

# **RYCO**

## **Operational Plan 2025**



## **Abbreviations**

AB - Advisory Board

AFD - Agence Française de Développement (French Development Agency)

AM - Advocacy Manager

CSO - Civil Society Organization

CP - Contracting Parties

DSG - Deputy Secretary General

EC - European Commission

ERP - Enterprise Resource Planning platform

EU - European Union

GB - Governing Board

GIZ - Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Agency for International Cooperation)

GMFA - German Ministry of Foreign Affairs

HLBO - Head of Local Branch Office

HoP - Head of Programs

ICL - Intercultural learning

LBO - Local Branch Office

MEAL – Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning

M&E - Monitoring and evaluation

NYC - National Youth Council

OFAJ - L'Office franco-allemand pour la Jeunesse (French-German Youth Office)

OSCE - Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe

PO - Programme Officer

REL - Research, Evaluation and Learning

RISE - Regional Incubator for Social Entrepreneurship

RYCO - Regional Youth Cooperation Office

SG - Secretary General

UN - United Nations

YPS - Youth, Peace and Security agenda

WB6 - Western Balkans Six

WFD – Westminster Foundation for Democracy

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Overview of RYCO's mission, vision, and guiding principles

The Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) was established with a commitment to fostering peace, reconciliation, and cooperation among young people in the Western Balkans 6. Driven by the belief that youth play a central role in the region's stability and growth, RYCO promotes an environment where young people can actively participate in initiatives that transcend national and cultural boundaries. RYCO envisions a future where youth are integral to promoting stability, unity, and positive change throughout the region. By providing opportunities for youth to engage in meaningful dialogue, mutual learning, and shared initiatives, RYCO seeks to create a generation of young leaders who are resilient, empathetic, and committed to peace. This mission aligns with the vision of a unified, peaceful Western Balkans 6 where youth are empowered to drive positive social change.

RYCO's guiding principles center around inclusivity, diversity, and youth engagement, emphasizing meaningful participation, intercultural learning, and reconciliation. These principles reflect RYCO's belief that young people, regardless of background or socioeconomic status, have the right to contribute to shaping a peaceful and prosperous future. RYCO's work is grounded in the principles of youth-centered development, ensuring that all initiatives are designed with and for young people, fostering a culture of ownership and active participation.

### 1.2. 2025–2027 strategic plan and its long-term outcomes

The 2025–2027 Strategic Plan provides a blueprint for achieving RYCO's vision over the next three years, aiming to generate long-term positive impacts across the Western Balkans 6. RYCO's impact statement, which drives all strategic efforts, is: **“Young people are effectively cooperating and fostering reconciliation towards a sustainable, positive peace within a supportive political and social environment across the Western Balkans 6.”**

To achieve this vision, the strategy is organized into four core pathways, each targeting a specific group of stakeholders:

- **Young People:** Increasing youth engagement through greater mobility, intercultural learning, and regional cooperation.

- **Socio-Political Actors:** Fostering a supportive socio-political environment that values and promotes youth-led initiatives.
- **Youth Structures:** Strengthening institutions and organizations that work with and for young people, enhancing their capacity to support youth.
- **RYCO as an Organization:** Building RYCO's institutional capabilities to ensure effective delivery of programs and sustained impact.

The strategy outlines long-term, intermediary, and short-term outcomes, creating a comprehensive framework for impact. These outcomes will be realized through targeted interventions, aiming to create pathways for young people to actively participate in social and political arenas, promote regional cooperation, and address shared challenges.

### **1.3. Importance of the 2025 operational plan within the strategic framework.**

The 2025 Operational Plan serves as the first critical step in implementing the broader 2025–2027 strategy. It emphasizes short-term outcomes that lay the groundwork for RYCO's envisioned long-term changes, including increased youth participation, enhanced mobility, the expansion of supportive structures and strengthening RYCO's structures. As the initial stage in a three-year cycle, the 2025 plan aims to create immediate, measurable progress that will build momentum toward the achievement of the strategy's intermediary and long-term goals.

