO LBO in North Macedonia's staff attended 17 events of key importance for policy making, representing RYCO's position on the development of youth and educational policies.

LOCAL BRANCH OFFICE IN SERBIA



The LBO Serbia organized **24 activities**, of which 22 had a local and 2 had a regional character. Besides local activities related to implementing RYCO's projects (Superschools, Western Balkan Youth Cultural Fund, RYCOnecting), the most important activities were the ones organized with local partners. Around **550 young people** (292 through Superschools, 255 through other activities) and almost **250 those working with youth** (teachers, representatives of CSOs, youth workers, etc.) were directly reached in 2023 by LBO Serbia. Indirectly, through social and traditional media, but also multiplying activities, a much larger audience was targeted and informed.



The OSCE Mission to Serbia supported the organization of the Capacity Building Training program designed to empower students in writing and implementing projects focused on the Youth Peace and Security agenda. This CBT was organized in collaboration with the Faculty of Political Sciences in Belgrade, and participants were students of the Master Program Peace, Security, and Development.

The OSCE Mission to Serbia also supported a Capacity Building Training for 15 civil society organizations in Serbia on the topic of project writing. The **Beginner's Manual for Project Proposal Writing 101** and the **Participation card game**, an interactive tool for the involvement of young people in project design, were used during the training.

In partnership with the National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS), LBO Serbia organized a Meet-up of stakeholders on the UN YPS Agenda. This event served as a bridge connecting international and local stakeholders in Serbia, all committed to advancing the principles and goals outlined in the Agenda. The event provided a platform for discussing the results of the "Analysis of the UN Agenda 2250 in the Context of Serbia" and explored current and potential joint activities at the local and regional level within this agenda.

Following this event, LBO organized Youth Talk within the Annual KOMS Assembly in which representatives of youth organizations and organizations for youth from all parts of Serbia discussed the priorities of the YPS Agenda, presented what their organizations are doing on local level under this Agenda, what are their needs in order to build their capacities to become more efficient and sustainable.

Under the “RYCOgnized” project, supported by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, LBO SRB organized Capacity building training for young people that was focused on YPS program pillars and its implementation in local communities. The main goal of this activity was to educate but also to inspire and empower a new generation of leaders from Serbia to foster positive change on both local and regional levels.

Within the RYCOgnized project, LBO Serbia supported the initiative “Paint for Peace: Engaging Students in Youth, Peace, and Security”, which was designed and organized by students of the Master’s study Peace, Security and Development of Faculty of Political Sciences in Belgrade. A mural on the facade of the Faculty of Political Sciences depicting the Ramonda Serbian flower was painted with the aim to promote the values associated with the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda. On the day when the mural was revealed, a conference on “Youth, Peace and Security” also took place at the Faculty.

One of the supported local activities was **also YPS Consultations with Serbo-Albanian Coalition** that was organized in Vranje. Main aim of this local activity was to provide support to the development of the Strategy for Serbian and Albanian youth cooperation in Pčinja district from 2024 to 2026 with an Action plan for 2024.

Following the priorities set in the RYCO Strategy 2022-2024 where UYO/NYCs will have important role in regional and local youth policy, as well priorities set within Berlin Youth Declaration, LBO Serbia together with NYC Serbia set joint priorities and started operational planning for next year, while having regular operational meetings.

In the framework of Pride week in Belgrade, a Youth Talk called RYCO@BG Pride: Queer for Peace – Are We Close? was dedicated to exploring the crucial role and benefits of involving queer voices in peacebuilding, especially in the context of the development of the Regional YPS Agenda for the Western Balkans. This discussion was a continuation of the established cooperation of BG Pride and RYCO aimed to strengthen the voice of queer youth.

LBO Serbia provided support for a second edition of the Reconciliation Festival in Novi Sad and within its program organized a Youth Talk “Do we dare to reconcile?” with the Ambassador of the Republic of France in Serbia and Deputy Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany in Serbia. They discussed the 60th anniversary of the Élysée Treaty and the mandate of the Franco-German Youth Office with the participants of the festival. The discussion revolved around the importance of understanding and examining history to prevent its instrumentalization by various individuals, including regional leaders. It was emphasized that young people should be encouraged to make their own assessments of both their personal history and the historical events within the region.

