

RYCO ANNUAL REPORT

2025

Foreword

Dear young people of the Western Balkans, dear partners and friends of RYCO,

2025 has been a year of transition for the Regional Youth Cooperation Office, a year that marks not only a change in leadership, but also a moment of reflection on where we stand as a region and where we are heading.

We are assuming this mandate at a time when the broader global and European context is becoming increasingly complex. Across regions, we are witnessing growing polarization, geopolitical tensions and challenges to democratic systems. These developments are not distant from the Western Balkans. They shape our political environment, influence public discourse, and directly affect the lives and prospects of young people. In such circumstances, the question is not whether regional cooperation and peacebuilding are important, but how we strengthen them and make them more resilient.

RYCO was established as a joint commitment of the Western Balkans to invest in young people as drivers of cooperation and reconciliation. Today, that commitment carries even greater weight. In a region where divisions still exist and where trust continues to be built, youth cooperation remains one of the most concrete and forward-looking investments we can make. Throughout 2025, RYCO continued to create opportunities for young people to engage across the region, to meet, to work together and to build relationships that go beyond inherited narratives. These are not symbolic exchanges. They are spaces where new connections are formed, where perspectives are challenged and where the foundations of long-term cooperation are strengthened.

At the same time, RYCO's role extends beyond program implementation. Through its engagement in the Berlin Process, the organization contributes to ensuring that youth perspectives are present in regional policy discussions. The Western Balkans Youth Forum and the recommendations presented at the Berlin Process Leaders' Summit in London are a clear example of this. They demonstrate that young people are not only ready to engage, they are ready to contribute with concrete proposals on issues that define the future of the region. This is where RYCO's role becomes especially important. As a regional organization established by governments and working closely with institutions, civil society, and partners, RYCO operates at the intersection of policy and practice. It connects young people with institutions and regional processes with local realities. This position within the regional architecture is both a responsibility and an opportunity.

As we enter this new mandate, our focus is on strengthening RYCO as a credible, reliable and politically relevant actor in the Western Balkans. This includes reinforcing trust with our Governing Board, particularly with Youth Ministries, maintaining strong partnerships with donors and ensuring that our work continues to deliver concrete results while contributing to broader regional priorities. At the same time, we remain committed to ensuring that young people are not seen only as participants, but as partners.

Their perspectives, initiatives, and engagement are essential for shaping more inclusive, stable, and cooperative societies. Supporting this role requires continuous effort, effort from institutions, from organizations and from all those working with and for young people.

To young people across the region, the message is clear: your engagement matters and it is needed, now more than ever. The region you are shaping depends on your willingness to cooperate, to challenge divisions and to build connections across our regional communities. To institutions and partners, the responsibility is equally clear: to ensure that youth participation is meaningful, consistent and reflected in decision-making processes. RYCO will continue to serve as a platform that connects these efforts, bringing together young people, institutions and partners around a shared commitment to cooperation, dialogue and peace.

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Secretary General

Regional Youth Cooperation Office

Tirana, March 2026



Table of Contents

I	LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	4
II	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
III	RYCO PROGRAMS	7
	1. RYCO Granting Schemes	7
	1.1. RYCOConnecting Youth 6th Open Call	7
	1.2. RYCOgnizing YPS	11
	1.3. Western Balkans Youth Cultural Fund	14
	2. RYCO Mobility Projects	18
	2.1. Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme - Superschools project	18
	2.2. Regional Incubator for Social Entrepreneurs	28
	2.3. Research Mentorship Program	32
IV	ADVOCACY AND POLICY ENGAGEMENT	36
	1. RYCO's role in the Berlin Process	37
	1.1. Western Balkans Youth Forum	38
	1.2. Participation in other Berlin Process Events	40
	2. RYCO's work with Members of Parliament	42
	3. RYCO's work with relevant Ministries	42
	3.1. Regional meeting of authorities responsible for Education and Sports in the Western Balkans	44
	4. Donor coordination meeting	46
V	LOCAL BRANCH OFFICES	48
	1. Local Branch Office in Albania	50
	2. Local Branch Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina	53
	3. Local Branch Office in Kosovo	55
	4. Local Branch Office in Montenegro	57
	5. Local Branch Office in North Macedonia	59
	6. Local Branch Office in Serbia	61
VI	RESEARCH, EVALUATION AND LEARNING	64
VII	COMMUNICATIONS	65
VIII	FINANCIAL REPORT FOR 2025	67

List of abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full Name
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CP	Contracting Party
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EU	European Union
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
LBO	Local Branch Office
LPO	Local Program Officer
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OC	Open Call
RAI	Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
RISE	Regional Incubator for Social Entrepreneurs
RYCO	Regional Youth Cooperation Office
S4D	Sport for Development
WB6	Western Balkans Six
WB YCF	Western Balkans Youth Cultural Fund
WFD	Westminster Foundation for Democracy
YPS	Youth, Peace and Security

Executive Summary

In 2025, the Regional Youth Cooperation Office implemented the first full year of its Strategy 2025–2027, translating strategic priorities into concrete actions across the Western Balkans. Guided by the Operational Plan for 2025, the organization focused on delivering a coherent portfolio of programs and initiatives aligned with its four strategic pathways: young people, supportive environment, youth structures and institutional capacities.

Young people remained at the core of RYCO's work. Through mobility programs, grant-supported projects, entrepreneurship initiatives, and research-based activities, RYCO provided opportunities for young people to engage in regional cooperation, dialogue and joint action. In total, RYCO reached over 7,500 young people, reflecting both the scale of its activities and the continued relevance of regional youth cooperation in the Western Balkans.