Through targeted activities and interventions, the 2025 Operational Plan focuses on enhancing RYCO's reach, expanding its support to youth structures, and strengthening collaboration with regional partners. This plan prioritizes fostering a strong foundation for the ongoing transformation of the Western Balkans 6 into a region where youth cooperation is the cornerstone of reconciliation and sustainable peace.

## 2. Objectives for 2025

In alignment with RYCO's 2025–2027 Strategic Plan, the objectives for 2025 are created to deliver immediate, impactful outcomes that lay the foundation for long-term, sustainable peace and cooperation across the Western Balkans 6. This first year of the strategic cycle focuses on engaging young people from diverse backgrounds, enhancing their mobility opportunities, strengthening the youth structures that support them and reinforcing the institutional structures within RYCO. These objectives are driven by RYCO's mission to empower youth as active contributors to reconciliation and positive change, enabling a generation that values unity, inclusivity, and peaceful collaboration.

Aligned Objectives and Short-Term Outcomes:

The objectives for 2025 are aligned with the short-term outcomes outlined in the RYCO Strategic Plan, which include:

- **Increased Youth Participation:** Encourage diverse youth engagement by expanding program access to marginalized groups, rural youth, and young people with fewer opportunities.
- **Expanded Regional Cooperation:** Develop and implement programs that increase youth mobility, enabling young people to participate in regional exchanges and collaborative projects.
- **Strengthened Capacity of Youth Structures:** Provide targeted training and resources to youth structures, enabling them to execute impactful projects and advocate for youth needs effectively.
- **Policy Engagement and Advocacy:** Collaborate with local and regional policymakers to influence youth policy, ensuring that young voices are considered in governance and policy creation processes.
- **Strengthening RYCO's Reconciliation Approach:** Reinforce RYCO's role as a leader in regional reconciliation efforts, supporting the use of innovative tools, training, and expertise to facilitate intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding.

- Organizational Development and HR: Improve RYCO's internal structures, M&E framework, HR practices, and staff development opportunities to ensure that the organization can deliver its strategic goals with efficiency and effectiveness.

#### Targeted Changes for Each Objective:

- Youth Mobility: By organizing regional exchange programs and expanding its key initiatives like the Superschools Project, RISE and Cultural fund, RYCO aims to provide more opportunities for young people to experience cross-cultural learning. These efforts will increase youth exposure to different cultures and foster a sense of unity across the region.
- Policy Advocacy: With an emphasis on the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda, RYCO will enhance youth-led advocacy efforts by collaborating with National Youth Councils and engaging with policy forums. This objective aims to establish youth as influential voices in policy-making processes.
- Capacity Development: Tailored training sessions and toolkits will be provided to youth organizations to help them enhance their program delivery, financial management, and advocacy skills. This capacity-building approach is essential to equip youth structures with the resources needed to contribute to RYCO's mission effectively.
- Youth Participation: In an effort to diversify RYCO's outreach, the organization will create new grant schemes and sectors targeting underrepresented youth, such as those in rural areas and marginalized communities. By promoting inclusivity, RYCO will expand the representation of diverse youth perspectives in its programs and activities.
- Strengthening RYCO's Reconciliation Approach: As part of its commitment to fostering peace, RYCO will strengthen its reconciliation approach through training programs, expert-led workshops, and the development of new tools, such as peacebuilding toolkits and intercultural dialogue manuals.

- Organizational Development and HR: To enhance its institutional capacity, RYCO will prioritize the development of its human resources and organizational structures. Key initiatives in 2025 will include the development of M&E framework and tools, revision of HR policies to support professional growth, the implementation of staff training programs focused on program management, and the strengthening of performance management systems.

