



# **RYCO** **Strategic Plan**

**2025 - 2027**

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# Abbreviations and Acronyms

<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>IO</b>	Intermediary outcome
<b>LBO</b>	Local Branch Office
<b>LO</b>	Long-term outcome
<b>NGO</b>	Nongovernmental organisation
<b>NYC</b>	National Youth Council
<b>RYCO</b>	Regional Youth Cooperation Office
<b>SO</b>	Short-term outcome
<b>ToC</b>	Theory of Change
<b>WB6</b>	Western Balkans Six is a geopolitical term suggesting the region comprised by six Contracting Parties: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia
<b>YPS</b>	Youth, Peace, and Security

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\*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.

# Foreword

Dear friends,

As we unveil our new strategy, we are thrilled to share our vision for a more connected and dynamic future for young people across the Western Balkans 6. While the World is facing unprecedented challenges, it is clear that the strength and creativity of young people is more crucial than ever. This strategy is designed to harness the incredible potential of young people to drive meaningful change and foster a more inclusive and peaceful region. This strategy remains aligned with our vision in which young people are creating a culture of mobility, intercultural exchange, and reconciliation.

The existence of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) serves as a powerful political statement, reflecting the commitment of WB6 leaders to collaborate based on shared values. Unlike other regional initiatives, RYCO emphasises the importance of addressing underlying factors that hinder cooperation among youth, such as stereotypes and prejudices. The organisation firmly believes that additional efforts are necessary to overcome these obstacles and ensure successful implementation of regional agreements.

Our approach underlines the role of regional youth cooperation for peace and reconciliation. By investing in the development of young people and creating opportunities for them to thrive, we are not only supporting their personal growth but also advancing a broader development of the region. We are committed to building strong partnerships between young people, civil society, schools, sports clubs, media, cultural institutions and organisations. Through this, we aim to create a supportive network that champions youth cooperation and exchanges for the peaceful Western Balkans 6.

This strategy is more than just a plan; it's a call to action and partnership. We are dedicated to creating an environment where diverse voices are heard and valued, and where they can connect, collaborate, and contribute to shaping a better future. Together, let's build a region where every young person has the chance to shine and make a lasting impact in these transformative times.

Remember, **a better region starts with YOUth!**

# 1. RYCO's Journey: What is the story so far?

## 1.1. What is RYCO?

Regional Youth Cooperation Office (hereinafter referred to as 'RYCO') is an independently functioning intergovernmental organisation founded in 2016 by the Western Balkans 6 participants (WB6: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia), aiming to promote the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation in the region through youth exchange programs.

RYCO stewards and promotes regional, cross-cultural, and intercultural cooperation within and among its six Western Balkans Contracting Parties. RYCO's unique governance system brings together governments and civil society to ensure young people are represented at all levels within the organisation. Its local branch offices (LBOs) ensure RYCO is represented in all six contracting parties (CP), while its headquarters is based in Tirana. RYCO invests in the development and strengthening of its governing mechanisms, its leaders, its representatives, its staff team, and its internal systems in order to ensure it is governed, represented, and managed in line with its mandate and mission.

## 1.2. RYCO context

Socio-economic processes in each contracting party are influencing factors for the work of RYCO. The consultation process and the PESTEL analysis highlighted the following main factors organised per area:



### Political

All processes of political and security nature, especially those involving more than one contracting party. The varying political circumstances affect the potential for interregional cooperation in the youth field as well.



### Technological

Rapid technological advancement, including digital developments, AI, reshape RYCO's approach and its responsiveness to emerging needs dictated by the changing trends and tools.



### Economic

The economic conditions in different contracting parties, as well as issues that concern the whole region, such as brain drain, lack of quality employment and infrastructural connectivity.



### Environmental

Climate change poses challenges and outlines new opportunities and requests for RYCO's projects and initiatives.



### Social

Social and cultural circumstances affect RYCO operations and outreach strategies in different contracting parties.



### Legal

Variations between legal systems across the region, as well as the fact that all current laws need to be adapted to the EU legislation.

Despite their varied paths of democratisation and European Union integration, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia all face the common issue of moderate institutional performance and constrained development.

These local and regional processes significantly impact the lives of young people, shaping their opportunities and prospects within the region. The interconnected challenges and opportunities across the region collectively influence the lives of young people, affecting their access to education, employment, and participation in social life.

Nevertheless, some of the external factors open up opportunities rather than posing a challenge. The cooperation based on the framework of the [Berlin Process](#) and the creation of a common regional market, the new [Growth Plan for the Western Balkans](#), and the other political initiatives leading to economic regional integration are easing RYCO's work. Mutual recognition of diplomas from formal education is also a positive development. Likewise, the legal systems in most contracting parties are changing to be more supportive for innovations, startups, and green businesses.

Legally, the definition of 'youth' varies across the Western Balkans 6: in North Macedonia, Kosovo and Albania, it includes individuals aged 15 to 29 years old, while in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia, it covers those aged 15 to 30 years old.

Young people throughout the WB6 encounter a range of significant challenges, including high unemployment rates, limited access to quality employment opportunities, and experiences of social exclusion and discrimination against marginalised groups. According to the research report *Young People in the Western Balkans: Peace and Security, Reconciliation, and Cooperation* by Dragan Stanojević, written commissioned by RYCO, young people face severe social, economic, and political marginalisation, making them one of the most vulnerable groups in the region.

Alarmingly, according to several local studies and the [Friedrich Erbert Stiftung](#), a large number of young people in the region feel there is no future for them locally and are considering leaving their contracting parties in the near future. The numbers differ among RYCO CP-s: the desire to emigrate is ranging from 26% in Montenegro to 43% in Albania. A widespread distrust in political institutions has led many young people to feel disconnected from the political process, leaving them with the sense that their voices are ignored and their concerns unaddressed. Furthermore, the legacy of past conflicts and the slow pace of democratic transition have compounded these challenges. Research indicates that the sociopolitical changes of the 1990s have not substantially improved opportunities for social integration or participation in decision-making. Instead, the region is facing rising populism, ethnic divisions, and secessionist threats. Hence, the engagement of young people is crucial for fostering democratic societies and maintaining peace and stability in the Western Balkans 6.

Furthermore, education and training systems in the Western Balkans 6 are facing growing calls to address youth unemployment, bridge the skills gap, and fully leverage the region's talent. These systems need to address the diverse socio-economic backgrounds and ethnic differences among children and young people to ensure equitable opportunities for all. Additionally, there is a pressing need to integrate the development of social competencies into formal education, equipping youth with the skills necessary to navigate and thrive in an increasingly complex and polarised world. By adapting educational frameworks to these needs, the region can benefit from better social cohesion, cooperation, and development in every aspect of life.

There is a noticeable decline in the shrinking space for the civil society sector in the Western Balkans 6. Despite its potential, the sector remains underdeveloped, with youth workers often lacking the necessary skills for peacebuilding. With decreasing funding and a lack of expertise, youth NGOs are unable to effectively engage with rural and marginalised groups and to integrate peacebuilding and reconciliation into their core activities.

Youth organizations are encountering new trends, such as increased digital engagement among young people. Post-pandemic challenges like mental health struggles, economic instability, and social isolation have intensified the need for support. As these issues evolve, youth organizations must quickly adapt, using innovative approaches to meet both the lasting impacts of the pandemic and the shifting needs and interests of today's youth.

Umbrella youth organizations and the broader youth sector are facing declining youth engagement and participation. Smaller organizations are struggling to attract and retain active members, further worsening this issue. To reverse this trend, it is essential to strengthen the youth sector across the region and promote greater collaboration among youth organizations. By building a more cohesive and resilient network, we can better address these challenges and ensure young people play a central role in shaping a stable, peaceful future for the region.

Recent developments in the Western Balkans 6 underscore the ongoing need for reconciliation, peacebuilding, and dialogue. The EU's declining influence, compounded by global conflicts and security threats, is weakening confidence in its enlargement process. Meanwhile, the region lacks a clear reconciliation strategy, particularly one focused on youth, and coherent policies for addressing past grievances and transitional justice at both local and regional levels. Regional dynamics are directly influencing reconciliation efforts at the local level.

The rise of populist and divisive groups additionally emphasises tensions by promoting conflicting narratives. Social and traditional media often fuel hate speech and extreme views, while segregated educational systems fail to foster intercultural dialogue. The lack of peace education and funding for civil society organisations further isolates young people, who are often exposed to one-sided narratives from their communities. These groups frequently exploit the divisive narratives for opportunistic gains, deepening societal divisions and impeding progress towards cooperation and peace.