Another **Youth Talk was organized with 50 young high school students** from 3 Belgrade “Superschools” and high school students from Germany when they had the opportunity to exchange their peer experiences, what it's like to live in Germany and Serbia, what is interculturalism for them, etc.

Youth for Greener Peace is the fifth Youth Talk that LBO Serbia organized, on which young people discussed environmental sustainability in their local communities and the significance of the Chapter 27 and the YPS agenda in this area as well.

Beside these local activities, 2 info sessions were organized for the 1st cycle of the Western Balkans Youth Cultural Forum alongside 2 Capacity Building trainings for cultural workers, artists and interested young people in culture, all potential applicants on this Fund. LBO Serbia also hosted Regional WBYCF training in Vrnjačka Banja for awarded CSOs and individuals in the 1st cycle.

Five info sessions have been organized during the summer within the Fifth Open Call RYCOConnecting Youth for all potential applicants across Serbia. In total 27 schools from Serbia have been awarded in the 2nd cycle of the Superschools program and LBO Serbia organized a Meet the Superschools event for the school principals and teachers at the beginning of the implementation process.

Staff of LBO Serbia participated in various activities organized by local CSOs, governmental and international organizations, often as panelists and speakers. Several meetings were held also with the representatives of Serbian institutions - Ministry of Tourism and Youth, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Commissioner for Protection of Equality as well as with relevant international partners.

RESEARCH, MONITORING, AND EVALUATION/REL



During 2023, RYCO remained committed to enhancing its Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) capabilities, expanding on the progress made in previous years. Our efforts were guided by the principles of Participatory Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting/Research, Accountability, and Learning, ensuring a comprehensive approach to assessing and improving our programs and initiatives.

Some of the key achievements in 2023 relate to:

- ***Enhanced Monitoring & Evaluation Tools Design:***

RYCO focused on enhancing its M&E tools to monitor progress and track strategic objectives effectively. The Monitoring & Evaluation Framework incorporates a robust set of qualitative and quantitative indicators tailored to monitor the success of RYCO's activities. RYCO has initiated a comprehensive project design process characterized by clearly defined SMART objectives from the designing stage. This approach ensures focused and impactful interventions across all projects, aligning with RYCO's overarching strategy to achieve its goals effectively.

- ***Data Collection and Analysis:***

We diligently collected data throughout 2023 using various methods such as surveys, interviews, focus group discussions, and observations. We carefully analyzed this information to gather valuable insights, helping us make informed decisions and improve the program. This data was also used to support drafting interim and final reports and other project documentation.

- ***Development of OC's Monitoring System:***

RYCO spearheaded the establishment of a comprehensive monitoring system to track grantee project implementation. This included developing a Log frame for the 5th OC RYConnecting Youth and WBYCF and log frames for each specific project that our beneficiaries are implementing. Questionnaires were developed and shared to assess progress, all aligned with RYCO's strategy and sub-granting objectives.

- ***Capacity Building Initiatives:***

RYCO prioritized building the capacities of its staff and beneficiaries (grantees) in applying M&E tools, ensuring a proficient workforce capable of effectively implementing and utilizing monitoring and evaluation methodologies. During the two-day workshop with the RYConnecting Youth Open Call winners in Tirana, we informed our grantees about the importance of keeping the log frames updated with the values of KPIs and using other M&E tools for effective project implementation and performance monitoring.

- ***Contribution to REL Unit Development & REL Hub***

This year, we contributed to the planning and development of RYCO's future Research, Evaluation, and learning (REL) Unit and initiated the development of the research study Shared Futures 2. Both of those goals will be finalized in 2024 and will complement the quality of RYCO's work.

CONTINUED COMMITMENT

Continuing from our successes in 2023, RYCO is committed to strengthening our Monitoring and Evaluation systems and processes. We do this by involving everyone in planning, checking progress, and learning from what we find. This helps us improve and have a bigger impact on all our programs and projects. Our ongoing work will also help us grow as an organization and set up a strong unit for research, evaluation, and learning, meeting the needs of everyone involved with RYCO.



In 2023, RYCO achieved very good results when it comes to external communication and the organization's visibility. The majority of communication outputs were related to RYCO's projects - from new projects (WBYCF) to updates on existing ones (Superschools, Open Call, RISE, GMFA, etc), along with a variety of local and regional activities. Moreover, regular communication efforts were undertaken to keep the public updated on various meetings of the RYCO leadership and its LBOs.