In parallel, RYCO contributed to strengthening the environment for youth participation by facilitating structured engagement between young people and institutions. Through initiatives such as the Western Balkans Youth Forum and its follow-up activities, youth perspectives were articulated and presented within regional policy processes, including the Berlin Process. The development and presentation of youth-led policy recommendations at the Berlin Process Leaders' Summit in London provided a concrete contribution to ongoing regional discussions on migration, security and economic development.

Supporting and strengthening youth structures remained a key component of RYCO's work. Through its grant-making schemes including the RYCOConnecting Youth Open Call, the Western Balkans Youth Cultural Fund and the RYCOgnizing Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) scheme RYCO supported civil society organizations, cultural practitioners, and youth networks across the region. These interventions contributed to enhancing organizational capacities, fostering regional partnerships and strengthening the overall youth cooperation ecosystem. The program portfolio was further complemented by targeted initiatives addressing mobility, entrepreneurship, and research. The Superschools program continued to facilitate structured exchanges and long-term partnerships between schools, while the Regional Incubator for Social Entrepreneurs (RISE) supported youth-led enterprises contributing to social and economic development. The Research Mentorship Program, implemented in 2025, introduced a policy-oriented component by supporting young researchers in developing evidence-based policy recommendations on key regional challenges. The Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda was reflected across RYCO's activities, including through dedicated grant schemes and its integration into programmatic interventions both on regional and local level. This contributed to reinforcing the role of young people in promoting dialogue, cooperation and democratic engagement across the region.

From an operational perspective, 2025 focused on strengthening coordination across programs and Local Branch Offices, improving internal processes and aligning implementation with strategic objectives. Efforts were also directed towards enhancing monitoring, evaluation and learning practices, contributing to more structured and evidence-based program delivery.

Throughout the year, RYCO supported 65 projects, facilitated 45 school partnerships, and engaged over 700 participants in structured capacity-building activities. These results reflect the continued implementation of a diversified program portfolio addressing key priorities related to youth cooperation, reconciliation, and regional development. Overall, the implementation of activities in 2025 confirms RYCO's role as a regional platform that connects young people, institutions, and stakeholders, contributing to strengthening cooperation, dialogue, and youth participation across the Western Balkans.





1. RYCO Granting Schemes

1.1. RYCOConnecting Youth 6th Open Call

General information

- *The overall financial package for the selected grantees: 300,000.00 EUR*
- *Duration of the projects: 4 months – 6 months*
- *Implementation period: February – October 2025*
- *Funded by: Regional Youth Cooperation Office*

The RYCOConnecting Youth Open Call is a funding opportunity launched by RYCO to support project proposals from civil society organizations (CSOs) across the Western Balkans. Through this call, RYCO provides grants to initiatives that promote reconciliation, regional cooperation, intercultural dialogue, and youth engagement among young people from the region.



The Open Call is one of the main mechanisms through which RYCO implements its strategic objectives and strengthens youth cooperation between the WB6. The purpose of the Open Call is to encourage civil society organizations to develop and implement projects that bring young people together, promote dialogue and mutual understanding, and contribute to long-term peacebuilding in the Western Balkans. By funding innovative youth initiatives, the Open Call aims to create opportunities for youth exchanges, intercultural learning, and regional cooperation. It also supports the development of inclusive and sustainable youth programs that strengthen trust, reduce stereotypes and empower young people to actively participate in shaping democratic and peaceful societies. Through the Open Call, RYCO strengthens the capacity of civil society organizations working with youth and enables them to implement impactful regional projects. By funding youth-focused initiatives, RYCO helps create networks between organizations across the Western Balkans, promotes cooperation between different communities and increases opportunities for young people to participate in exchanges and dialogue.

The Open Call functions as a competitive grant scheme where eligible civil society organizations submit project proposals through an online application platform. Proposals are evaluated based on their relevance, quality, regional impact, and contribution to youth cooperation. Successful projects receive financial support ranging from €15,000 to €30,000, and funded projects must be implemented within a period of four to six months. The projects must have a regional dimension and involve organizations from at least two RYCO contracting parties to ensure diverse cooperation and meaningful youth engagement.

The Open Call primarily targets civil society organizations working with youth, including youth-led organizations, youth organizations and NGOs implementing programs for young people. The call encourages participation from both experienced organizations and emerging youth actors that work in areas such as youth empowerment, intercultural learning, peacebuilding, education, culture, and community engagement.

The 6th RYCOConnecting Youth Open Call was launched on 14th October 2024 during the Western Balkan Youth Forum in Berlin. The call invited CSOs to submit project proposals promoting reconciliation, intercultural dialogue, and youth cooperation in the region. The deadline for submitting applications was 20 November 2024, and project proposals had to be submitted through RYCO's online grant management platform.

To ensure that organizations across the region understood the requirements and application procedures, RYCO organized several promotional and support activities, including 6 online and in-person information sessions, consultations with Local Branch Offices and one regional info session. These activities aimed to explain the objectives of the call, provide guidance on developing project proposals, and support organizations in building regional partnerships.

The 6th Open Call was structured around two thematic LOTS (funding categories) that addressed different priorities related to youth cooperation and regional reconciliation.

- **LOT 1 – Youth for Reconciliation, Dialogue, and Peacebuilding**

LOT 1 supported projects that directly engage young people in activities promoting reconciliation, intercultural dialogue, and trust-building among communities in the Western Balkans. Projects funded under this lot focused on bringing youth from different backgrounds together through exchanges, workshops, and collaborative initiatives that challenge stereotypes and foster mutual understanding.

- **LOT 2 – Youth Empowerment and Engagement in Society**

LOT 2 focused on initiatives that empower young people to actively participate in society and strengthen youth engagement in social, civic, and community activities. Projects under this lot aimed to support youth leadership, civic participation, and innovative initiatives that create opportunities for young people to influence their communities and contribute to regional cooperation.