The changes and developments in the region, but also wider in the world, show the need for innovations, new tools and approaches. As the world is changing rapidly, the needs and priorities of young people change continuously as well. New topics emerge and become prominent among youth, such as mental health and climate change. In the case of RYCO, that also means that additional resources will be needed in future, such as staff with different competencies to answer the needs of the youth sector. It also means that RYCO needs to keep redefining its role and the ways in which reconciliation and peacebuilding can be addressed.

Operating in such an environment is challenging, particularly given the unique character of RYCO as an intergovernmental organisation and the multiple roles it plays. RYCO constantly needs to balance between representing governmental agendas and being independent; providing grants and implementing projects; working on its "traditional" and the emerging topics; supporting processes and taking its own initiatives, etc. Given that these are the circumstances that will not change, RYCO, its bodies, and the team have to continuously keep improving and adopting its navigation abilities in a complex context.

### 1.3. Looking back at the previous strategic period

RYCO's recent strategic efforts have been marked by impactful initiatives like the **Superschools** program, **RISE - Regional Incubator for Social Entrepreneurship**, the **Western Balkans Youth Cultural Fund (WBYCF)**, **RYConnecting You(th) Open Call** and **RYCOgnized** that supported the implementation of the **Youth, Peace and Security Agenda**. RYCO's successes also followed the implementation of different advocacy activities, capacity building programs, outreach and networking activities implemented on a regional and local level.

A summary of the key achievements:



**Superschools (2022-2026):** This flagship initiative has built regional connections between secondary schools. In the 2022-2023 period, 77 school partnerships were established, leading to 154 exchange events involving 1,840 students and 308 teachers. Additionally, 3,688 more youths were indirectly engaged through local outreach. The upcoming period (2024-2026) aims to involve 2,600 students and 360 teachers across 90 partnerships.



**RISE (2020-2023):** Through the Regional Incubator for Social Entrepreneurship, RYCO supported 534 young entrepreneurs, fostered 130 social business ideas, and advanced 48 into incubation. The RISE forums of 2022 and 2023 further engaged 250 participants from various sectors across the region.



**WBYCF - Western Balkans Youth Cultural Fund (2023-2024):** Focused on fostering cultural collaboration, the Fund granted 29 projects in 2023, with ongoing support for 19 more in 2024. An additional 21 grants are anticipated before the end of the year, alongside workshops and training sessions to strengthen regional cultural initiatives.



**RYConnecting You(th) Open Call (2023):** The 5th Open Call in this series engaged 13 NGOs in peacebuilding and youth empowerment projects, impacting 1,164 young people directly.



**RYCOGNIZED - Enhancing Peacebuilding and Reconciliation in WB6:** Aimed at advancing peacebuilding and youth advocacy, this effort supports the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda implementation in the WB6. Key activities included creating a knowledge hub, launching the "Youth Shaping the Peacebuilding Process in the WB6" campaign, and establishing a YPS Academy. Local initiatives supported the establishment of a YPS coalitions on local level in the partnerships with the National Youth Councils (NYCs)



**Peace Broadcasters** - the program enhanced skills of young journalists in quality journalism, focusing on intercultural dialogue, transitional justice, and constructive journalism to support regional reconciliation. Young journalists received training and mentoring to improve their reporting on these crucial topics.





**Hajde!** - The web platform 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.



**EU-WB Students Integration** - 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.



**Supporting multipliers** - 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 trainings for civil society representatives to encourage their applications for RYCO's open calls and other similar initiatives. Additionally, 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. Lastly, RYCO supported youth from rural areas by providing capacity building programs for intercultural competencies, youth cooperation and peacebuilding.



**Berlin Process Western Balkans Youth Forum**, a side event of the Berlin Summit, which took place in Berlin in 2022, Tirana 2023 and again Berlin 2024, 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 logos for the Summit, designed by a young designer from the region. In 2024, RYCO coordinated the process of designing the permanent logo for Berlin Process which involved 6 young designers from the region.



**Outreach and Media Presence:** Over the past three years, RYCO had a significant outreach among its target audience amassing over 67.000 page visits per year and over 1.2 million social engagements on our social media channels as well as maintained significant visibility through 670 media reports.



**Institutional Development** - RYCO prioritized organizational development, completing a Functional Analysis, which proposed a new, cohesive structure. Key updates included a revised organigram, updated HR policies, a new salary scheme, and defined roles. Enhancements were made in HR and Finance departments, internal procedures, and managerial coordination, along with transitioning staff contracts and completing LBO registration in 4 Contracting Parties.



**Six RYCO Local Branch Offices** successfully implemented their local activities (youth talks, training, networking, mentorship, raising awareness and advocacy activities), creating partnerships with relevant CSOs, governmental and international organisations and bringing them together on peacebuilding mission.

These accomplishments underline RYCO's dedication to promoting regional cooperation, youth empowerment, and social entrepreneurship, significantly contributing to reconciliation and development in the Western Balkans 6.

## 2. RYCO's strategic process — how, when, and with whom?

### 2.1 Approach to the strategy development

RYCO has so far designed and implemented two strategic plans (2019-2021 and 2022-2024). Broad consultative processes were employed, integrating youth perspectives into the strategy design for both cycles.

To further strengthen the intervention logic, the strategic planning process for the 2025-2027 period was conducted with the use of the **Theory of Change (ToC) approach**. ToC is a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context.

The ToC approach was chosen in light of the dynamic complexity of regional youth cooperation, mobility, and reconciliation. By defining RYCO's impact and long-term outcomes and tracing backward to determine the necessary steps and conditions, ToC ensures that the strategy is well-structured and focused. This clarity is vital for guiding operational planning and implementation in the direction of the desired change.

The strategic planning process was led, between May and September 2024, by the RYCO Strategy Task Force, with support from an independent **external team of consultants**.

### 2.2. The methodology of strategy development

The process of developing this strategy was conducted through the following steps:

The desk analysis was done by reviewing existing data, reports, and research, which ensured understanding of the context and current landscape, enhancing the accuracy and relevance of the strategy. The following documents provided by the RYCO team were consulted:

Berlin Declaration of the Western Balkans Youth Forum 2022,  
RYCO Annual Reports 2022 and 2023,  
Internal Monitoring and Evaluation Report, 1st Cycle of the Superschools Exchange Program 2022,  
Superschools 2nd Cycle, qualitative and quantitative data analysis  
Systemic Conflict Analysis on the Western Balkans 6, draft 2024,  
RYCO Communication strategy, draft 2024,  
Young people in the Western Balkans 6: Peace and Security—Reconciliation and Cooperation (internal document),

Agreement on the Establishment of the RYCO, RYCO Statute and previous strategic plans were also consulted. Furthermore, different reports and studies on WB6 youth and regional cooperation were taken into consideration. The Systemic Conflict Analysis (SCA) for RYCO was developed alongside the strategic planning process, and the draft SCA was used as a reference for the strategy development.

To kick off the strategy thinking, a **visioning workshop** for strategy development was conducted with RYCO leadership, management, and operational staff members, held in Skopje. This dynamic and collaborative session was designed to align perspectives on regional youth needs, trends, and team aspirations. During the workshop, participants engaged in activities that clarified their long-term vision, identified key priorities, and mapped out strategic objectives. Through facilitated discussions and interactive exercises, the workshop fostered a shared understanding of the organisation's vision, mission, and values, ensuring that every team member contributes to and is invested in the strategic direction.

**Consultations in each CP** were held with the participation of a diverse range of stakeholders and the RYCO team members. This collaborative approach not only enriched the strategy with multiple perspectives but also ensured that it addressed real needs and opportunities. It also fostered buy-in and commitment from key players. More specifically, consultations were conducted with the following groups:

**The RYCO team** supported a strategy that not only reflects a unified vision but also outlines practical steps. This process enhanced strategic clarity and strengthened team cohesion and commitment to the organisation's future. In total, over 29 RYCO team members were included in the consultation process, including higher management, program team members, advisors, REL, HR, and finance.

**Representatives of young people, secondary school teachers, cultural workers, youth workers, young activists and youth leaders, representatives and heads of local NGOs, international organisations, and media representatives.** In the pursuit of creating a robust and inclusive strategy, a series of local consultations have been meticulously organised in each contracting party. These consultations were pivotal in ensuring that the strategy reflects the diverse needs and perspectives of youth and other stakeholders. These local consultations represent a critical component of the strategic development process, ensuring that the RYCO is both effective and responsive to the needs of its primary stakeholders—youth across the region. In total, **215 individuals** were included.