### 3. Operational plan

Pathway 1: Young people					
Strategic outcome	Key activity	Expected result	Timeline	Responsible unit	Budget
Youth Mobility, Intercultural Learning, and Regional Cooperation	Implementation of Superschools exchange scheme.	180 exchanges implemented.  2.600 young people engaged in regional exchanges, fostering intercultural dialogue and peacebuilding.	Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4.	Program unit: WB6 School Exchange Scheme-Superschools 2.0	€1.260.000 Project budget: GIZ Superschools 2
	Develop grant schemes for youth initiatives on peacebuilding.	6 youth organizations participate in implementing YPS agenda in the region.  200 young people engaged during activities implemented by grantees.	Q2, Q3, Q4	Program unit: RYCOgnizing YPS: Meaningful Youth Participation in the WB6	€350.000 Project budget: YPS GFFO Contract to be signed in December



	Organize Business Forum	<p>200 young people gain employment skills.</p> <p>2 best teams from RISE alumni will be supported to develop their business idea in next phase.</p>	Q3.	Program unit: Regional incubator for social entrepreneurs	To be fundraised
	Implementation of Grant Scheme: Ryconnecting 6th OC	<p>At least 8 CSOs supported by the 6th OC.</p> <p>At least 8 regional mobility programs planned by grantees.</p> <p>250 Young People gain skills &amp; knowledge on thematic areas of RYCO through exchange programs.</p>	Q1, Q2, Q3	Program unit: Grant unit	€300,000 Core budget
	Implementation of RISE grant scheme	<p>12 Social Businesses supported to the Incubation Phase.</p> <p>12 RISErs winners' teams from 6 CPs supported in developing their social business ideas.</p> <p>18 RISErs winners' teams from 6 CPs will be supported in order to strengthen regional perspective and gain business skills.</p>	Q1, Q2, Q3	Program unit: Regional incubator for social entrepreneurs	€ 39.000 Core budget (RISE)
	Implementation of Western Balkans Youth cultural fund	<p>14 young individuals supported to implement youth cooperation programs through culture</p> <p>20 CSOs supported to implement cooperation programs through culture</p> <p>6 Peace Champion supported.</p> <p>340 youth involved in cultural activities</p>	Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4	Program unit: Western Balkans Youth cultural fund	€ 135,600 Project budget (RCF)

	Implementation of Japan's Friendship Ties Program "MIRAI"	At least 13 young people from the WB participate in an exchange program in Japan.	Q4	Program unit: Japan's Friendship Ties Program "MIRAI"	Activity supported by Japan Embassy
Youth Participation and Engagement in Civil Society	Organization of the challenge of presence in the media during 100 days	A 100-day media challenge campaign with a minimum of 200 media appearances across at least 30 different media outlets.	Q2, Q3	Program unit: LBO Bosnia and Hercegovina	€ 11.300 Project budget
	Support for the organization of up to two large events for young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, through the organization of the event segment/side event	At least 120 young people are informed on RYCO's programs and acquired knowledge about RYCO thematic areas	Q2, Q3	Program unit: LBO Bosnia and Hercegovina	€ 2.000 Core budget
	Organization of WB6 Youth Forum	40 young people participate in International conference and directly engage in discussions and advocacy efforts on regional and European level.	Q4	Program unit: RYCO	To be fundraised

	Engage youth researchers and institutions to develop knowledge databases	6 research/policy briefs created by young people.  18 young people from WB gain research skills	Q1, Q2, Q3	Program unit: REL unit (Austria voluntary contribution)	€ 30.000 Project budget  Contract to be signed in December
	Organize ICL training for young people from rural areas.	Increase capacities of young people from rural areas from MNE for ICL topics as peer promoters of RYCO values in their communities	Q2	Program unit: LBO Montenegro	€ 4.500 Core budget
	Organize training for young people on discrimination, hate speech, peacebuilding, tolerance, and coexistence.	Increase the capacities of young people to present social issues through mobile documentaries, supporting their engagement and advocacy efforts	Q3	Program unit: LBO Bosnia and Hercegovina	Activity supported by UNFPA
	Organization of two discussions with young people (Youth Talk format)	40 young people from rural areas engage in discussions on youth issues and regional cooperation	Q3	Program Unit: LBO Kosovo*	€ 1000 Core budget

\*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.