Results and outreach

The tables below show that the 6th Open call demonstrated strong regional participation and balanced geographical distribution.

RYCConnecting Youth	Total
1. Number of open calls	1
2. Number of applications received	152
2.1. Number of applicants	152
2.2. Number of partners in Consortium	242
3. Number of awarded grants	13
3.1. Number of grantees	13
3.2. Number of partners in consortium	29
3.3. Number of grants awarded in LOT 1	7
3.4. Number of grants awarded in LOT 2	6

ALB	33	37	2	4
BIH	24	34	2	4
KS	25	38	2	7
MNE	15	25	1	6
MKD	23	39	2	3
SRB	32	69	4	5
TOTAL	152	242	13	29

Implementation and Support

Implementation took place between February and October 2025 and was supported through a structured monitoring and capacity-building approach. Monitoring data below confirm that structured support continued into implementation, beginning with contract signature and complemented by a capacity-building training for grantees held in February 2025 in Pristina, which focused on implementation, reporting and compliance requirements.

During the implementation phase (February–October 2025), monitoring tables and survey feedback (Multiplier Questionnaires) show that ongoing support from RYCO Grant Unit, Finance Officers and LBOs helped grantees address administrative and operational challenges, particularly among smaller or first-time beneficiaries. This combination of transparent selection procedures and hands on support contributed to all funded projects meeting their planned outputs, indicating that the grant management approach effectively balanced accountability with capacity development.

M&E Data	Total
1. Number of young people reached directly	381
2. Number of multipliers (grantees - CSOs working with youth)	29
2.1. Number of participants in capacity-building measures	22
2.2. % of participants reporting increased knowledge and skills	94%

1.2. RYCOgnizing YPS

General information

- *The overall financial package for the selected grantees: 636,000.00 EUR*
- *Duration of the projects: 4 months – 6 months*
- *Implementation period: October 2025 – June 2026*
- *Funded by: German Federal Foreign Office*

The RYCOgnizing YPS Granting Scheme is a funding mechanism launched by RYCO to support civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Western Balkans working on the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda. The scheme provides financial and technical support to youth-focused initiatives that promote peacebuilding, democratic participation, and security through youth engagement. It is implemented within the project “RYCOgnizing YPS: Meaningful Youth Participation in the Western Balkans” and financed by the German Federal Foreign Office.



Through this initiative, CSOs are supported to design and implement projects that strengthen youth participation and contribute to sustainable peace at the local level. The call supports youth-led and youth-responsive initiatives that contribute to peacebuilding, social cohesion, and democratic participation. Successful projects receive financial support ranging from €40,000 to €60,000, and funded projects must be implemented within a period of four to six months. By funding local projects and strengthening CSO capacities, the program aims to equip young people with the skills and opportunities to actively participate in decision-making processes, promote dialogue, and contribute to peace and stability in their communities. Through the granting scheme, RYCO strengthens the implementation of the Youth, Peace, and Security agenda in the Western Balkans by supporting youth-driven initiatives that promote dialogue, cooperation and conflict prevention. By funding CSOs, RYCO helps build the capacities of youth organizations, supports innovative peacebuilding activities, and creates opportunities for young people to participate in governance and policy processes. This approach allows RYCO to connect international YPS commitments with local realities, ensuring that youth are recognized as active contributors to peace and security in their communities.

Projects funded under the scheme had to address at least one of the five pillars of the Youth, Peace, and Security agenda:

- Participation – strengthening youth participation in governance, policymaking, and decision-making processes.
- Protection – ensuring protection of young people from violence, discrimination, and rights violations.
- Prevention – addressing factors that contribute to instability, conflict, and radicalization.
- Partnerships – building cooperation between youth, civil society, public institutions, and international actors.
- Disengagement and Reintegration – supporting reintegration of youth affected by conflict or marginalization.

These pillars provide the thematic framework for project proposals and guide the implementation of activities aimed at strengthening youth engagement in peace and security. Projects funded under the YPS Granting Scheme are implemented through a structured partnership model. In order to provide participation on institutional level organizations were encouraged to partner with either Partner organizations or institutions who collaborate in implementing the project activities and may include municipalities, public institutions, local authorities, youth centers, or other civil society organizations.

A key component of the granting scheme is the localization of the Youth, Peace, and Security agenda. Each funded project is expected to produce a policy paper or policy brief containing recommendations based on project findings and engagement with youth and local institutions. These policy briefs help translate project experiences into concrete policy suggestions that can influence local governance and youth policies. By encouraging CSOs to work closely with municipalities and public institutions, the program ensures that the YPS agenda is not only discussed at the international level but also integrated into local decision-making processes and community-level initiatives.

The call was officially launched on 10 Apr 2025, and the deadline for submitting proposals was 10 May 2025. To ensure broad participation, RYCO organized several promotional and outreach activities after launching the call. These activities included a launch event, information sessions, consultations with Local Branch Offices and information sessions for potential applicants. The purpose of these activities was to explain the objectives of the YPS grant scheme, clarify eligibility criteria, and provide practical guidance on preparing strong project proposals and building partnerships with relevant stakeholders.