Participants were asked to comment on the long-term outcomes and objectives of the strategy, suggesting what needs to be developed further, defining short-term outcomes, and reflecting on current interventions, while sharing their concerns for the regional youth cooperation towards sustainable peacebuilding and reconciliation.

**National Youth Councils in all CPs** were consulted in a separate workshop held in Sarajevo and online. Their deep understanding of local youth needs, plans of each youth council, and regional dynamics ensured that the strategy aligned with and was supportive of local efforts and policy processes. Understanding their need to be seen as RYCO's key partners rather than beneficiaries supports further RYCO development as a regional mechanism and feeds into its aim to not only support NYCs but also enhance the regional collaboration in the next strategic period.

**Writershop** was facilitated with Strategy Task Force members towards the end of the process. Over three days, it was an opportunity to consolidate all the inputs from consultations, discuss contradictory suggestions, and construct the final ToC logic.

### 3. RYCO's Vision, Mission, and Approach

Vision and Mission of RYCO are defined in the Statute and read:

#### **Vision:**

Young people are creating a culture of mobility, intercultural exchange, and reconciliation. They actively contribute to democratic development, social and economic prosperity, and European integration in an increasingly open WB6. Contracting Parties in the WB6 are providing proactive support to youth exchange and youth engagement within the Contracting Parties and across the region.

#### **Mission:**



To support the regional exchange of youth and their sharing of ideas as a ground for future cooperation prospects in our region, based on the values of co-existence, tolerance, and respect for human rights and diversity, as well as the commitment to inclusion and security.



To step up regional cooperation among youth and youth-dedicated institutions and ensure implementation of joint programs for young people, focussing on democratic governance, sustainable economic development, education, and innovation.



To coordinate youth cooperation in the Western Balkans 6.

Further, building on the previously set values, this strategic process identified the following strategic **guiding principles**:



**Inclusivity:** ensuring that all young people, regardless of background, have the opportunity to participate in shaping their societies.



**Empowerment:** Providing young people with the tools, knowledge, and opportunities to become active agents of change.



**Positive youth development:** engaging youth in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognising, utilising, and enhancing their strengths; and promoting positive outcomes by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths.



**Innovation:** Integrating up-to-date technologies, digital tools, and creative approaches to better engage youth and aim to better reach out to those coming from marginalised areas.



**Cooperation:** building bridges between youth in WB to foster mutual understanding and solidarity.



**Resilience:** supporting sustainable solutions that foster long-term peace and stability in the region.

## RYCO reconciliation approach

During this strategic planning process, RYCO's approach to reconciliation has been refined to reflect its unique role in fostering peace and cooperation among young people in the Western Balkans 6. The approach addresses the needs of the region and the needs of RYCO's target groups. This approach is defined as follows:

RYCO reconciliation approach is inspired by the European spirit of cooperation, understanding, and tolerance and employs regional youth cooperation, mobility, dealing with the past, and intercultural learning and dialogue. This approach will be integrated through multiple instruments, including grant making, capacity building, advocacy, and research, to ensure comprehensive RYCO impact.

## International policy framework

It is recognised that the vision and mission of RYCO directly align with the [UN Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda \(YPS\)](#). This landmark resolution identifies five key pillars for action: participation, protection, prevention, partnerships, and disengagement and reintegration. Some of these pillars (participation, partnerships) are integral to RYCO's own guiding principles. The others (protection, prevention, and reintegration) are engraved in the outcomes of RYCO's work, as defined by this strategy. Overall, the role of RYCO is to help contextualise the YPS in the Western Balkans 6. In this sense, RYCO acts as a bridge between international policy goals and local realities, ensuring that the global vision for youth participation in peace and security is fully realised in the Western Balkans 6 context.

## 4. Theory of Change

### 4.1. Impact Statement and Pathways of Change

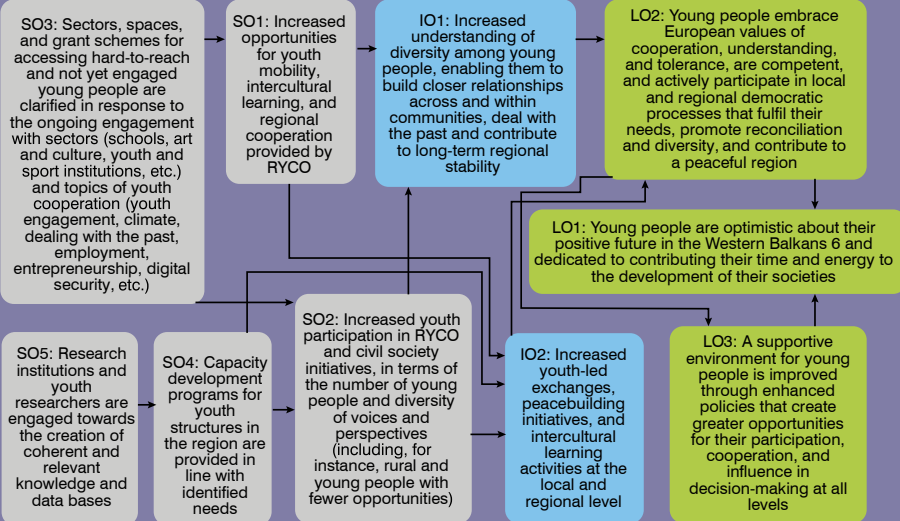
The 2025-2027 strategy of RYCO is built upon an impact statement and a set of long-term, intermediary, and short-term outcomes that have been identified as preconditions for achieving the impact. These outcomes are organised in four pathways, focussing on the foreseen change of 4 key stakeholders, namely: **1) young people; 2) actors defining socio-political environment; 3) youth structures** (composed of institutions and organisations working with and for young people); and **4) RYCO itself**.

The four pathways represent the main strategic directions for RYCO's work during the period covered by this strategy. Altogether, they should lead to the desired impact statement, defined as:

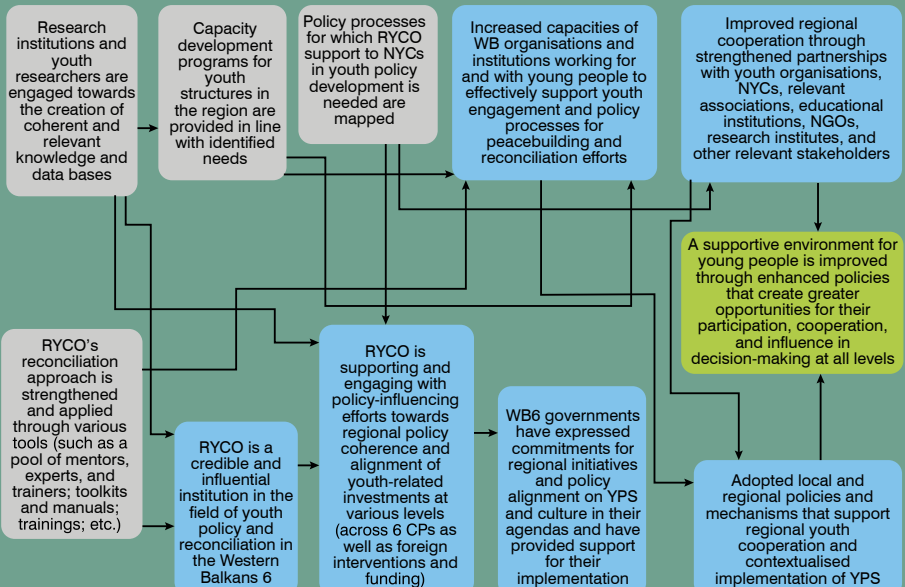
**Young people are effectively cooperating and fostering reconciliation towards a sustainable, positive peace in the supportive political and social environment across the WB6.**

Even though in this graph the four pathways are represented separately, the change under each of them does not happen in isolation. The interplay between outcomes across different pathways shows the complexity of social change processes and the need to implement them in a holistic and adaptive manner. The visual below presents the whole ToC, with causality links between all outcomes.