During 2023, the Communication Department recorded 144 mentions of RYCO in WB6 media outlets, and additionally, around 130 media mentions related to the Superschools project have been recorded by our partners. It is worth mentioning that all media reports have a positive tone. Moreover, RYCO can report significant success on its social media platforms, where the number of followers compared to 2022 has increased from 4,6% to 33,4%, depending on the platform. The quality of production and youth-friendly and visually appealing content are some of the main reasons for RYCO's success on social media.

When it comes to communication key highlights, we can emphasize that:

The RYCO Communication Department successfully designed and executed the **Youth Peace and Security Agenda (YPS)** digital campaign and created a digital platform where the content on the topic will be shared (<https://youthapproved.rycowb.org/>). In order to familiarize targeted audiences and introduce the topics, a social media campaign was created, consisting of 12 impactful posts highlighting the core pillars of the YPS agenda, emphasizing its significance, and sharing inspirational stories of youth driving positive change. Additionally, 6 influencers from each CP were engaged to create a series of explanatory videos underscoring the importance of the YPS agenda and curating Spotify playlists dedicated to peace and change themes. These activities resulted in a high number of positive interactions and impressions on social media.

In October 2023, RYCO launched the new **"Western Balkans Youth Cultural Fund"** project in Tirana. The event hosted by RYCO gathered distinguished Ministers and Ambassadors, along with cultural representatives and activists, and it had good outreach in media outlets across the region (10 reports). Activities that followed, such as info sessions and the regional workshop, were additionally promoted on social media channels. For the purpose of the new project, the Communications Department prepared visual and promo materials distributed in 6CPs, which significantly contributed to project visibility.

As in the previous years, in 2023, RYCO was actively engaged in the **Organization of WB Youth Forum**, conducting extensive social media campaigns, along with several other activities – open call for logo competition (resulting in more than 5000 views of article, along with two promo videos that together reached more than 60000 people and generated 3000 clicks); info campaign on previous Berlin Declaration, familiarizing the audience with the importance of this document; launch of Balkan Youth Express Participation Call followed by social media post that produced more than 100 reshares. As for the main event, a series of online communications were created, including impactful posts and videos, reaching more than 5000 impressions and reshares. To increase the event's visibility, various promo materials were produced by the Communication Department. In addition, the event received over 20 regional media mentions. The overall efforts of having diverse communication channels and engagement strategies played a crucial role in amplifying awareness and participation in the Western Balkans Youth Forum 2023, organized in Tirana.

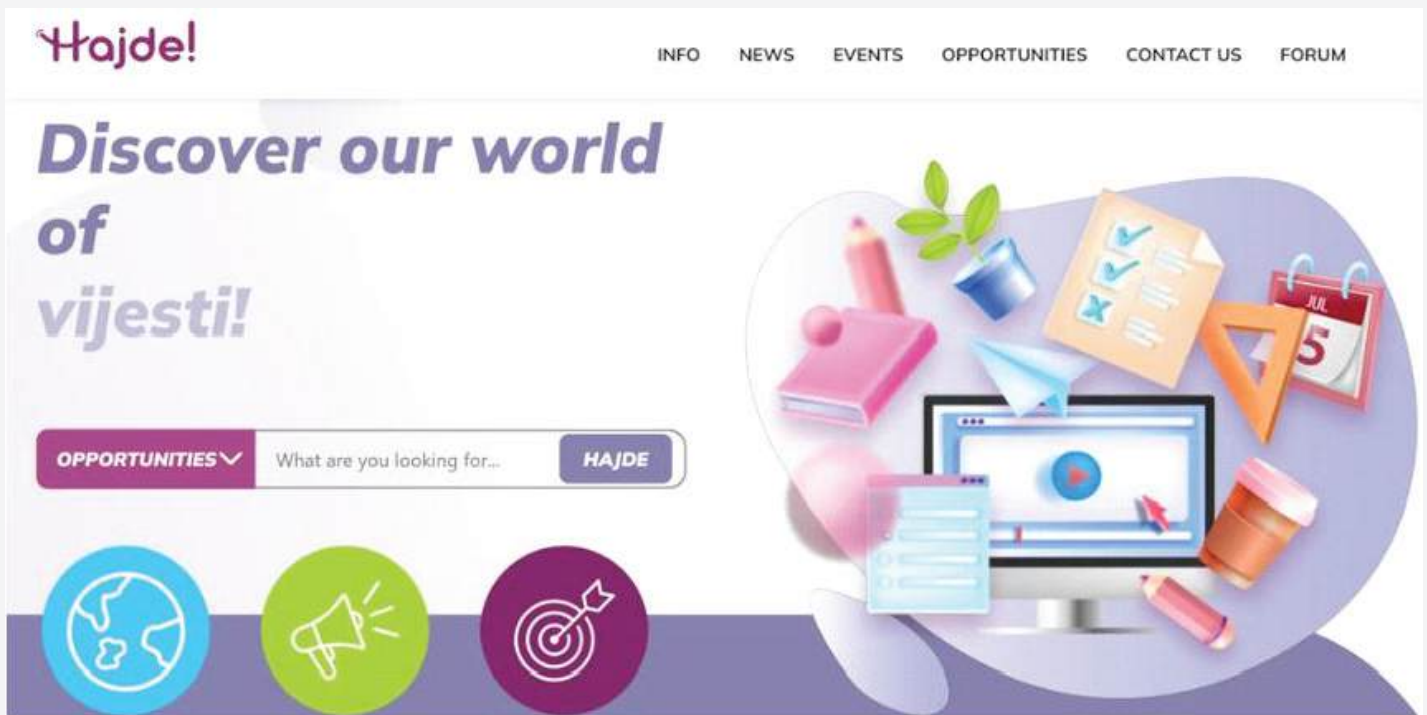
Communication activities related to the **Superschools Project** were focused on producing 6 success stories showcasing the Superschool exchange dynamics, like this example. Additionally, media from BiH and creative agencies were engaged to produce the Homestay documentary. All in all, around 130 media reports related to the Superschools project were recorded in various media outlets across WB6.