Results and Outreach

The tables below show that the RYCOgnizing YPS call demonstrated strong engagement with institutional partners, particularly at the local level and balanced geographical distribution. Project reflect a strong network of public institutional partners, encompassing 20 municipalities and local governments, alongside key ministries and municipal associations across the Western Balkans

RYCOgnizing YPS	Total
1. Number of open calls	1
2. Number of applications received	91
2.1. Number of lead applicants	91
2.2. Number of partners in consortium	128
3. Number of awarded grants	13
3.1. Number of grants awarded in LOT 1	3
3.2. Number of grants awarded in LOT 2	10

Contracting Party	Lead Applicants	Partners in Consortium	Awarded Grantees	Awarded Partners in Consortium
ALB	17	16	2	2
BIH	19	19	2	2
KS	12	19	2	2
MNE	5	9	2	1
MKD	18	30	2	2
SRB	10	35	3	2
TOTAL	91	128	13	11

Implementation and Support

Implementation on the projects is taking place between October 2025 and June 2026 and is supported through continuous coordination and technical guidance from RYCO. Particular attention is given to supporting grantees in managing partnerships with public institutions and delivering policy-oriented outputs, in line with the objectives of the Youth, Peace and Security agenda. As projects continue throughout 2026, grantees will benefit from a structured support approach that goes beyond standard grant management. This includes ongoing mentorship provided by RYCO, complemented by the engagement of external experts, who support organizations in areas such as policy development, stakeholder engagement, and the formulation of evidence-based recommendations. In addition, RYCO organized regional online capacity-building sessions, bringing together grantees from across the Western Balkans to strengthen their knowledge and skills related to project implementation, partnership management and the development of policy briefs. These sessions also serve as a platform for peer exchange, enabling organizations to share experiences, challenges, and good practices. This combined approach ensures that projects are not only implemented effectively, but also generate meaningful policy-relevant outputs and contribute to the localization of the YPS agenda across the region.

M&E Data	Total
1. Number of young people reached directly	445
2. Number of multipliers (grantees - CSOs working with youth)	20
2.1. Number of participants in capacity-building measures	17
2.2. % of participants reporting increased knowledge and skills	94%

1.3. Western Balkans Youth Cultural Fund

General information

- *The overall financial package for the selected grantees: 75,416.11 EUR*
- *Duration of the projects:*
 - LOT 1 – 2 months to 4 months*
 - LOT 2 – 3 months to 6 months*
 - LOT 3 – 1 month to 3 months*
- *Implementation period: November 2024 – September 2025*
- *Funded by: German Federal Foreign Office and WB6 participants*

The Western Balkans Youth Cultural Fund granting scheme is a regional sub-granting mechanism established by RYCO supported by the German Federal Foreign Office and all WB6 participants to support cultural practitioners, artists, and civil society organizations working with youth across the Western Balkans 6. The scheme provides financial and capacity-building support for cultural and artistic initiatives that address social and political issues through creative activism. Its core purpose is to foster regional cooperation, intercultural dialogue, peacebuilding, and reconciliation by empowering grassroots cultural actors to design and implement projects with a regional dimension and strong youth involvement.



Through this granting scheme, RYCO strengthens the capacities of CSOs and individual cultural practitioners, promotes innovative artistic approaches to social change, enhances regional collaboration, and increases youth engagement in civic and cultural life, thereby contributing to sustainable regional cooperation and a more cohesive, dialogue oriented Western Balkans.

The Call is structured around three LOTS:

- **LOT 1 “Spark Fund”** (grants up to 3,000 EUR for individual cultural practitioners).
- **LOT 2 “Cool-Art Events”** (grants up to 6,000 EUR for CSOs working with youth in the cultural field).
- **LOT 3 “Peace Champions”** (grants up to 1,000 EUR for recognized cultural practitioners promoting peace and reconciliation).

Projects are implemented over a period of 3 to 6 months, with continuous monitoring and reporting supported by RYCO's Local Branch Offices, ensuring transparency, accountability, and impact at regional level. The ultimate beneficiaries of this project are young people and cultural practitioners living and working in the Western Balkans 6. The project provides a platform for participants to collaboratively engage with youth CSOs, CSOs working with young people in the field of culture, and cultural practitioners from their communities and across the region. Through this engagement, it facilitates the exchange of best practices, ideas, skills, perspectives, and experiences.

The 3rd cycle Open Call was launched on 10 September 2024, with the application deadline set for 10 October 2024. To promote the call, six informative sessions were organized in each Contracting Party (CP), including one regional session, where all application details and requirements were presented to potential applicants.

Results and Outreach

The tables below show generated strong interest and geographical distribution across the region.

WB YCF	Total
1. Number of open calls	1
2. Number of applications received	95
2.1. Number of lead applicants	95
2.2. Number of partners in consortium	50
3. Number of awarded grants	21
3.1. Number of grantees	21
3.2. Number of partners in consortium	9
3.3. Number of grants awarded in LOT 1	6
3.4. Number of grants awarded in LOT 2	9
3.5. Number of grants awarded in LOT 3	6

Contracting Party	Lead Applicants	Partners in Consortium	Awarded Grantees	Awarded Partners in Consortium
ALB	15	7	3	1
BIH	18	7	4	2
KS	12	8	4	2
MNE	10	4	3	1
MKD	19	11	3	1
SRB	21	13	4	2
TOTAL	95	50	21	9

Implementation and Support

Projects were implemented between November 2024 and September 2025, with continuous monitoring and support provided by RYCO and its Local Branch Offices. Attention was given to supporting smaller-scale and first-time beneficiaries, especially individual cultural practitioners, in managing project implementation and reporting requirements.

The support approach combined administrative guidance with hands-on assistance, ensuring that grantees were able to deliver their activities effectively while maintaining compliance with grant requirements. Finally, seven workshops were implemented to support cultural practitioners and CSOs in developing project ideas focused on social change through art and culture, aligned with RYCO's thematic areas. These workshops aimed to strengthen applicants' capacities and improve the quality of project proposals.