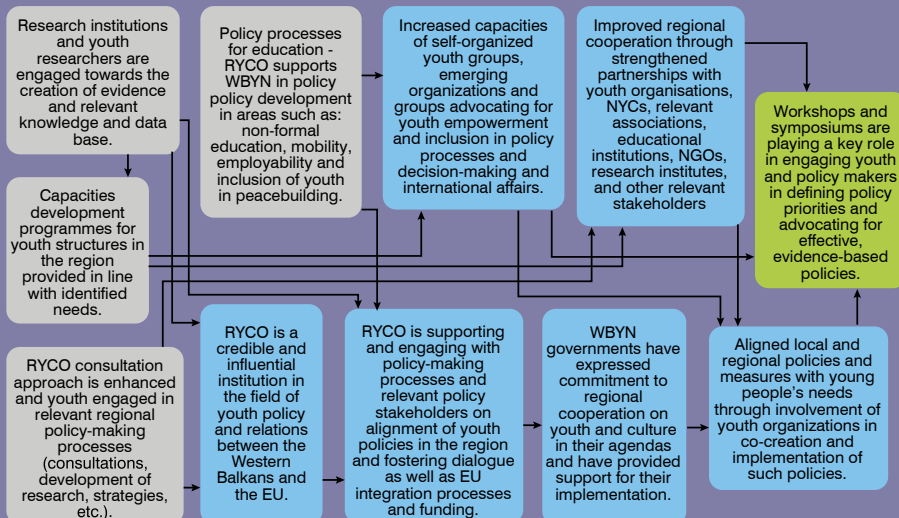
## Young people



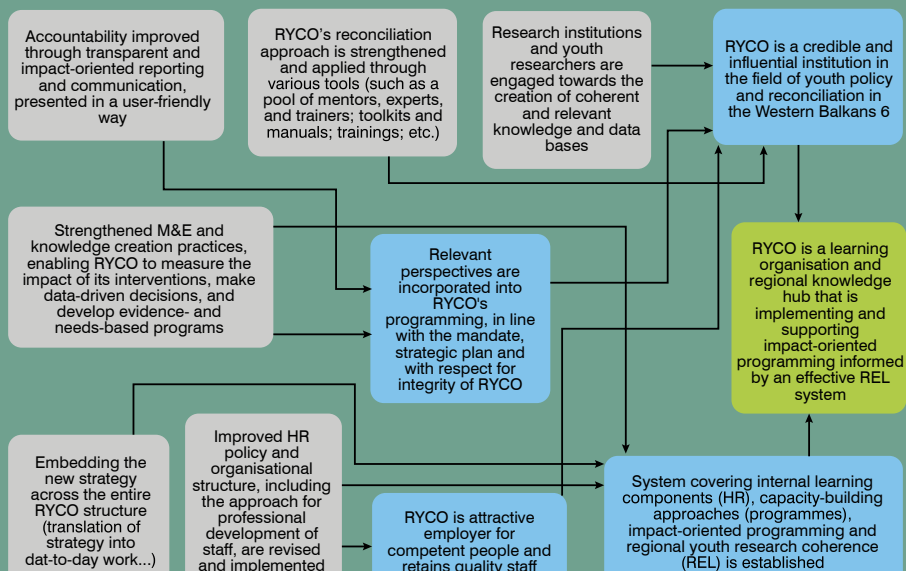
## Supportive environment



## Youth structures



## RYCO





beyond 2027

Young people are effectively cooperating and fostering reconciliation towards a sustainable, positive peace in the supportive political and social environment across the Western Balkans

Young people embrace European values, have competencies, are optimistic about their positive future, and dedicated to the development of their societies.

A supportive environment through policies that enable youth participation, cooperation, and influence in decision-making at all levels.

Institutions and organisations are providing quality services, programs, and initiatives that effectively address youth needs and priorities.

RYCO is a learning organisation and regional knowledge hub.

2025-27

young people have increased understanding of diversity and build closer relationships

improved regional cooperation across youth structures

increased capacities of WB organisations and institutions

adopted policies that support regional youth cooperation and contextualised implementation of YPS

RYCO is committed to learning and impact oriented programming

opportunities for youth mobility, cultural learning and cooperation

increased youth participation in RYCO and civil society

engagement of hard-to-reach young people

capacity development programmes for youth structures

collaboration with researchers

policy engagement support clarified and provided

reconciliation approach established and applied

reconciliation approach established and applied

strengthened research, monitoring, evaluation learning and accountability

further development of staff support and professional growth

Supporting youth participation and capacity building

Regranting and funding opportunities

Facilitating youth exchanges and mobility in the region

Collecting and systematizing data and knowledge

Stronger collaboration for improved impact

Advancing policy coherence and advocacy

Commitment to organizational development

***RYCO's approach to youth development and reconciliation builds on the previous strategic commitments and aims to position the organisation as a regional knowledge hub, a partner for youth structures, and a voice in advocating for improved policies.*** By 2030, RYCO will have successfully implemented programs that enable youth to lead reconciliation efforts, address the past, and foster democratic participation. Through sustained partnerships and innovative approaches, RYCO will facilitate evidence-based programming that aligns with the needs and aspirations of youth in the WB6.

## 4.2. Outcomes

**RYCO's impact statement will be achieved through five (5) long-term outcomes, as well as intermediary and short-term outcomes preceding them.**

The long-term outcomes are to be achieved by 2030. As such, they do not constitute the commitment for the coming strategic period (2025-2027). Rather, they are the direction in which activities in the coming three years should be implemented.

### Long-term outcomes (to be achieved by 2030)

Young people are optimistic about their positive future in the Western Balkans 6 and dedicated to contributing their time and energy to the development of their societies (LO1).

**Young people embrace European values of cooperation**, understanding, and tolerance, **are competent**, and actively participate in local and regional democratic processes that fulfil their needs, promote reconciliation and diversity, and contribute to a peaceful region (LO2).

Institutions and organisations are providing **quality services, programs, and initiatives** that are developed in collaboration with young people to effectively address their needs and priorities (LO3).

A **supportive environment** for young people is improved through enhanced policies that create greater opportunities for their participation, cooperation, and influence in decision-making at all levels (LO4).

RYCO is a **learning organisation and regional knowledge hub** that is implementing and supporting impact-oriented programming informed by an effective REL system (LO5).

Each of the long-term outcomes can be linked to one of the four pathways, even though their impact is clearly wider. Their successful implementation is conditioned by a set of intermediary and short-term outcomes, which should happen within this strategic period.

#### Intermediary outcomes (to be achieved by 2027)



Young people are building closer relationships across and within communities, dealing with the past and contributing to long-term regional stability, motivated by an **increased understanding of diversity among young people** (IO1).



**Increased youth-led exchanges**, peacebuilding initiatives, and intercultural learning activities at the local and regional level (IO2).



Improved regional cooperation through **strengthened partnerships** with youth organisations, NYCs, relevant associations, educational institutions, NGOs, research institutes, and other relevant stakeholders (IO3).



**Adopted local and regional policies and mechanisms** that support regional youth cooperation and contextualised implementation of YPS (IO4).



**Increased capacities of WB organisations and institutions** working for and with young people to effectively support youth engagement and policy processes for peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts (IO5).



WB6 governments have expressed **commitments for regional initiatives** and policy alignment on YPS and culture in their agendas and have provided support for their implementation (IO6).



RYCO is supporting and engaging with policy-influencing efforts towards **regional policy coherence and alignment of youth-related investments** at various levels (across 6 CPs as well as foreign interventions and funding) (IO7).



**RYCO is a credible and influential institution** in the field of youth policy and reconciliation in the Western Balkans 6 (IO8).



**RYCO's programming is data-driven and evidence-based**, as well as in line with the mandate, strategic plan, and respect for integrity of RYCO (IO9).



RYCO's human capacities are **further strengthened and expanded** (IO10).



A system covering **internal learning components** (HR), **capacity-building approaches** (programmes), **impact-oriented programming and regional youth research coherence** (REL) is established (IO11).

## Short-term outcomes (to be achieved in 2025)

**Increased opportunities** for youth mobility, intercultural learning, and regional cooperation provided by RYCO (SO1).

**Increased youth participation** in RYCO and civil society initiatives, in terms of the number of young people and diversity of voices and perspectives (including, for instance, rural and young people with fewer opportunities) (SO2).

Sectors, spaces, and grant schemes for **accessing hard-to-reach and not yet engaged young people** are clarified in response to the ongoing engagement with sectors (schools, art and culture, youth and sport institutions, etc.) and topics of youth cooperation (youth engagement, climate, dealing with the past, employment, entrepreneurship, digital security, etc.) (SO3).

**Capacity development programs** for youth structures in the region are provided in line with identified needs (SO4).

**Research institutions and youth researchers** are engaged towards the creation of coherent and relevant knowledge and data bases (SO5).

**Policy processes** for which RYCO support to NYCs in youth policy development is needed are mapped (SO6).

RYCO's **reconciliation approach is strengthened and applied** through various tools (such as a pool of mentors, experts, and trainers; toolkits and manuals; trainings; etc.) (SO7).

