



**Youth Forum
2025:**
Youth Recommendations



Berlin Process Youth Forum 2025

Youth Recommendations

This collection of policy recommendations has been created as part of the project “Youth Forum 2025” in the framework of the Berlin Process, implemented by the Regional Youth Cooperation Office with the support of the UK Government; however, the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK Government’s official policies.



Editorial Note

The *Youth Forum 2025: Youth Recommendations* is a publication that presents the ideas, priorities, and proposals of young people from across the Western Balkans. It reflects practical suggestions on how youth can contribute to building inclusive, stable, and prosperous societies. The recommendations focus on education, mobility, participation, regional cooperation, and youth empowerment.

This publication was developed by the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO), with the collaboration of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, and national youth councils/youth umbrella organizations from the region. The document itself reflects the composed inputs from youth across the region collected through local outreach events and the Youth Forum 2025 organized under the auspices of the Berlin Process. The process ensured that youth perspectives were collected, discussed, and formulated into clear and actionable proposals.

The recommendations show that young people are engaged in shaping policy and contributing to regional development. They are intended to guide decision-makers, institutions, and civil society in further strengthening youth participation and cooperation across the Western Balkans.

Within these pages, readers will discover how youth perceive the challenges of today and the opportunities of tomorrow. Their recommendations carry a strong message: young people are not passive observers of regional developments, but active contributors shaping an inclusive, cooperative, and resilient future.

This editorial team views the Youth Forum 2025 process as part of a broader continuum—one that draws strength from the Berlin Process and the creation of RYCO itself, while also looking ahead to new spaces where youth voices can influence policy and practice.

We thank all contributors for their trust, their energy, and their commitment. This publication is both a testament to their work and an invitation to all readers to engage with the ideas put forward. It is our hope that the recommendations will inspire dialogue, action, and policies that bring us closer to a Western Balkans where youth are truly empowered to shape the future.

– Regional Youth Cooperation Office

The UK Presidency of the Berlin Process 2025

In 2025, the **United Kingdom assumed the Presidency of the Berlin Process**, which facilitates dialogue between the Western Balkans and European partners. The Berlin Process, established in 2014, serves as a platform for dialogue between the Western Balkans and European partners, aiming to enhance regional cooperation, support economic development, and accelerate efforts for closer European alignment.

The UK will host the Berlin Process Summit in London on October 22, 2025, under the theme of "Security and Growth in Partnership". This dual focus reflects the interconnectedness of regional security and economic development. The Western Balkans, while making strides toward integration with Europe, continue to face challenges such as irregular migration, organized crime, and political instability. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that combines security measures with initiatives aimed at fostering economic growth and regional cooperation.

One of the key outcomes of the UK's presidency is the [emphasis on the creative economy as a driver for growth](#).

In May 2025, the Western Balkans Ministerial Forum on Creative Economy convened in Kotor, Montenegro, under the auspices of the Berlin Process. This forum brought together ministers to discuss how the creative economy can serve as a catalyst for economic development, cultural exchange, and regional cooperation.

The UK's presidency also places a strong emphasis on gender equality and social inclusion, while civil society engagement has been another cornerstone of the UK's presidency. The Civil Society & Think Tank Forum, embedded within the broader calendar of thematic events leading up to the Leaders Summit, provides a platform for non-governmental organizations and think tanks to engage in dialogue and contribute to the development of policies that affect their communities. This inclusive approach ensures that the voices of citizens and civil society organizations are heard in the decision-making processes, fostering greater transparency and accountability in governance.



While the youth agenda was discussed as an overarching topic in other forums the main contribution on youth recommendations came out of the Western Balkans Youth Forum 2025. The event took place in Pristina from 16 to 19 September 2025. The Forum gathered youth leaders, policymakers, and experts from all six RYCO Contracting Parties. Organized by RYCO within the Berlin Process framework, the Forum enabled dialogue, peer learning, and co-creation of policy recommendations.

This year, the Forum focused on three interconnected thematic pillars: **migration, security, and economic growth and development**. Under migration, participants examined issues such as brain drain, student mobility, displacement, and circular migration, exploring solutions for integration and cross-sectoral engagement. Security discussions highlighted youth contributions to peacebuilding, community resilience, and combating disinformation and radicalization, while aligning with the United Nations Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda. In the context of economic growth and development, young leaders explored entrepreneurship, digital transformation, and green initiatives as tools for fostering regional economic inclusion and sustainability.