M&E Data	Total
1. Number of young people reached directly	821
2. Number of multipliers (grantees - CSOs and cultural workers working with youth)	126
2.1. Number of participants in capacity-building measures	126
2.2. % of participants reporting increased knowledge and skills	83%

2. RYCO Mobility Projects

2.1. Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme

General information

- *The overall financial package for the selected schools: 552,302.95 EUR*
- *Duration of each exchange: 6 days*
- *Implementation period of exchanges: November 2024 – April 2025*
- *Implementation period of the 3rd Open call: May 2024 to May 2025*
- *Funded by: European Union and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)*

The Western Balkan School Exchange scheme - Superschools project is a regional secondary school exchange scheme designed to support peacebuilding and reconciliation in the Western Balkans. The program connects secondary schools from different societies in the region to collaborate on projects that bring students and teachers together to foster dialogue, mutual understanding, and cooperation among young people in the region.

RYCO Superschools is part of the multi donor project called “Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme” jointly financed by the European Union and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) together with RYCO. The main purpose of the Superschools project and its exchanges is to create opportunities for young people to meet, learn and work together across the region. Each partnership between two schools organizes two youth exchanges - one hosted by each school in their local community. These exchanges represent the core of every Superschools project and involve short-term learning mobility where students travel with their teachers to the partner school. During these visits, participants engage in educational, cultural and collaborative activities that promote intercultural learning, challenge stereotypes and build lasting connections among students from different backgrounds. contribute to peacebuilding, dialogue and long-term reconciliation in the region.

By supporting schools and students through these exchanges, RYCO contributes significantly to reconciliation efforts in the Western Balkans. The program helps young people develop intercultural competencies, empathy and a deeper understanding of neighboring societies. Through direct contact, shared experiences and joint project work, students learn to appreciate diversity and overcome historical divisions. In this way, RYCO strengthens regional cooperation at the grassroots level and empowers a new generation to actively contribute to peacebuilding, dialogue and long-term reconciliation in the region.



School partnerships can apply under two different categories - LOTs. These LOTs are designed to support partnerships at different stages of cooperation and to strengthen the long-term impact of exchanges between secondary schools in the Western Balkans.

- **LOT 1:** *Establishment of new partnerships focuses on creating new collaborations between schools or further strengthening partnerships that need additional support. Under this LOT, eligible applicants include schools that have never participated in the program before, partnerships that include a new partner school, or previous Superschools partnerships in need of further support. The goal is to expand the network of participating schools and encourage new regional collaboration.*
- **LOT 2:** *Support for the sustainability of partnerships is designed for partnerships that have already demonstrated strong cooperation and program quality through previous participation. The focus of this LOT is on implementing the homestay component, which is obligatory for participating partnerships.*

Homestays are considered one of the most impactful elements of the Superschools program because they create deeper opportunities for intercultural learning and everyday interaction. By sharing daily routines, meals, and family life, students gain a more authentic understanding of each other's cultures and communities. This experience helps build stronger personal connections and friendships between young people from different societies. At the same time, homestays extend the intercultural experience to the families themselves, allowing parents and siblings to participate in the exchange process and engage with people from other parts of the region. Superschools program targets three main groups: secondary schools, teachers and high-school students across the Western Balkans.

A key target group of the program is high-school students aged 14 to 19 who attend secondary schools in the region. Through youth exchanges, students gain opportunities to meet peers from other communities, experience different cultures, and develop skills such as critical thinking, communication, and teamwork. Particular attention is given to inclusion and diversity. The program encourages the participation of young people who are often underrepresented in international mobility programs, including youth with disabilities, those from marginalized ethnic or religious groups, young people from rural or remote areas, and students with disadvantaged socio-economic or educational backgrounds. Ensuring gender balance and supporting the participation of youth with fewer opportunities are also important principles of the program.

Teachers and schools themselves are another important target of the Superschools initiative. Schools participate in regional partnerships that allow them to collaborate on joint projects and exchanges, creating long-term institutional connections across the region. Teachers play a key role as coordinators and mentors for students, and the program provides them with training and support in areas such as peacebuilding, intercultural dialogue, and project cycle management. By strengthening the capacities of educators and institutions, Superschools help build sustainable networks among secondary schools and encourages them to actively contribute to regional cooperation and reconciliation processes in the Western Balkans.

Program Cycle

The Superschools call operates through a structured cycle lasting approximately 13 months and consisting of five main phases that guide schools from application to project completion. The process begins with the application phase, during which the call is officially launched and promoted to secondary schools across the Western Balkans. The 3rd open call was launched on 7th of May and was opened until 21 June 2024. Schools were invited to apply in partnership with another school from a different RYCO Contracting Party and to submit ideas for joint projects and exchanges. This phase focuses on outreach and communication activities conducted by RYCO and our Teachers Champions to ensure that schools are well informed about the program.

The second stage is the selection phase, which lasts approximately three months. Following the selection of partnerships, the process continues with the capacity building phase, which lasts approximately two and a half months. This phase is designed to strengthen the programmatic and management capacities of teachers so they can successfully develop and implement high-quality youth exchange projects. Through various training sessions and workshops, including a tailor-made Teacher's training, participants receive guidance on RYCO program pillar intercultural learning, project planning, youth exchange methodologies, financial management and communication. The goal is to ensure that schools are well prepared to implement exchanges that promote meaningful learning experiences and regional cooperation.

A key element of the training process is the mentorship program, during which Local Program Officers work directly with teacher coordinators to help them design high-quality youth exchange agendas. This mentorship is tailored to each partnership and focuses on developing methodologically sound exchange programs that respond to the objectives of the project, the needs of the students, and the local context in which the exchanges will take place. During this process, teachers also receive support in developing workshops for students and guidance on important operational aspects such as budgeting and communication visibility, with additional input from Finance and Administration Officers and the Communication Officer. Within the 3rd OC a total of 172 sessions for agenda and budget design took place leading to a design of 43 partnership agendas.