Accountability improved through **transparent and impact-oriented reporting and communication**, presented in a user-friendly way (SO8).

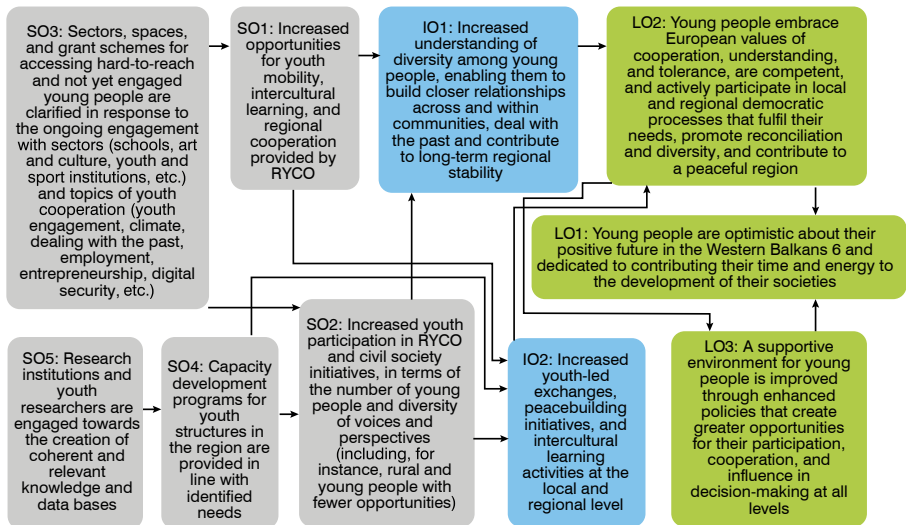
**Strengthened M&E and knowledge creation practices**, enabling RYCO to measure the impact of its interventions, make data-driven decisions, and develop evidence- and needs-based programs (SO9).

**Improved HR policy and organisational structure**, including the approach for professional development of staff, are revised and implemented (SO10).

These outcomes are organised in the 4 pathways of change introduced earlier:

## Change pathway 1: Young people

The **main long-term outcome** for this pathway is LO1: *Young people are optimistic about their positive future in the WB and dedicated to contributing their time and energy to the development of their societies and the region.*



## Young people

This outcome suggests the need to work on **attitudes and competencies** as well as a **conductive environment for young people to contribute**. Hence, the preconditions are identified in the long-term outcome 3 (supportive environment) and long-term outcome 2 (change in attitudes, competence, and action). Only if the outcomes are achieved on those two levels will young people be **optimistic about the positive future** and will work on developing their societies and the region.

In turn, the long-term outcomes are preconditioned by the intermediary outcomes linked to them. LO2 is expected to be enabled by IO1 (*increased understanding of diversity among young people, enabling them to build closer relationships across and within communities, deal with the past, and contribute to long-term regional stability*) and IO2 (*increased youth-led exchanges, peacebuilding initiatives, and intercultural learning activities at the local and regional level*).


In other words, this pathway aims to **provide young people with broader awareness, engagement opportunities, and spaces for their leadership role**. For this to happen, RYCO intends to provide *increased opportunities for youth mobility, intercultural learning, and regional cooperation (SO1)* and work on *increased youth participation in RYCO and civil society initiatives in terms of the number of young people and diversity of voices and perspectives (including, for instance, hard-to-reach and young people with fewer opportunities) (SO2)*.

In order to multiply the results and ensure a broader reach of diverse young people, RYCO is committed to *identifying sectors, spaces, and grant schemes for accessing hard-to-reach and not yet engaged young people in response to the ongoing engagement with sectors (schools, art and culture institutions, sport, etc.) and topics of youth cooperation (climate, dealing with the past, digital security, etc.)* (SO3). Simultaneously, recognizing the critical role of institutions and organisations working with and for young people, the focus is put on *Capacity development programs for youth structures in the region in line with identified needs* (SO4). For the capacity development programs to be well informed, *research institutions and youth researchers will be engaged towards the creation of a coherent and relevant knowledge and data base* (SO5). Research also contributes to other intermediary outcomes, namely those related to improved cooperation, policy engagement, and the credibility of RYCO.


The pathway leading to the long-term outcome 3, which is also part of this pathway, is elaborated in the next section, focussing on the supportive environment.

With regards to the achievement of LO1, RYCO will employ a **set of strategies, including capacity building, strengthening partnerships, regranting, facilitating exchanges, and collecting and systematising data.**


The underlying assumption is that increased understanding, enhanced competencies, and opportunities for interaction will, together with opportunities for leadership roles in regional activities, lead to the achievement of IO1. Further, for the realisation of this change pathway, the following preconditions were identified:



**Young people have access** to the necessary training, skills development opportunities, and sufficient resources to effectively participate.



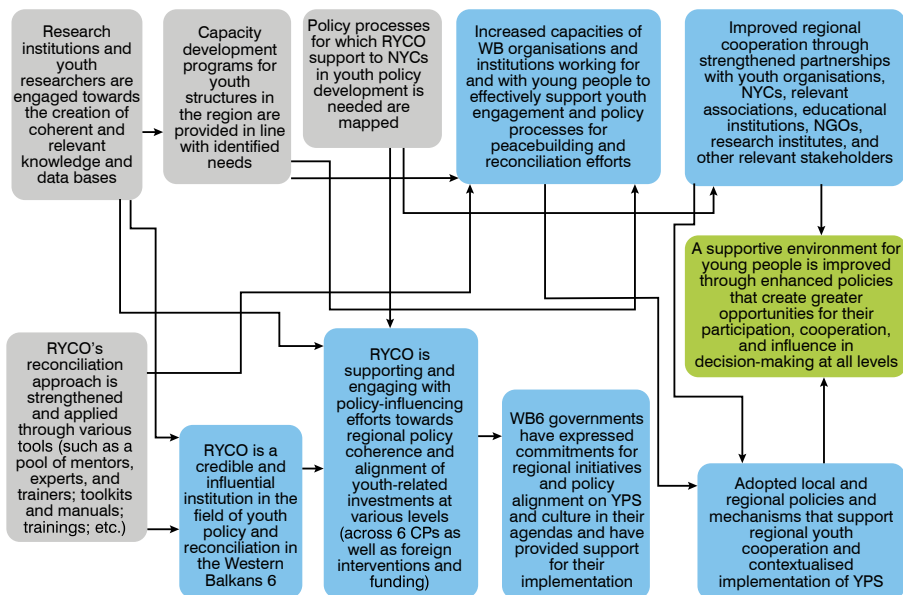
**Access to digital tools and platforms** is available, facilitating communication, outreach, and engagement with youth.



Young people across the WB6 region demonstrate **interest and willingness in being active participants** in civic engagement, social change, and reconciliation processes, showing enthusiasm for participating in RYCO's programs and initiatives.

## Change pathway 2: Supportive environment

This pathway is explained through the **long-term outcome 3 (LO3)**. *A supportive environment for young people is improved through enhanced policies that create greater opportunities for their participation, cooperation, reconciliation, and influence in decision-making at all levels.*



## Supportive environment

This outcome is to be achieved through the interplay of **youth engagement** (LO2 explained above) and the two intermediary outcomes: *improved regional cooperation and strengthened partnerships (IO3)* and *adopted local and regional policies (IO4)*. Hence, both **strengthened relationships and adopted policies** are essential for creating a supportive environment.

In the field of relationships, RYCO aims to achieve *improved regional cooperation through strengthened partnerships with youth organisations, NYCs, educational institutions, NGOs, research institutes, and other relevant institutions and stakeholders (IO3)*. This will be enabled by *capacity development programs (SO4)*, *engagement in relevant policy processes (SO6)* and *collaboration with researchers (SO5)*.

Towards the *adoption of policies that support regional youth cooperation and contextualised implementation of YPS (IO4)*, RYCO will work on **increasing capacities of WB institutions and organisations (IO5)** and *engage with WB6 government to ensure their commitments for regional initiatives and policy alignment (IO6)*. More specifically, recognising its intergovernmental position, RYCO will be *supporting and engaging with policy-influencing efforts towards regional policy coherence and alignment of youth-related investments at various levels (across 6 CPs as well as foreign interventions and funding) (IO7)*.

In relation to policy engagement, it is important to emphasise the **complementary role of RYCO and NYCs**. The central role of NYCs in local and CP-level policy-influencing efforts is recognised. For these processes, RYCO will provide support and learning exchange opportunities to strengthen the work of NYCs (SO6). Simultaneously, RYCO will leverage its position to work on regional policy coherence and the contextualisation of global policies for the WB. These together are expected to play out into a supportive role for navigating a shrinking space and expanding it for young people and youth structures.