Pathway 2: • Socio-Political Actors (Supportive environment)					
Institutional local or regional cooperation and strengthen partnerships	Organize regional donor consultation meetings	Strengthen RYCO cooperation with the donor community.	Q3, Q4	Program unit: WB6 School Exchange Scheme-Superschools 2.0	Activity supported by GIZ
	Organize teachers' training organized	250 teachers increase skills in regional cooperation and peace building.	Q4	Program unit: WB6 School Exchange Scheme-Superschools 2.0	€38.000 Project budget
	Organize 6 Meet the Super Schools conferences	200 education practitioners engage in discussions with decision-makers on local level.	Q4	Program unit: WB6 School Exchange Scheme-Superschools 2.0	€12.000 Core budget
	Strengthen cooperation with Albanian youth sector and increasing RYCO's visibility in Albania	At least 50 young people being informed on RYCO's programs.	Q2	Program unit: LBO Albania	€ 1000 Core budget
	Increase RYCO's visibility in Kosovo through actively participating at the Month of Youth activities	At least 100 young people being informed on RYCO's programs	Q3	Program unit: LBO Kosovo	€ 1000 Core budget

	Organize presentational event for the RYCO Bosnia and Herzegovina office to engage the international community	40+ representatives from international organizations, embassies, and partners attend the event and get acquainted with local office activities, and establish strategic partnerships for enhanced collaboration.	Q1	Program unit: LBO Bosnia and Herzegovina	€ 1000 Core budget
	Study visit of successful examples of youth centers (Initiation of youth gaming center)	12 representatives of WB6 institutions participate in study visit and exchange knowledge and experience in establishing and managing youth centers	Q1	Program unit: LBO North Macedonia	€ 2000 Core budget
Adoption of policies that promote youth cooperation	Organize three meetings between MPs and young people on RYCO related topics	Strengthening cooperation with MPs and Parliaments	Q2, Q3, Q4	Program unit: LBOs	x
	Building capacities of young MPs for thematic areas peacebuilding, intercultural learning and dialogue and regional youth cooperation;	Organize 1 study visit program for 12 young MPs (members of young MPs group from MNE) to Berlin;	Q2	LBO MNE	OSCE funded; In cooperation with the OFAJ
	Strengthening capacities	Organize 1 one-day national conference for 50 participants with the focus on decision makers	Q1	LBO MNE	OSCE funded;

	knowledge of key stakeholders in MNE (government institutions, international partners, CSOs, media etc.) on RYCO Mission, Programs and peacebuilding and ICL topics in general with the focus on YPS;	and most important stakeholders, with the inclusion of young people;			RYCO core budget 500 EUR;
<b>Pathway 3: Youth structures</b>					
Capacity Building for Youth Structures	Implement regional training for grantees of 6 <sup>th</sup> OC	Youth CSOs gain skills on Project Management, Financial Management and visibility	Q1	Program Unit: Grant unit	€ 20.000 Core budget
	Organization of 7 Workshops to support cultural practitioners and CSOs	Cultural practitioners and cultural CSOs gain skills in for social change through arts and culture	Q2	Program unit: Western Balkans Youth cultural fund	€ 30,030 Project budget
	Organization of Regional Training to Grantees	Cultural CSOs and youth CSOs gain capacities to apply the creative methodology of art and creative activism in order to reach bigger impact with their projects.	Q3	Program unit: Western Balkans Youth cultural fund	€ 18,020 Project budget

	Organization of Capacity Building Training for CSOs	15 representatives of CSOs gain skills for project development equipping them to apply for RYCOConnecting and other RYCO Open Calls.	Q3	Program unit: LBO Serbia	€ 1.000 Core budget  Event additionally supported by OSCE
	Organization of Capacity Building Training for Youth Wings of political parties	20 representatives of youth political parties gain skills in advocacy, lobbying, youth participation, and cooperation.	Q2	Program unit: LBO North Macedonia	€ 2000 Core Budget  Explore cooperation with IFES, KAS/ FES/ WFD
	Organize Capacity Building Training on ICL for Youth Wings of political parties	20 representatives of youth wings of political parties gain skills in advocacy, lobbying, youth participation, and cooperation.	Q2	Program unit: LBO Montenegro	€ 2000 Core Budget  Explore cooperation with IFES, KAS/ FES/ WFD