One of the first activities in this phase is the Meet the Superschools event, organized in each of the six RYCO Contracting Parties. Each participating school sends one teacher coordinator and one school director. The purpose of these events is to officially launch the implementation of the projects, increase the visibility of school partnerships in front of institutions and representatives of the donor community and begin the first sessions of the capacity-building program. These events also provide an opportunity for networking among schools and help participants better understand the goals, expectations, and thematic priorities of the Superschools program. In total, six Meet the Superschools events were organized within the 3rd OC in August and September 2025 across the region, bringing together around 200 participants.

Another vital component is the regional Teachers Training, a four-day event attended by two teachers from each partnership (one from each school) as well as selected Superschools champions. The aim of this training is to improve teachers' competencies in working with young people on topics related to RYCO's thematic areas, such as intercultural dialogue, peacebuilding, and regional cooperation. The training provides deeper knowledge, practical tools, and opportunities for collaboration among educators from across the region. Different strands of the training are designed depending on the specific thematic focus of the project or whether the participant is a Superschools champion.

Within the 3rd OC, a total of 7 online learning sessions were organized with approximately 127 teachers attending. The next stage is the implementation phase, during which the selected partnerships carry out their Superschools projects. The implementation phase lasts for approximately five months. The central activities are youth exchanges, where students travel to the partner school and participate in educational, cultural, and collaborative activities together. Each partnership organizes two youth exchanges, one hosted by each school, as well as two local outreach activities in their communities.

Teacher coordinators play a key role in organizing preparatory activities, managing logistics, and leading the implementation of exchanges and outreach initiatives. Throughout the implementation phase, teachers receive continuous mentorship and monitoring from Local Program Officers and Finance and Administration Officers at RYCO. The final stage is the closing and reporting phase, which lasts approximately one month.

Noteworthy exchange

During the implementation phase RYCO organizes opportunities for young people to engage with local and regional policy makers. One of the most noted exchange included the visit from the Commissioner for Enlargement Marta Kos. The Commissioner concluded her official visit in Albania at “Dhaskal Todri” High School in Elbasan on 14 March 2025, where, together with Minister of State for Youth and Children of Albania and EU Ambassador to Albania, she met students from Albania and Serbia participating in RYCO’s Superschools program. The visit highlighted the importance of youth exchanges in promoting dialogue, reconciliation, and intercultural learning, reaffirming the European Union’s continued commitment to supporting youth-driven regional cooperation and a shared European future.



Local outreach activities

Local outreach activities are organized by teacher coordinators after the completion of youth exchanges. Their main purpose is to share the experiences, knowledge, and outcomes of the exchanges with a broader school and local community. By doing so, the program ensures that the impact of the exchanges extends beyond the group of students who directly participated.

Each school partnership is expected to organize two outreach activities during the implementation phase of their project. These activities typically take place in the school's local communities after the exchanges have been completed. Teachers guide students in presenting what they learned during the exchange, sharing stories, project results, and reflections with other students, teachers, and sometimes parents or community representatives. The activities can take different forms, such as presentations, workshops, discussions, exhibitions, or interactive sessions that encourage dialogue about intercultural understanding, cooperation, and reconciliation.

The main goal of these outreach activities is to disseminate the results of the exchanges and stimulate reflection and discussion among a wider group of young people. By involving additional students who did not participate in the exchange, teachers help spread the values of intercultural learning, mutual respect, and regional cooperation within their schools. In this way, outreach activities play a key role in amplifying the program's impact and ensuring that the benefits of one Superschools exchange contribute to a broader educational and community experience.

Within the 3rd Open Call 86 local outreach activities were organized with 3597 young people taking part in them.

Superschools Champions

The Pool of Champions is an initiative within the Superschools program that focuses on empowering experienced teachers to become multipliers of knowledge, experience, and motivation within their local communities and education systems. The goal of this initiative is to strengthen the long-term sustainability and outreach of the Superschools program by engaging teachers who have already successfully implemented Superschools projects and enabling them to support new participants and promote the program more widely.



These teachers act as multipliers, meaning they help spread the values, methodologies, and experiences gained through the program to other schools, teachers, and students. Their role includes providing peer support to other educators, sharing practical knowledge about organizing youth exchanges, and contributing to the broader promotion of the Superschools initiative. Within the 3rd OC, RYCO selected 11 teachers who have previously participated in the implementation of Superschools exchanges to join the Pool of Champions.

One of the key responsibilities of the teacher multipliers is supporting the promotion of new calls for applications. Each teacher in the pool is expected to organize at least two motivation sessions (also called Spark sessions) in their local communities, where they present the Superschools program to other schools and teachers and encourage them to apply.

During the 3rd OC through the Spark sessions organized by the Champions 177 teachers from approximately 61 schools were reached.

Another important role of the champions is working directly with young people at the local level. Each multiplier teacher organizes workshops (Bridges to peace workshops) for at least 30 students in their community, focusing on topics related to intercultural dialogue, regional cooperation, and peacebuilding. These workshops help extend the impact of the Superschools program beyond the exchange participants by engaging a wider group of students who may later become interested in participating in similar initiatives. During the 3rd OC through the Superschools Champions have organized 21 “Bridges to Peace” workshops and reached 466 young people.

Teachers in the Pool of Champions also continue to participate in capacity-building activities, with some training sessions specifically designed for them in order to further strengthen their facilitation, mentoring, and outreach skills. Through this approach, the Pool of Champions helps build a strong network of experienced educators who actively support the growth and sustainability of the Superschools program across the region.