Policy engagements are to be supported by the **clarification and operationalisation of RYCO reconciliation philosophy and approach** as well as the internal work under pathway 4, which is to *strengthen the credibility and influence of RYCO* (IO8).

The underlying assumption is that stronger capacities, improved coordination, and effective collaboration between NYCs, RYCO, and other actors, informed by relevant data and knowledge, will ensure political commitments and lead to policy changes. Further, the following preconditions for this pathway were identified:

**Regional cooperation and EU integration** remain key priorities on the political agenda throughout the Western Balkans 6. Governmental and institutional bodies are eager to collaborate and align with strategic objectives.

**The general public is aware and understands** reconciliation and youth issues, showing support for related initiatives.

**Key governmental institutions remain engaged in collaboration with RYCO** to enhance regional youth exchange programs, emphasising the integration of youth, peacebuilding, and reconciliation themes.

**The academia and research institutions are open to partnerships with RYCO** to integrate youth and reconciliation topics into their curricula or research agendas and/or they create study programs on peacebuilding.

### Change pathway 3: Youth Structures

This pathway focuses on the various actors working with and for young people, aiming to ensure that *institutions and organisations provide quality services, programs, and initiatives co-developed with youth to meet their needs* (LO4). Achieving this outcome depends on **increased capacities, regional cooperation, youth engagement, quality assurance, and an enabling policy environment**.

This rather complex outcome is expected to be achieved through the interplay of elements under other pathways. More specifically, the preconditions are seen in the combination of increased capacities, regional cooperation, youth engagement, quality assurance, and an enabling policy environment.

The entire work under pathway 1 will *enable young people to participate in processes that will shape up initiatives directed to them* (LO2). Simultaneously, RYCO will be engaging with institutions and organisations to strengthen their capacities (IO5) and *improve cooperation among them* (IO3).

Additionally, policy engagement work will also contribute towards the quality of services, programs, and initiatives (IO4, 6, and 7). Relevant data and knowledge will also have an important role in this pathway (SO5) by being used in a collaborative rather than extractive manner. The expected impact on the services, programs, and initiatives of institutions and organisations will be achieved by **strengthening their capacities while also promoting regional cooperation and influencing policies**, all while building knowledge and engaging young people.

The underlying assumption of this pathway is that capacities, cooperation, positive policies, and a clear RYCO reconciliation approach and methodology will lead to quality services collaboratively developed with young people. It is also assumed that these will lead to the introduction of quality assurance mechanisms. Furthermore, they are expected to provide space and support for young people to participate in shaping services, programs, and initiatives. In addition, the following preconditions for this pathway are:

**Institutions and organisations remain engaged** in collaboration with RYCO to enhance regional youth exchange programs, emphasising the integration of youth, peacebuilding, and reconciliation themes.

The RYCO Governing Board will provide **essential oversight and strategic direction**, ensuring that organisational goals align with the needs of young people, institutions, and organisations.

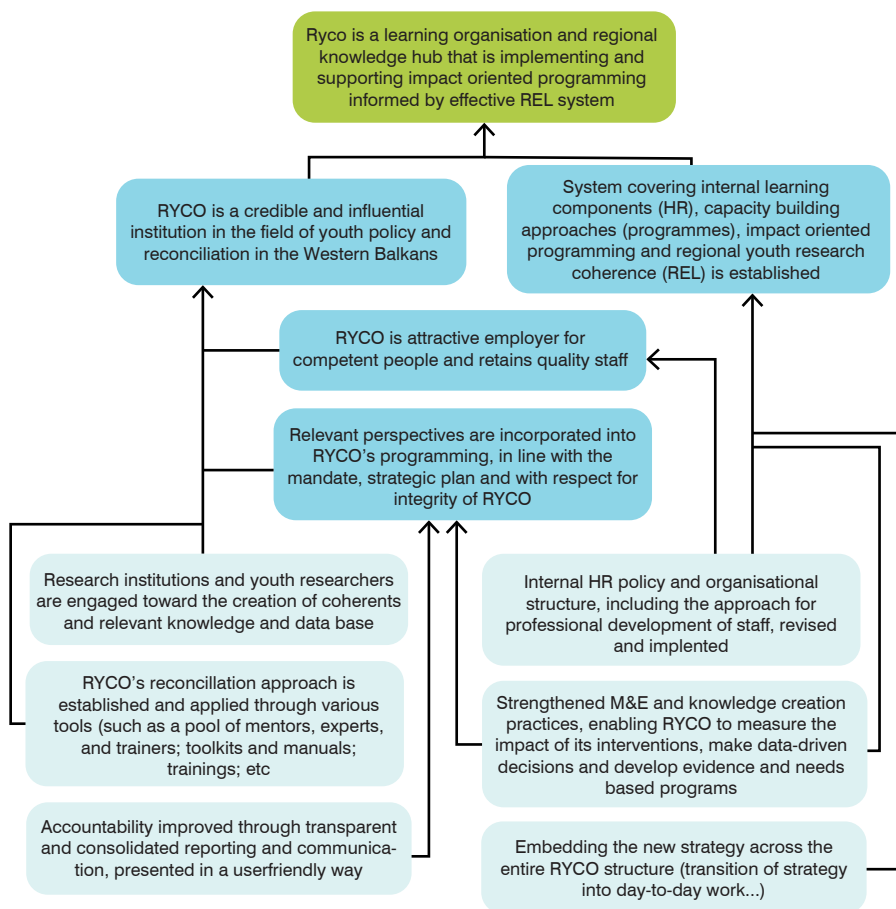
The RYCO Advisory Board will **leverage its networks and connections** to secure resources, funding, and partnerships that are crucial for the successful execution of RYCO's strategy.

#### Change pathway 4: Elevating Internal Capacities

This pathway is primarily elaborated through the **long-term outcome 5 (LO5)**: *RYCO is a learning organisation and regional knowledge hub that is implementing and supporting impact-oriented programming informed by an effective REL system*. For this pathway to successfully unfold, internal institutional development and external perception and credibility of RYCO are tackled in this strategy.

Building on commitments from strategic plan 2019-2021, RYCO aims to be a **learning organisation with a robust REL system**. In addition, the systematic collection and collation of data and learnings is for RYCO to be a **knowledge broker**, facilitating the exchange of information, best practices, and innovative ideas among young people, institutions, organisations, research institutes, and other stakeholders in the Western Balkans 6. The purpose of knowledge brokering is to **inform better policies and contribute towards more impactful programs**. Further, impact-oriented programming suggests the ambition to plan and implement projects that contribute to the impact, facilitate feedback loops and adaptive programming, and report on outcomes.





## RYCO

Considering the **internal institutional development**, RYCO is committed to developing a comprehensive system, aligning functions of internal learning (HR), capacity-building approaches (through programmes), impact-oriented programming, and regional youth research coherence (REL) (IO11). To achieve this, RYCO will continue working on further strengthening its organisational structure and further developing a conducive environment through improved HR policy (SO10). Further, RYCO will be strengthening its REL function to inform data-driven decisions, create evidence-informed programs, and measure its impact (SO9).

Considering the **external credibility and influence in the field of youth cooperation and reconciliation** (IO8), RYCO aims to further strengthen and expand its human resources (IO10). This is expected to be achieved by strengthened REL and HR functions (SO9 and 10). Simultaneously, RYCO will be incorporating relevant perspectives into programming decisions, based on evidence and in line with the mandate,

strategic plan, and with respect for the integrity of RYCO (IO9). This will particularly be supported through improved accountability, reporting, and communication (SO8).

The underlying assumptions of this pathway are that the institutional strength lies with people working in it, that transparent, evidence-informed, and impact-oriented programming leads to stronger results, and that the quality and coherence of internal policies will enable RYCO to achieve more. In addition, knowledge brokering roles are based on the assumption that a learning organisation that has access to relevant actors and is nurturing close contacts with knowledge production sources is able to influence policy and programming decisions. In addition, the following preconditions for this pathway are:

RYCO is committed to **developing and delivering programs that are grounded in reliable data and research**, ensuring that initiatives are tailored to the specific needs and interests of youth, focussing on RYCO thematic areas.

RYCO is committed to **organisational development** and impact-oriented programming

The RYCO Governing Board will provide **essential oversight and strategic direction**, ensuring that organisational goals align with the needs of youth and organisations.