	Organize Capacity Building Training on ICL for Youth Wings of political parties	20 representatives of youth political parties gain skills in advocacy, lobbying, youth participation, and cooperation.	Q3	Program unit: LBO Kosovo	€ 4000 Core Budget  Explore cooperation with OSCE/IFES, KAS/ FES/ WFD
	Organize Capacity Building Training on ICL and RYCO thematic areas for High School Student's Parliaments	15 Student representatives gain skills on ICL and RYCO thematic areas	Q3	Program unit: LBO Serbia	€ 5000 Core budget
	Organize Capacity Building Training for CSOs	15 representatives of CSOs in Albania gain skills for project development for equipping them to apply for RYCOConnecting and other RYCO Open Calls.	Q1	Program unit: LBO Albania	€ 2000  OSCE PiA Albania (TBC)
	Organize Capacity Building Training for CSOs	15 representatives of CSO representatives gain knowledge on Intercultural learning and dialogue ICL and Project Cycle Management	Q2, Q3	Program Unit: LBO Montenegro	Activity supported by OSCE
	Organize Capacity Building Training for CSOs	15 representatives of CSOs gain knowledge for project development equipping them to apply for RYCOConnecting and other RYCO Open Calls.	Q3	Program unit: LBO Bosnia and Hercegovina	€ 3000 Core budget



					OSCE
	Organize Capacity Building Training for members of Local Youth Councils	10 representatives of Local Youth Councils gain knowledge on intercultural learning and regional youth cooperation	Q2	Program unit: LBO Albania	€ 3000 Core budget
Strengthening RYCO's Reconciliation Approach	Develop and launch a video campaign celebrating peace	Reach at least 150,000 views across social media platforms by highlighting the importance in fostering a cohesive and resilient society.	Q2, Q3, Q4	Program unit: LBO Bosnia and Hercegovina	To be fundraised
<b>Pathway 4: RYCO</b>					
Research, Monitoring, and Evaluation (M&E)	Develop research and data collection mechanisms to monitor youth mobility, participation, and policy influence.	Strengthened research, evaluation, and learning practices at RYCO.	Q1	M&E unit	X
	Develop M&E Plan for grantees of the 6 <sup>th</sup> OC	Increase internal and external monitoring tools both for third parties and RYCO Local staff	Q1, Q2, Q3	Grant Unit and M&E unit	x
	Establish digitalizing of tracking outputs & outcomes of M&E on project cycle module	Digital format of M&E strength both for third parties and internal tracking (outputs & outcomes)	Q2	ERP admin	Activity supported by GIZ

Organizational Development and HR	Revise and implement improved HR policies, focusing on staff development and performance.	Improved HR policy, with a focus on staff development and organizational capacity.	Q2, Q3	HR unit	x
	Enhance internal accountability and transparent, impact-oriented communication practices	Developed internal communication strategy.	Q2, Q3	Communication Department	€ 5,000
	RYCO rebranding	Producing a new brand book, upgrading RYCO visual identity and conducting a campaign	Q1, Q2	Communication Department	€ 8,000
	Enhance media collaboration	Enhance collaboration with media, update already existing memorandums and establish new collaborations with media, especially regional outlets. Identify youth programs on the local level and initiate new collaborations	Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4	Communication Department	x
	Upgrading of ERP System	Created synergies between modules on ERP platform with additional functionalities of Project Cycle Module, Accounting Module, Procurement and HR module	Q1, Q2, Q3	ERP admin	Activity supported by GIZ

	Organization of capacity-building modules for all levels of staff	<p>Increased capacities of RYCO management staff on management and leadership skills.</p> <p>Increased capacities of PO staff on Intercultural dialogue and contextualization of peace studies.</p> <p>Increased capacities of admin and finance staff on budgeting and administrative procedures.</p>	Q1, Q2	HR unit	Activity supported by GIZ
	Optimize procurement internal practices	<p>Improvement and standardization of pre and post-procurement processes.</p> <p>Enhance communication and coordination among departments concerning consolidated procurement.</p> <p>Strengthen internal capacities in terms of Improving the monitoring of framework contracts, and formalizing communication with framework contractors.</p>	Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4	Procurement unit	x

#### **4. Monitoring, Evaluation and learning**

Effective Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) practices are essential to the success of RYCO's 2025 operational plan, ensuring that the organization's programs are impactful, accountable, and adaptive. As RYCO embarks on the first year of implementing its 2025–2027 Strategic Plan, the MEL framework will play a central role in tracking progress toward short-term outcomes, providing insights to guide ongoing adjustments, and facilitating data-driven decision-making.