The 2025 Forum also emphasized participatory design and youth ownership. Leading up to the event, RYCO engaged young people across the region through local consultations, surveys, and outreach campaigns, ensuring that the program reflected both grassroots perspectives and high-level policy discussions. Participants engaged in masterclasses, workshops, interactive panels, and advocacy labs, producing concrete policy recommendations and fostering lasting regional partnerships.

As the UK prepares to host the Berlin Process Summit in October 2025, the recommendations created by the youth of the region through this participatory process will be presented in London. The summit presents an opportunity to not only address pressing challenges that the youth is facing but also to set a course for a more secure, prosperous, and inclusive future for the Western Balkans.



RYCO Approach and Development of Recommendations

The Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) facilitated the development of recommendations through an inclusive and participatory approach. The three main topics of the Youth Forum: Migration, Economic Growth and Development, and Security, were first presented to representatives of youth organizations during “Outreach Events” in the six Contracting Parties of RYCO. These events served as an invitation for RYCO’s local partners to contribute to the co-design of the Youth Forum program and provide input on its priorities. The process then involved National Youth Councils and Umbrella Youth Organizations from the WB6, who, together with RYCO staff and colleagues from the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, acted as facilitators for the working groups on the three thematic areas. Finally, participants of the Youth Forum were divided into six working groups - two for each topic. Through active engagement in discussions, they shared firsthand insights into the challenges they face and proposed practical solutions, helping to shape recommendations that are both relevant and actionable.

The process of defining the recommendations was designed to capture the perspectives and priorities of young people across the Western Balkans. It followed a structured yet participatory flow, ensuring that the final outcomes were rooted in real experiences and jointly developed solutions.

Topic 1: Migration

Discussions on the topic of migration began with mapping the key challenges that drive young people to leave the region. Through open exchange, participants identified three primary factors:

1. Pursuit of better education

Many young people from the Western Balkans leave their home because domestic education systems do not meet their expectations. Limited access to modern learning methods, outdated curricula, and a lack of international recognition of diplomas and qualifications often push students to look abroad. This creates a cycle in which the most ambitious youth pursue opportunities outside the region, making it more difficult for local institutions to retain talent.

2. Search for improved employment opportunities

The labor markets in the WB6 are often characterized by high unemployment, low wages, and limited opportunities for career advancement. On top of this, nepotism and corruption further erode trust in the system, leaving young people feeling excluded from fair competition. Many therefore see migration as the only way to secure a dignified job, a decent salary, and long-term career prospects.

3. Aspiration to live in a safer social and political environment.

Beyond education and employment, many young people decide to leave the region because of insecurity in their everyday lives. Weak institutions, political instability, and limited protection of rights, especially for marginalized groups, make youth feel unsafe and excluded. This fuels the perception that other societies can offer them more stability, protection, and a sense of belonging.

The dialogue then moved towards exploring **solution areas** that could respond to these challenges. Participants worked in smaller groups to brainstorm, compare perspectives, and refine ideas. This collaborative approach resulted in three concrete directions:

1.Reforming education systems to match global standards and ensure recognition of qualifications;

To reduce the outflow of students, the education systems in the WB6 should be modernized and aligned with global standards.

This includes introducing contemporary learning methods, ensuring that domestic diplomas are equally recognized as foreign ones, and investing in quality that matches leading international universities. By raising standards and recognition, the region can provide young people with compelling reasons to study and build their future at home.

2.Tackling nepotism and corruption in employment to guarantee fairness, transparency, and decent living standards;

Addressing the structural problems of nepotism and corruption is crucial for improving employment opportunities. Recruitment processes should be based on merit and conducted transparently, with equal access for all candidates. Ensuring fair wages, equal pay for equal work, and a standard of living that provides dignity will make staying in the region more attractive. Ultimately, a just and competitive labor market can help transform migration from a necessity into a choice.

3.Establishing stronger systems of checks and balances, with both governments and civil society ensuring that youth feel included, safe, and protected in their home countries.

For youth to feel secure and motivated to remain in the Western Balkans, institutions must guarantee that their rights are protected, and their voices are heard. Establishing stronger checks and balances, with meaningful contributions from both government and civil society, can create a safer, more inclusive environment. When young people feel understood, respected, and empowered, the appeal of migration as an escape diminishes.

The proposed solutions were then discussed and validated in plenary, where participants ensured that the language and focus of the recommendations reflected both ambition and feasibility. This process of collective reflection and consensus-building guaranteed that the recommendations are not only relevant but also carry the ownership of the diverse group of young voices engaged in the dialogue.

On the topic of Migration Youth recommend

1

Decision makers should enable and support Universities to facilitate for all students to have access to leading libraries, archives and data bases worldwide to improve the flow of information and support young researchers from all fields of studies.