In 2023, RYCO launched the 5th Open Call **"RYCONNECTING YOUTH"**. The promotion resulted in more than 15 media reports and numerous impressions and shares on social media. **RISE** project activities were communicated through several web articles and press releases, including the RISE Regional Forum for Social Entrepreneurs, followed by social media promotion of RISE Demo Days and Bootcamp.

In addition, RYCO's Communication team promoted numerous local activities as part of "Peace Broadcasters: Empowering Journalists as Peace Reporters" which offered training for more than 40 journalists and awarded 3 best stories. This program turned into a regional edition at the end of 2023. The celebration of the International Youth Day, along with RYCO's 7th Anniversary and the organization of Youth Fair, were additional highlights when it comes to the Communication Department's endeavors in 2023.

The following publications should be considered major for RYCO communications efforts – Strategic Plan 2022 - 2024 and RYCO Annual Report 2022, and Berlin Declaration of the Western Balkans Youth Forum 2022.





In 2023, the Hajde platform continued to be a credible and inspiring communication channel, serving as a meeting place for all young people interested in active participation, events, and opportunities in the Western Balkans.

In order to create chances for young people to share their stories and get informed about different opportunities and events in the region, RYCO signed Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) with several faculties/departments of journalism from the region, aiming to provide content on various topics from the youth perspective. A novelty in the 2023 cycle was competition for the best students' story, which served as an additional motive for providing good quality content for the platform

AS A RESULT, THE FOLLOWING CAN BE HIGHLIGHTED:

- > 7 Faculties of journalism actively contributed to providing content – news, events, and opportunities for Hajde! platform during the period of 3 months (October-December)
- > 22 students of journalism were engaged in content creation in the 2023 cycle
- > In addition, one young journalist from Kosovo was engaged in the provision of content for the platform
- > 25 articles, 12 events, and 34 opportunities were published
- > 47 Instagram posts were created
- > The platform's Instagram profile has 750 followers.

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN 2023



Organizational development has been a major topic within the organization during 2023. Several processes were tackled during the year, during which the institution-building process was closed after several years of slow progress.