Youth Camp

The Youth Camp serves as a platform that brings together young people from different secondary schools across the Western Balkans who previously participated in the Superschools exchanges, allowing them to continue their learning and cooperation at a regional level.

The activities within the Youth camp have a thematic focus on core thematic areas, including intercultural dialogue, and peacebuilding. Through a series of interactive workshops, group activities, and expert-led sessions, students have the opportunity to reflect on their exchange experiences, share perspectives, and deepen their understanding of regional challenges and cooperation. The program encourages open dialogue, critical thinking, and collaboration among participants from diverse backgrounds, helping them build stronger networks and friendships across the region.






In addition to strengthening the impact of the Superschools exchanges, the Youth Camp aims to empower young people to become active contributors to positive change in their communities. By creating a safe and inclusive environment for dialogue and learning, the camp helps participants further develop skills in communication, cooperation, and leadership.

The Superschools Youth Camp in 2025 took place in Berane, Montenegro from 16-21 June, and has brought together 50 young people from various communities across the Western Balkans.

Results and Outreach

The Superschools program continued to demonstrate strong regional reach and engagement, both in terms of participation and the depth of cooperation established between schools across the Western Balkans. Through the 3rd Open Call, the program supported a significant number of school partnerships, enabling large-scale youth mobility, intercultural exchange, and community outreach activities. Beyond direct participation in exchanges, the program ensured that its impact extended to a wider group of young people and local communities through structured outreach activities, multiplier engagement and sustained institutional cooperation between schools.



Superschools		Total
 Open Calls	1. Number of Implemented Open Calls	1 closed (3rd OC)
	1.1. Number of New Open Calls	1 open (4th OC)
 Applications & Reach	2. Number of applications received for the 3rd OC	93 applications
	2.1. Number of applicant schools	186 schools
 Implementation & Impact	3. Number of partnerships awarded	45 awarded 43 implemented
	3.1. Number of schools supported	90 supported 86 implemented
	3.2. Number of partnerships awarded in LOT 1	11 awarded 10 implemented
	3.3. Number of partnerships awarded in LOT 2	34 awarded 33 implemented
	3.4. Number of Homestays Partnerships	11 Homestays

Awarded Partnerships	ALB	BIH	KS	MNE	MKD	SRB
ALB	N/A	2	2	1	1	10
BIH	2	N/A	2	1	2	9
KS	2	2	N/A	1	2	1
MNE	1	1	1	N/A	1	1
MKD	1	2	2	1	N/A	7
SRB	10	9	1	1	7	N/A
TOTAL	16	16	8	5	13	28

Implementation and Support

Implementation of the Superschools program was supported through a continuous and structured support system led by RYCO, ensuring that participating schools were able to effectively plan, implement, and report on their exchange activities. Throughout all phases of the program, Local Program Officers provided hands-on mentorship to teacher coordinators, supporting them in designing exchange agendas, facilitating intercultural learning activities, and adapting project implementation to local contexts.

This support was complemented by the active involvement of Finance and Administration Officers, who guided schools in financial management, budgeting, and compliance, ensuring accountability and smooth implementation. In addition, Superschools Teacher Champions played a key role in peer support and outreach, sharing their experience with other educators, supporting new applicants, and contributing to the overall quality and sustainability of the program. Together, this multi-layered support system ensured consistency, quality, and effective delivery across all participating partnerships.

M&E Data for the 3rd OC	Total
1. Number of students that participated in exchange (anticipated at the end of program)	1214
2. Number of students that participated in outreach activities (anticipated at the end of program)	3597
3. Number of teachers that coordinated the exchanges	172
4. Number of Multipliers (pool of champions)	11
5. Number of students that participated in Multiplier Activities (conducted by Teachers Champions)	466
6. Number of teachers/representatives participating in capacity building measures	172
7. % of participants reporting increased knowledge and skills	91%

2.2. Regional Incubator for Social Entrepreneurs

General information

- *The overall financial package for the selected grantees: 49,463.00 EURO*
- *Duration of the projects: 3 – 6 months*
- *Implementation period of the awarded projects: May – September 2025*
- *Funded by: RYCO, Agence Française de Développement (AFD) and the European Commission.*

The Regional Incubator for Social Entrepreneurs (RISE) project is a regional initiative implemented by RYCO in partnership with a consortium of organizations supporting social entrepreneurship across the Western Balkans. The project aims to empower young people to develop sustainable social enterprises that address societal challenges while fostering reconciliation and regional cooperation. Through RISE, RYCO supports young innovators who seek to combine entrepreneurial solutions with positive social and environmental impact. By supporting youth-led social enterprises, the program contributes to reconciliation in the Western Balkans by encouraging cooperation across communities, promoting intercultural dialogue, and creating shared economic opportunities among young people from different Contracting Parties.

The RISE project is implemented by RYCO, in partnership with GROUPE SOS Pulse and it is co-funded by RYCO, Agence Française de Développement (AFD) and the European Commission. The RISE program supports young entrepreneurs throughout several stages of their development. The process begins with an open call for applications, which targets young individuals and early-stage teams interested in developing social enterprise ideas. The call is promoted across the region through a network of local incubators and partner organizations, which play a key role in outreach activities, information sessions, and communication campaigns aimed at reaching potential applicants. These actors help identify promising ideas, support applicants during the application phase, and contribute to the development of the local social entrepreneurship ecosystem.

The 5th RISE open call was launched in October 2024 and targeted young people ages 16 to 35 across the Western Balkans. Once selected, participants enter a structured support program consisting of several phases. During the ideation and incubation phase, participants refine their social enterprise concepts with the support of mentors, experts, and training sessions focused on business development, impact measurement, and sustainability. Following this stage, selected teams receive Business Development Grants, which enable them to move from concept or prototype stage toward operational social businesses.