The RYCO Advisory Board will **leverage its networks and connections to secure resources**, funding, and partnerships that are crucial for the successful execution of RYCO's initiatives.

RYCO is receiving **ongoing financial support from multiple donors**, such as governments and international organisations.

### 4.3. Interventions and strategies

In order to achieve RYCO's ambitions of fostering reconciliation, enhancing youth cooperation, and building a supportive environment for young people, a variety of strategies will be employed across the WB6 in the next strategic period. Interventions will be designed to support young people, engage various youth structures, and strengthen partnerships between government, civil society, and international organisations. The following key strategies and actions will guide RYCO's efforts in the next three years:

#### 1. Supporting youth participation and capacity building

Integral to pathways 1, 2, and 3.



RYCO will continue to organise programs, projects, workshops, training, and competence development programs to **enhance the capacities of youth organisations and institutions** in the region.



RYCO will give attention to the **empowerment of young people as agents of change** while equipping them with the tools to engage effectively in reconciliation processes and civic initiatives.



RYCO will continue to support the **participation of hard-to-reach young people** through cooperation with new sectors and engagement with new topics to encourage programs and projects that have a wider outreach and give a chance to all youth to commonly benefit from opportunities for learning and entrepreneurship, mobility schemes, and policy processes.



RYCO is committed to promoting a **bigger youth engagement in policy-making processes** by strengthening and structuring the cooperation and support for the National Youth Councils of the region.

## 2. Regranting and funding opportunities

Integral to pathways 1, 2 and 3

Through a well-established and competitive grant system, RYCO will **continue to provide funding** to schools, NGOs, cultural organisations, and other youth structures for youth exchanges, mobility activities, trainings, seminars, and capacity-building activities that encourage intercultural dialogue and cooperation.

While committing to diversify the funding opportunities and create and maintain long-term sustainable programs, RYCO will strive to either **revive successful past projects and/or establish new** regranting opportunities that address topics of interest for the various stakeholders and grantees.

## 3. Facilitating youth exchanges and mobility in the region

Integral to pathways 1, 2 and 3

RYCO will continue to **build upon and expand its key initiatives** (exchanges in the field of culture, education, and entrepreneurship) to provide more opportunities for young people to engage in mobility activities, fostering mutual understanding and collaboration and promoting respect for diversity and human rights.

**Increased cooperation** with RYCO's Local Branch Offices, the Governing Board, and Advisory Board will ensure that these exchanges reflect the diverse needs of the region, contributing to sustainable peace and reconciliation efforts.

RYCO will continue to organise **intercultural learning initiatives and youth dialogues**, bringing together young people from different backgrounds to address regional challenges and contribute to a better region. This will promote mobility and reinforce RYCO's mission of enhancing youth participation in building a peaceful and integrated WB6.

#### 4. Collecting and systematising data and knowledge

Integral to pathways 1, 2, 3, & 4



In order to contribute to better informed policies in the region, RYCO will seek the opportunities to **collaborate with universities, research institutes, organisations, and experts** to conduct comprehensive studies on youth needs, trends, and challenges. The data collected will not only be used to adjust RYCO's interventions and inform policies but also as a meaningful contribution to regional youth research.



RYCO will create an **online repository** where partners and primary stakeholders can access reports, case studies, tools, manuals, and best practices related to youth cooperation, peacebuilding, and reconciliation in the WB6.

#### 5. Stronger collaborations for improved impact

Integral to pathways 2, 3, & 4.



RYCO will **strengthen its collaboration** with CP governments, European Union institutions, and international organisations, ensuring alignment with global policy frameworks like the continuation of the Berlin Process engagement and/or the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda.



During this new strategic period, RYCO will aim to **establish programs** to connect WB6 youth living abroad with local initiatives, leveraging the knowledge and experience of the diaspora to foster development and cooperation within the region.

#### 6. Advancing policy coherence and advocacy

Integral to pathway 2.

**RYCO will support NYCs** and other youth organisations in the WB6 in advocating for the adoption of youth-friendly policies at the local level.

On a regional perspective, RYCO will work on **contextualising the Youth, Peace and Security agenda** across WB6

A **reinforced cooperation and involvement with its own structures**, such as the Governing Board and the Advisory Board, will feed the organisations work and commitment to contributing meaningfully in WB and EU policy dialogue and policy coherence for a better aligned cooperation of all actors and stakeholders engaged with RYCO.

RYCO will remain **open and collaborative** towards bringing together youth representatives, policymakers, and international stakeholders to discuss regional challenges and solutions, contributing to the development of a supportive environment for youthcooperation.

RYCO will actively seek to **build and maintain strategic partnerships** with a wide range of stakeholders to create a united front on key youth issues.

## 7. Commitment to organisational development

Integral to pathway 4.

Protocols, procedures, and systems developed in the last strategic period will be fully **aligned and implemented**, along with the revision of the organisational structure to further strengthen the organisation's internal and external functioning.

The organisation will seek to **secure diverse and long-term funding sources**, ensuring the financial sustainability of operations and programs, by partnering with existing local and international stakeholders that can support.

RYCO will further develop and implement a **robust Research, Evaluation, and Learning (REL)** system to track the long-term impact of its initiatives and drive continuous improvement across its programs.

A focus will be placed on **continuously building the capacity of staff** at headquarters and local branches to better support youth initiatives and respond to emerging challenges more effectively and with the intention to build capacities among RYCO staff in the area of peace building, reconciliation and dealing with the past.

RYCO will seek to **integrate sustainability into all its programs** by promoting environmentally friendly practices and mainstreaming equality and equity among its structure.

### 4.4. Coherence with the previous strategies

The previous strategy of RYCO (2022-2024) was based on three strategic pillars with the following objectives:

1. To initiate, support, and foster regional cooperation and intercultural learning, peacebuilding, and mobility opportunities for young people in the WB6. **(EXCHANGE PILLAR)**
2. To enhance the capacities, resources, and networking of multipliers in the WB6 that contribute towards and are engaged in intercultural learning, peacebuilding, and other RYCO thematic areas. **(CAPACITY BUILDING PILLAR)**
3. To advocate for the development of an enabling environment in the WBs for peacebuilding, regional youth cooperation, and improving the position of youth. **(ADVOCACY PILLAR)**

For the **2025-2027 strategy**, these strategic pillars have been reorganised. **Exchanges and capacity building are seen as strategies or types of interventions rather than pathways of change.** Hence, they have their meaningful strategic process have informed the approach to advocacy. The process clarified that RYCO, as an intergovernmental organisation, should avoid activism and local advocacy. Instead, RYCO will focus on supporting policy efforts within the contracting parties and work on adapting global policy frameworks, like the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda, to place given the mandate and work that RYCO is implementing. As such, they cut through all pathways of change and are employed when relevant. Simultaneously, analysis and consultations during this the regional context. RYCO will leverage its diplomatic status and connections to influence these efforts.

## 5. Risk management



Identification of potential risks and challenges.



Risk assessment and mitigation strategies.



Contingency planning.

A variety of risks were identified through the strategic planning process, which have the potential to impede the achievement of the set outcomes. The risks were mapped according to the 4 key stakeholders of RYCO's work (and hence the four pathways); however, many of them could influence the outcomes across the overall work of RYCO.

### 5.1. Risks related to the wider socio-political environment

On a wider socio-political level, the **potential political and security instability** was marked as the main threat, as it may prevent the free movement of young people and the implementation of activities. Another potential risk is the lack of political, institutional, and social support for activities aimed at reconciliation, which could also take the form of active resistance, thus posing an even greater threat to RYCO's work. This essentially means that to be able to operate efficiently, RYCO needs an enabling socio-political environment in the region and in each contracting party.

In some circumstances, RYCO can take proactive steps to reduce these risks while also **contributing to the creation and maintenance of a positive socio-political environment**. Examples include targeted outreach campaigns to engage different segments of the population, the use of social media, the organisation of community events, the hosting of workshops and forums where concerns and different perspectives can be shared in a safe space, and the formation of partnerships with local organisations to effectively disseminate information.

RYCO can also **monitor the public sentiment** through various feedback tools, such as surveys, so that it is able to identify in a timely manner any changes and developments, including for example, misunderstandings or resistance. Equipped with that information, RYCO could adapt its approach to maintain the momentum in support of reconciliation and youth initiatives that would ultimately lead to constructively dealing with the past.

However, the political and security instabilities are generally out of the sphere of control of RYCO. To mitigate them, RYCO must develop contingency plans to ensure that activities can continue even during times of instability and that young people's safety and security are guaranteed.