At the beginning of 2023, a **Functional Analysis** of RYCO's role, responsibilities, and functions was finalized. This comprehensive report was produced by Deloitte, who proposed the best organizational design that combines cohesive structures with efficient processes and systems and promotes synergy and flexibility. As a result, RYCO's GB was presented and approved:

1. New high-level organizational structure
2. Layers for salary scheme
3. Revised HR Policy Manual
4. Structured Terms of Reference for all the core positions

Additional **organizational development processes** in 2023 entailed:

- Development of the HR department and the hiring of a CIM expert supported by GIZ
- Transition to employment contracts for both core and project staff
- Setting up the Finance department according to the new organizational structure
- Improvement of internal procedures and manuals
- Strengthening the coordination of managerial staff and capacity building
- Process of LBO registration

In summary, 2023 witnessed significant milestones in RYCO's organizational development endeavors, culminating in finalizing some critical processes and implementing structural enhancements. These efforts have fortified RYCO's operational framework, streamlined administrative functions, and strengthened internal capacity. As RYCO continues to evolve, these foundational developments position the organization for greater effectiveness, resilience, and impact in advancing its mission to empower youth and foster regional cooperation across the Western Balkans.

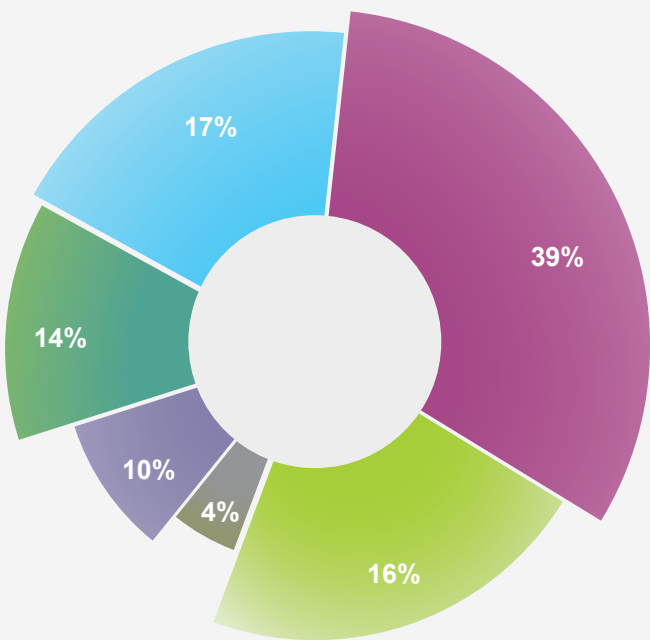
FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY



3.1.1 Annual financial budget execution

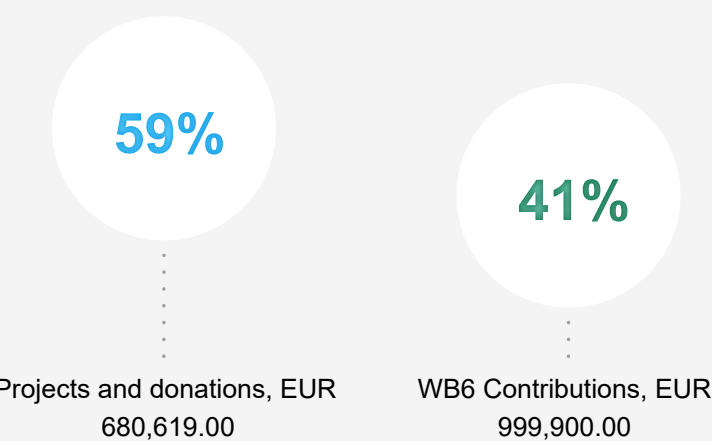
Total operating income in 2023 amounted to EUR 1,680,519, of which 999,900 EUR were direct contributions from the six CP governments and 680,619 EUR from various Projects and Donations. During 2023, RYCO implemented various program activities supported by a range of international partners, as mentioned throughout this report. The volume of the expenses for 2023 was EUR 1,187,206.34 EUR, from which 72% 853,719.62 EUR as direct costs for activities and 28% 333,486.72 EUR as operating costs. In the table below, you will find the amount in EUR and the share of the contributions from the 6 governments towards RYCO during 2023.