2

Governments of WB6 should digitalize the diploma nostrification processes obtained abroad. Also, they should make the process bureaucratically simpler, faster and cheaper with the goal of turning brain drain into brain gain.



4

Governments of the WB6 should establish an independent commission or body that manages public open calls for job vacancies so that citizens can report corruption or lack of transparency in employment processes online.

3

WB6 should invest in high-speed internet access in rural, less developed areas to develop infrastructure in order to empower young people to work remotely in these communities.



5

Ministries of Youth of the WB6 should establish mechanisms of support for young mothers to have their rights protected in the labor market.

6

A mental health support hotline should be established for young people who feel unsafe, discriminated or neglected.

Topic 2: Economic Growth and Development

Discussions on the topic of **economic growth** and development began with mapping the key challenges that young people identified in this field. The following challenges were listed:

1. Migration, quality of life & lack of opportunities

Many young people continue to leave the Western Balkans due to limited job opportunities, low salaries, and unpaid internships. This trend is compounded by internal migration from smaller towns to capitals, contributing to a concentration of talent in urban centers. Poor quality of life driven by housing shortages, inflation, and weak public services further pushes youth to seek better prospects elsewhere. In addition, there is a lack of incentives or mechanisms to encourage return migration, reinforcing the cycle of brain drain.

2. Education and skills

A significant gap exists between the skills young people acquire through formal education and those required by the labor market. Outdated curricula and insufficient practical experience leave many young people underprepared for emerging industries. The absence of internships, practice-based learning, and accessible entry-level opportunities, combined with unrealistic requirements such as “years of experience,” contributes to high youth unemployment and limits economic mobility.

3. Lack of strategies

The absence of coherent strategies at local and regional levels undermines economic development. Weak policy support for entrepreneurship, startups, and innovation reduces opportunities for young people to create and access meaningful work. Moreover, policy gaps between fostering AI-driven jobs and protecting traditional professions, alongside limited support for sustainable and competitive markets, further hinder the potential for inclusive economic growth.



The **solution areas** emerged from a participatory process in which young people collaboratively identified the main challenges and proposed concrete responses. Through iterative group discussions and plenary validation, the ideas were refined to ensure that the final solutions reflected shared priorities, practical feasibility, and the collective ownership of all participants.

1. Improving opportunities and quality of life

Addressing youth migration requires a multifaceted approach. Decentralizing capitals and large towns can help balance opportunities and ensure fairer distribution of government resources. Enhancing communication with youth through interactive and accessible channels, along with establishing youth centers and cultural opportunities in smaller towns, can foster stronger engagement. Supporting startups, sustainable agricultural projects, and community initiatives can create meaningful local opportunities, while efforts to shift societal mindsets in smaller towns can help youth feel included and motivated to stay.

2. Strengthening strategies and governance

Stronger governance and coherent strategies are essential for economic development. This includes strengthening prosecution systems to reduce corruption, supporting communities in accessing regional and international markets, and fostering innovation through dedicated centers and programs. Addressing monopolistic practices, reducing pollution, and promoting market decentralization can boost competitiveness. Dedicated scholarships for innovators and entrepreneurs further encourage youth to develop creative and sustainable solutions for the region's economic challenges.

3. Aligning education with labor market needs

Aligning education with labor market needs is key to long-term economic development. Expanding internships and practical learning opportunities, particularly in high schools, can equip youth with essential skills. Curricula should be updated to include modern competencies such as digital literacy, financial literacy, and soft skills, while teachers should receive training to implement contemporary methods. Efforts to reduce the urban-rural educational gap, strengthen cooperation between businesses and schools, and expand access to emerging fields of study can ensure that young people are well-prepared for future careers, encouraging them to remain in or return to the region.



**On the topic of Economic Growth and
Development Youth recommend**

1 Integrate practical literacy skills (financial literacy, media literacy, and entrepreneurship) into all secondary schools to equip students with the critical life skills needed for employability, resilience, and informed decision-making in the labor market.

2 Develop government-EU and government-private sector partnerships that provide young people with agricultural opportunities, state land, training, and co-funded vocational programs, guaranteeing sustainable jobs and reducing migration, particularly by addressing internal rural-to-urban migration.



4 Governments should establish a National Taskforce by 2026 that secures at least five new international investment and employment opportunities each year, publishes transparent annual reports on resource allocation, and guarantees that young people directly benefit through jobs, training, and innovation programs monitored by independent auditors.