### 5.2. Risks related to youth structures and other stakeholders

The risks associated with RYCO's partners and other stakeholders can be organised according to the type of actors. Consequently, the mitigation strategies of RYCO also depend on the stakeholders in question.

There is a risk that **governmental institutions** may disengage from RYCO's work on peace-building and reconciliation. To mitigate this, RYCO will continue demonstrating the impact of its programs and collaborate with these institutions in promoting and implementing joint initiatives. For example, co-promoting RYCO activities and calls for participation will ensure a strong partnership.

Similarly, there is a risk for a potential decline in the **international community** in recognition of RYCO as a valuable partner in regional cooperation and development. To mitigate this risk, RYCO will work on: maintaining consistency and quality in all its programs and initiatives; ensuring transparent communication and open dialogue with all stakeholders; and showcasing the impact of RYCO's work by highlighting success stories, applying storytelling, and using other suitable methods.

As key partners of RYCO, **youth structures** need to possess certain capacities and competences so that they can effectively implement projects aligned with RYCO's objectives. Recognising the risk that the youth organisations and other youth structures may not possess the needed capacities, RYCO will work proactively by providing capacity-building activities to its local partners, monitoring and evaluating partnerships and adjusting support as needed.

The **academia and research institutions** are also an important stakeholder, and there is a risk that they may be reluctant to partner with RYCO, which could hinder the integration of youth and reconciliation topics into academic curricula and research. There are specific actions expected from RYCO's cooperation with the academic institutions, such as integrating youth and reconciliation topics in academic curricula and research, creating study programs on peacebuilding and involving diaspora scholars in research and youth programs. To prevent challenges in implementing those outcomes, RYCO will invest in building partnerships and maintaining open communication with the academic and research institutions, aiming at building trust and fostering commitment on both sides. RYCO will also promote the value of such partnerships and of cooperating with diaspora to obtain wider support for its initiatives.

Finally, there is a risk that the **media** outlets may show limited interest in covering RYCO activities. As before, RYCO will continue to foster strong relationships and maintain continuous communication. In addition, RYCO will also initiate specific activities aimed at media, such as organising regular press events, sending timely and well-prepared press releases, and providing exclusive interviews. As a concrete measure to strengthen its relationship with the media, RYCO will keep investing in the implementation of a separate communication and visibility strategy.

### 5.3. Risks related to young people

As a core target group of RYCO, the risks associated with **young people in WB showing a decline in the interest and willingness to be actively involved in activities** related to civic engagement, social change, and reconciliation processes are present. To prevent this from happening, RYCO will initiate different strategies, such as: implementing regular outreach and feedback mechanisms to understand the evolving needs and interests of young people and ensure that its programs are relevant; collaborating with local organisations to create more inclusive opportunities that reflect diverse perspectives and experiences; investing in capacity-building initiatives for youth leaders to strengthen trust and commitment among young people; and promoting the successful outcomes from previous programs.

The other risks related to young people include the lack of access to skills development opportunities and the lack of resources necessary to effectively participate, including but not limited to digital tools and platforms. To ensure that all young people have equal access to the offered opportunities, RYCO will actively work on removing barriers to participation by providing tailored support, flexible scheduling, resource allocation, and inclusive engagement strategies. In planning its youth engagement activities, RYCO will particularly focus on marginalised groups of young people. The activities and information about them will be made available across multiple digital platforms, while parallel offline strategies will also be employed to ensure continued communication and engagement with youth in case digital access is restricted or unavailable.

#### 5.4. Risks related to internal capacity building of RYCO

Finally, there is a group of risks associated inherently with RYCO and its work, which might impact the efficient implementation of this strategic plan. Some of the potential challenges that could arise are structural, linked to the roles and responsibilities of different parts of RYCO, its internal capacities, internal coordination, and the efficiency of its bodies. To mitigate those risks, RYCO will remain committed to continuously building its capacities, strengthening its communication channels, tracking progress, identifying potential challenges, and proactively adjusting its coordination efforts.

Other risks are linked to potential challenges in securing and maintaining strategic partnerships and sustainable funding. To mitigate such risks, RYCO will continuously work on building and strengthening its relations with partners, donors, and other relevant stakeholders. This will be done through mapping potential partners and funding sources, fostering relationships with diverse organisations, sustaining transparent communication and regular reporting towards current donors, as well as developing action and contingency plans to map potential funding options and to outline specific actions in case of funding shortfalls.

Finally, some of the risks are also linked to RYCO's capacities for conducting research, obtaining reliable data, and applying the knowledge gained in its work. RYCO is committed to developing and delivering programs that are grounded in reliable data and research and has an ambition to grow into a knowledge broker in the fields of peacebuilding and reconciliation, facilitating the exchange of information, best practices, and innovative ideas among youth organisations, academic institutions, and other stakeholders in the WB6. To achieve this, RYCO will work with research organisations to improve the accuracy of its data and better understand trends; it will regularly implement data collection activities with youth structures, schools, youth leaders, and other stakeholders; and it will ensure that programs are adjusted according to received information to better respond to the needs and wants of young people.

The mitigation strategies of RYCO associated with the risks elaborated herein are also integrated in the new Theory of Change, primarily on the level of short-term outcomes and interventions/actions, as prerequisites for successful achievement of the intermediate and long-term outcomes.



## 6. Research, Evaluation, and Learning (REL)

In order to become more responsive to the needs, RYCO will move from project monitoring and evaluation to the organisational REL as a comprehensive look toward development and impact measurement. By systematically collecting and analysing output monitoring data, facilitating reflective learning, and using methods like outcome harvesting to measure outcome-level changes, RYCO will gain a deeper understanding of its impact and make informed decisions to drive adaptive programming.

Testing assumptions is a fundamental step in validating the pathways of change. Assumptions about how and why certain actions lead to specific outcomes form the backbone of the ToC. By testing assumptions, RYCO can confirm whether the change pathways are grounded in reality or if they need adjustments. This process involves examining whether the anticipated cause-and-effect relationships hold true and whether the sequence of actions aligns with the expected change process. Challenging and verifying these assumptions ensures that strategy will be informed by accurate, evidence-based understanding, leading to more impactful work.

**In order to test assumptions**, at the beginning of the strategy period, for each pathway, RYCO will utilise different organisational tools to enhance its effectiveness and achieve desired outcomes for each specific intervention. Following steps can support the process for each pathway:

1.



**Identify key assumptions for each strategic pathway:** clearly define the assumptions about causality and sequencing that underlie the change pathways in the strategy.

2.



**Design testing methodologies:** choose appropriate tools and methods to test assumptions.

3.



**Collect Data:** gather data using the selected tools, such as conducting surveys, interviews, or collecting performance metrics.

4.



**Analyse Data:** review the collected data to assess whether the assumptions about causality and sequencing are confirmed or challenged by the evidence.

5.



**Revise Strategies:** based on the analysis, reflect on and make sense of data to implement necessary adjustments to the strategy or pathways of change.

6.



**Monitor and Review:** continuously monitor the outcomes and revisit assumptions regularly to ensure they remain valid over time.

## Systemising learning and knowledge sharing

To ensure RYCO evolves into a learning organisation and a regional knowledge hub, the following steps will be initiated and implemented during this strategic period:

### Internal learning systems

Further evolve the REL system to centralise data and learnings from all programs into a single platform, accessible to all RYCO staff and stakeholders. This system should serve to capture not just outputs but also learnings, success stories, and areas for improvement.

Regular learning reviews (quarterly or biannual) to reflect on program performance, align implementation, analyse lessons learnt, translate insights into implications, and adjust strategies accordingly.

Capacity building as a continuum, to invest in staff training and professional development, especially in areas like data analysis, REL, organisational learning, communication, HR, and procurement. Encouraging continuous learning among staff ensures RYCO adapts to emerging trends and challenges. Study visits or job shadowing to similar organisational structures could be a great learning experience for staff and the organisation.

### Becoming a regional knowledge hub

By investing in rigorous data collection and analysis, RYCO can become a credible source of insights on youth engagement and reconciliation. Sharing this data through regional reports, white papers, and policy briefs will establish RYCO as a knowledge broker in the WB6.

RYCO will seek to leverage partnerships with academic institutions, think tanks, and youth organisations to co-create and disseminate knowledge. Youth-led research initiatives will be explored as a powerful tool to gather insights directly from young people.

RYCO will continue to host regional conferences and forums on youth and reconciliation to bring together diverse stakeholders and inform policies and programs across the WB region.

In light of the alignment of RYCO work with the YPS agenda, analysis of data and reporting shall also feed into the global measurement of YPS progress.



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