##### **Tracking Progress through RYCO's REL System**

RYCO's Research, Evaluation, and Learning (REL) system will be the primary tool for tracking progress in 2025. The system will provide real-time data collection and analysis to monitor the impact of various activities and interventions on youth participation, mobility, and policy influence. By systematically measuring outputs and outcomes, the REL system will allow RYCO to assess program effectiveness, make evidence-based adjustments, and ensure accountability to stakeholders.

##### **Data Collection Methods**

Data will be collected through a combination of surveys, interviews, focus groups, and program reports. This multi-method approach will enable RYCO to gather both quantitative and qualitative data, providing a comprehensive picture of its impact. Surveys will target program participants to measure satisfaction and learning outcomes, while focus groups with youth and partner organizations will offer deeper insights into the social and cultural impact of activities.

##### **Periodic Reviews and Adjustments**

To maintain responsiveness, RYCO will conduct quarterly reviews of all ongoing programs, analyzing data collected through the REL system. These reviews will identify any challenges and inform adjustments to enhance program outcomes. An annual impact assessment will summarize findings, highlighting successes and areas for improvement. This iterative learning process will ensure that RYCO's interventions remain aligned with the needs of the Western Balkans 6' youth and the overarching strategic goals.

## 5. Risk management

Operating in the diverse socio-political landscape of the Western Balkans 6 presents both unique opportunities and risks, which RYCO addresses through a proactive risk management approach. This approach includes identifying, assessing, and mitigating risks that could impact RYCO's programs, partnerships, and overall mission to foster peace, cooperation, and youth empowerment across the region. The 2025 operational plan's risk management framework considers various potential obstacles, such as political shifts, funding fluctuations, operational challenges, and stakeholder engagement risks. By anticipating these risks, RYCO can develop strategic responses to maintain program continuity, protect youth participation efforts, and ensure effective collaboration with partners and communities.

RYCO operates within a complex socio-political landscape that requires proactive risk management to ensure continuity and stability in its programs. The key risks identified include **political instability**, **funding variability**, and **challenges in maintaining youth and community engagement**.

**Political Instability:** The Western Balkans 6 region occasionally experiences shifts in political dynamics that may impact program operations. To mitigate this risk, RYCO will adopt a flexible program design, allowing for adjustments in timing, location, or format. RYCO will also strengthen partnerships with local organizations, which are better positioned to navigate changing political landscapes, ensuring continuity in program delivery.

**Funding Gaps:** Funding limitations or changes in donor priorities could impact program delivery. RYCO aims to mitigate this risk by diversifying funding sources, building a broader donor base, and pursuing multi-year commitments with existing partners. By actively engaging new donors and reinforcing established partnerships, RYCO aims to maintain a stable funding stream, enabling the uninterrupted implementation of its strategic goals.

**Stakeholder Engagement and Youth Involvement:** Sustaining youth and partner engagement is essential for the success of RYCO's programs. To prevent disengagement, RYCO will implement robust feedback mechanisms, encourage participatory planning, and foster strong communication with youth and community stakeholders. Regular consultations and collaborative planning sessions will ensure that programs remain relevant and aligned with the needs of youth across the region.

**Operational Risks:** Internal risks, such as staffing challenges or logistical constraints, can impact program delivery. To address this, RYCO will focus on building its organizational capacity by improving HR practices, enhancing staff development, and optimizing operational workflows. Strengthening internal capacities will help RYCO maintain high standards in program implementation, despite potential internal disruptions.

Through these strategies, RYCO aims to build resilience into its programs, maintaining stability in its operations and delivering impactful outcomes in line with its 2025 objectives. By proactively identifying and addressing potential risks, RYCO reinforces its commitment to achieving its vision for a peaceful and cooperative Western Balkans 6.

## 6. Budget overview

RYCO's detailed budget for the Operational plan 2025 is available in the budget Annex for 2025. Below are presented percentages of the organization's projected overall budget.