Annual Financial Contributions for RYCO from its 6 CPs during 2023

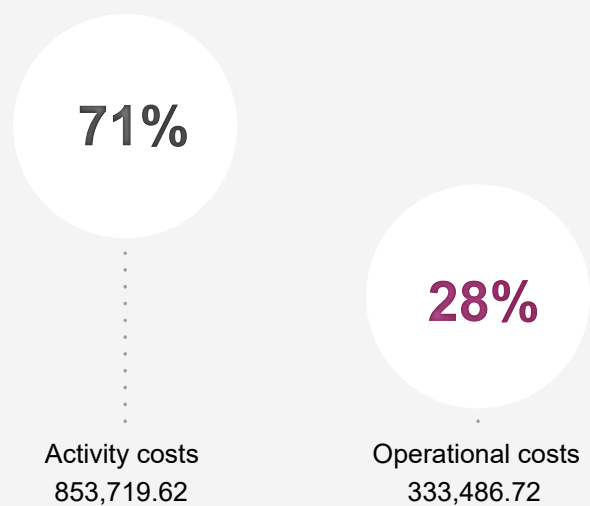


FINANCIALS' SUMMARY

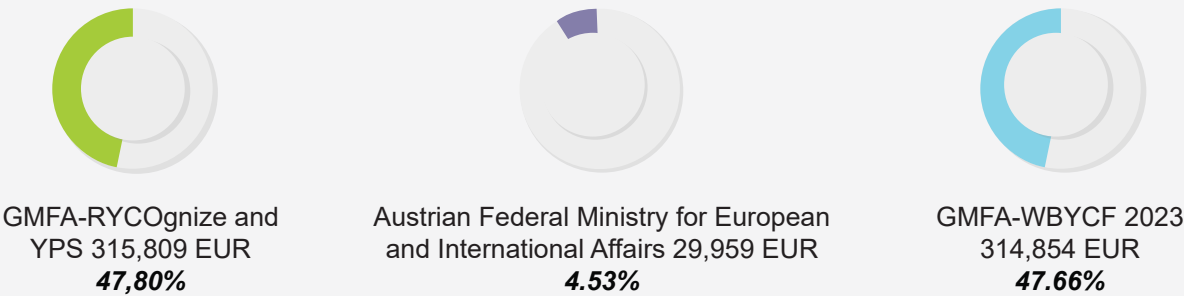
REVENUES 2023 (EUR)



EXPENSES 2023 (EUR)



RECEIVED FUNDS BY DONOR 2023 (EUR)



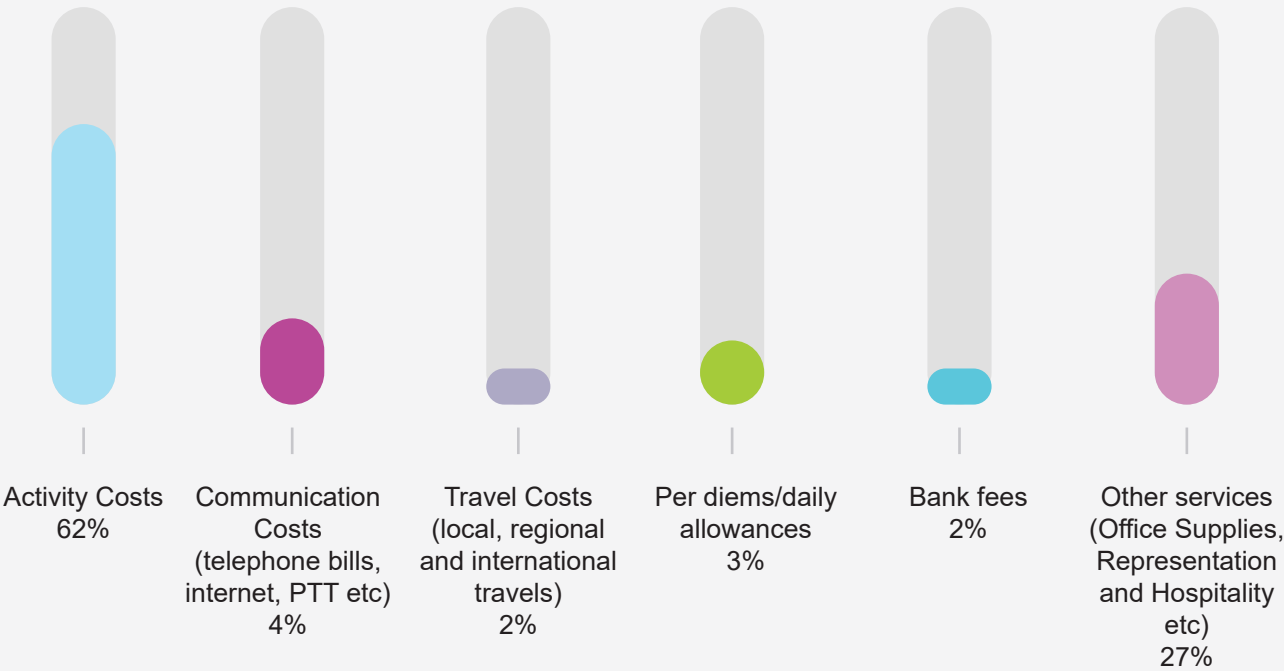
OPERATIONAL COSTS 2023 (EUR)