3 Introduce structured and paid internships at universities and establish a regional WB6 scholarship program with mandatory return-to-region employment, ensuring that graduates gain practical experience and contribute to closing skill gaps.



Topic 3: Security

The challenges in the Security thematic area were also identified through open and participatory discussions. Participants shared their experiences, observations, and concerns regarding digital risks, human security, and institutional trust, allowing the group to collectively map the most pressing threats and vulnerabilities affecting youth in the region. **The challenges** defined by the young people are the following:

1. Cybersecurity, disinformation & online threats

Young people face increasing risks in the digital space, including online violence, hate speech, data breaches, foreign cyberattacks, and the spread of propaganda and disinformation. Limited digital literacy and weak institutional responses further expose youth to these threats.

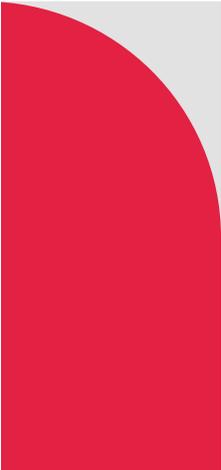
2. Human security & protection of vulnerable groups

Discrimination against women, LGBTQ+ individuals, Roma, and other minorities, alongside the rise of gender-based violence, highlights the ineffectiveness of current protection mechanisms. Tokenistic inclusion and formal representation without real influence reinforce exclusion and distrust among vulnerable groups.

3. Institutional failures & lack of trust

Weak rule of law, corruption, and political interference in institutions and media undermine public trust. Limited inclusion of youth and civil society organizations in decision-making processes further weakens institutional legitimacy and hampers regional cooperation.

The solution areas for security were identified through a collaborative process in which participants first examined the key challenges facing youth and then explored practical responses. Ideas were shaped and honed through targeted group discussions and collective plenary review, ensuring that the resulting solutions reflected common priorities, practical feasibility, and the joint ownership of all participants.



1. Advancing digital safety and combating online threats

Strengthening protection against online violence, data misuse, and cyberattacks is essential. This can be achieved by aligning with EU standards (e.g., Digital Services Act), introducing digital and media literacy in schools, and developing guidelines for cyber protection, ensuring that youth can navigate the digital space safely and responsibly.

2. Promoting inclusive policy design and youth participation

Youth and civil society organizations must be systematically included in decision-making processes. Policies and legal frameworks should adopt intersectional approaches to guarantee equal opportunities and protection for marginalized groups, ensuring meaningful participation rather than tokenistic inclusion.

3. Strengthening transparent governance and rule of law

Rebuilding trust in institutions requires reinforcing judicial independence, oversight mechanisms, and accountability. This includes establishing independent regulatory bodies, transparent policymaking, and robust anti-corruption mechanisms, which together can ensure legitimacy, protect human rights, and support regional cooperation.



On the topic of Security Youth recommend

1

Ministries of Education across the WB6 should introduce mandatory courses on digital and media literacy in primary and secondary schools, in partnership with accredited NGOs. This will equip young people with practical skills to recognize disinformation, propaganda, and hate speech, while strengthening resilience to online threats.

2

Governments should develop standardized national guidelines on cyber protection and data security, fully aligned with the GDPR and EU acquis. This will ensure safer digital environments for youth and enhance trust in digital governance.



4

Parliamentary committees and relevant ministries should systematically include National Youth Councils and youth CSOs in policymaking processes, particularly on issues related to human security, digital governance, and inclusion.

3

WB6 parliaments should enforce anti-discrimination laws and align national legislation with EU standards on gender-based violence, ensuring better protection of women, LGBTQ+ people, Roma, and other minorities.



5

Media regulatory bodies should adopt and consistently enforce guidelines in line with the EU's Digital Services Act, operating transparently and free from political influence to safeguard freedom of speech and restore trust in the media.





Journey of Recommendations and Follow-ups

The Youth Forum 2025 recommendations reflect the priorities and perspectives of youth across the Western Balkans. The next steps include multi-level dissemination to ensure integration into policy..

In the immediate steps ahead, the recommendations will be presented at **events connected to the Berlin Process**, providing a platform to highlight the priorities of young people. The recommendations will be shared at the meeting of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs in Belfast, and at the Leaders' Summit in London.

At the local level, **follow-up events** in all 6 Contracting Parties of RYCO will be organized to facilitate direct engagement with key stakeholders. This includes presentations to the competent ministries of the WB6 and to Members of Parliament, aiming to foster ownership, discussion, and concrete actions based on the recommendations.

Through these efforts, youth insights will continue to guide policy initiatives and strengthen youth participation in shaping the Western Balkans' future.