ACTIVITIES' COSTS 2023 (EUR)



RYCO LOCAL BRANCH OFFICES' COSTS 2023 (EUR)



3.2. PROCUREMENT



The **main achievement** regarding procurement activity is the **revision** of the new Rules and Operational Guidelines on procurement procedures of RYCO (ROGPP), an internal regulatory framework that covers the whole procurement cycle, aimed at giving practical guidance and detailed steps to RYCO’s staff involved in executing procurement procedures. This internal document harmonizes as much as possible RYCO Statute, Financial Regulations, donor’s rules on procurement, and international best practices.

As per the revised ROGPP:

- LBOs can conduct, to a certain degree, procurement procedures independently in line with their official registration
- Project teams can conduct procurement procedures with greater autonomy as well as greater responsibility
- Procurement procedures do not mix any more various wording or practices of different donors; rather, the document includes the guidelines set out in the PRAG rules, which the European Commission regularly updates
- Review and Endorsement Matrix is introduced to supplement the Delegated Approval Matrix outlining the responsibilities and obligations of RYCO staff during the procurement processes
- The Secretary General’s responsibilities focus more on the end of the process obligations rather than on the operational processes in the procurement procedures
- HLBOs are recognized as sole contract signatories in CPs for procedures conducted by either projects or LBOs.

Additionally, RYCO’s procurement practices were slowly integrated into the organizational ERP system, which is expected to become operational in 2024. During 2024, the plan is to continue addressing the challenges related to the consolidation of needs due to different timing of project implementations and the repetition of calls/invitations to tenders due to low participation.

RYCO’S PROCUREMENT PROCEDURES IN NUMBERS

With regards to the main indicators: the source of funds, typology of contracts, and types of procurement procedures, RYCO’s procurement activity in 2023 has been performed as follows:

TYPE OF PROCEDURE	NO
OPEN PROCEDURE	10
SIMPLIFIED PROCEDURE	14
DIRECT CONTRACTING PROCEDURE	76

3.3.

LEGAL



For RYCO's Legal unit, 2023 has been a dynamic year. The increase in activities within the organization also meant increased administrative work, including contract drafting, legal opinions, official decisions, etc. In brief, we can summarize that the work of the Legal unit during 2023 consisted mainly of the following:

- Preparing contracts, be it for the core staff, project staff, or different service providers, based on RYCO's Statute, Host CP Agreement, and other internal regulations and rules while considering the obstacles that might appear due to the existence of 6 different legal frameworks.
- Following the successful registration of the 5 LBOs, the legal nature of the contracts was changed to Employment and not service.
- Work is still ongoing to enable the digitized contracting process by the respective colleagues using drafts and pre-prepared forms.
- The workload of the Legal Unit in a regional organization is constant and challenging, as we can briefly mention the process of compiling the contracts or their amendments, as well as the preparation of other legal documents, such as Memorandum of Understanding, Partnership agreements, Donation agreements, Decisions, and Legal Opinions, providing legal assistance, etc.
- Since January 2023, RYCO has had only 1 Legal Officer carrying out all the legal work and tasks; therefore, legal support was hired for 4 months to ensure the flow and efficiency of work.

In numbers, the work of the Legal unit looks as follows:

Donation Agreements	0
Partnership Agreements/Agreements for Endowing of an Allocation	65
Grant Agreements	42
Attestations and Official Letters to various institutions	55
Service contracts/Service contracts amendments/Supply contracts	162
SG awarding contracts + internal Decisions	172
GMFA project awarding contracts for Berlin Logo Process	1
Employment contracts (RYCO funds)	45
Legal Opinions/Interpretations/Briefs compiled by the Legal Unit	N/A
RISE WB6 Lab Project	12

This means that overall, the legal unit compiled was 554.

RYCO PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS 2023



Co-funded by the European Union