In parallel, the program also supports Regional Mobility activities, allowing grantees to travel within the Western Balkans to exchange knowledge with peers, explore new markets, establish partnerships, and strengthen regional networks. These mobilities enable participants to learn directly from other social enterprises, institutions, and ecosystem actors, further strengthening the regional dimension of the program.



RISE Local Forums

In addition to financial and mentoring support, the project also contributes to the development of the broader social entrepreneurship ecosystem through six RISE Local Forums organized in each Contracting Party. These forums serve as multi-stakeholder platforms that bring together representatives of public institutions, international partners, civil society organizations, social entrepreneurs, and ecosystem actors. During the reporting period, forums were organized across the region. The events featured presentations of RISE achievements, advocacy panels discussing challenges and opportunities for social entrepreneurship, and testimonials from RISE beneficiaries. These discussions facilitated dialogue on policy frameworks, ecosystem gaps, and opportunities for strengthening support mechanisms for youth-led social enterprises.

The RISE local forums were organized in the capitals of the Western Balkans in the period from September to November 2025.



The insights and recommendations gathered during these forums contributed to the development of a regional White Paper on Social Entrepreneurship. The White Paper compiles the perspectives of stakeholders engaged in the forums and provides an evidence-based overview of the social entrepreneurship ecosystem in the Western Balkans. It highlights key challenges, identifies opportunities for growth, and offers policy-oriented recommendations aimed at strengthening enabling conditions for social enterprises. As such, the document represents a strategic output of the project, translating dialogue and practical experience into actionable recommendations for policymakers, ecosystem actors, and development partners. Furthermore, the project introduced the RISE Alumni Awards, designed to recognize and support social enterprises developed by RISE alumni that have demonstrated continued growth and impact beyond the initial program cycle. Through a competitive selection process involving local juries and a regional pitching session, alumni teams presented their ventures and competed for additional financial support and visibility. The awards not only provided financial incentives but also served as a platform for networking, knowledge exchange, and showcasing successful social entrepreneurship initiatives in the region for the 2 winners. Together, these activities demonstrate how the RISE program goes beyond direct grant support by fostering a dynamic regional ecosystem for youth-led social entrepreneurship. By combining financial assistance, mentorship, regional mobility, policy dialogue, and ecosystem-building activities, RISE contributes to empowering young entrepreneurs while strengthening regional cooperation and reconciliation across the Western Balkans.

Results and Outreach

The RISE program continued to demonstrate strong engagement across the region, both in terms of participation and the development of youth-led social enterprises. Through the 5th Open Call, the program supported a new generation of young entrepreneurs, enabling them to transform their ideas into viable social businesses with tangible social and economic impact.

Beyond direct support to grantees, the program significantly contributed to strengthening the broader social entrepreneurship ecosystem in the Western Balkans through structured outreach, policy dialogue, and multi-stakeholder engagement.

RISE	Total
1. Total number of open calls	1
2. Total number of applications received	49
3. Total number of awarded grants	18

Contracting Party	Awarded Grantees
ALB	3
BIH	3
KS	3
MNE	3
MKD	3
SRB	3
TOTAL	18

Implementation and Support

Implementation of the RISE program in 2025 was supported through a comprehensive and multi-layered support system combining regional coordination with strong local ecosystem engagement. A central role in this process was played by the network of local incubators, which act as key implementing partners on the ground, supporting outreach, selection, and continuous development of participating teams.

During the incubation phase, participants received structured mentorship and technical guidance from local and regional experts, focusing on business model development, financial sustainability, and social impact. This support was complemented by continuous coordination from RYCO, ensuring alignment with program objectives and facilitating regional exchange between participating teams. Throughout the grant implementation phase (May–September 2025), grantees continued to benefit from ongoing mentoring, peer learning, and practical support provided by incubators and program partners. In addition, regional ecosystem activities—such as networking events, mobility opportunities, and exchanges—enabled participants to connect with other social enterprises and stakeholders across the Western Balkans, strengthening cooperation and expanding market opportunities.

2.3. Research Mentorship Program

General information

- *Implementation period: March – November 2025*
- *Funded by: Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.*

The Research Mentorship Program is an initiative supported by the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs aimed at bringing together young researchers and entrepreneurs from the Western Balkans to tackle shared regional challenges. The primary goal of the project was to enhance the capacities of young individuals in both research and entrepreneurship by promoting collaboration and creating knowledge that can address key regional issues.

The Research Mentorship Program is an initiative supported by the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs aimed at bringing together young researchers and entrepreneurs from the Western Balkans to tackle shared regional challenges. The primary goal of the project was to enhance the capacities of young individuals in both research and entrepreneurship by promoting collaboration and creating knowledge that can address key regional issues.

By supporting capacity building in the field of research, RYCO contributes to regional reconciliation as research fosters collaboration and produces valuable insights to address common challenges affecting youth in the Western Balkans. It is both a collaborative moment and an opportunity to generate knowledge that can help tackle issues related to reconciliation. The young researchers and entrepreneurs were selected through a structured process. A regional open call for young researchers was launched on 19 March 2025, remaining open for two weeks and receiving approximately 80 applications. Following an eligibility check, evaluation and interviews, 12 young researchers were selected, ensuring gender balance and representation from all Contracting Parties. The second target group consisted of 6 young entrepreneurs, selected from the RISE alumni pool based on: quality and maturity of their social business ideas, interest in innovation ecosystems and willingness to contribute to research processes.



Program phases

Study Visit (Graz, Austria)

The first phase of the program was a study visit to Graz, Austria, held from 14 to 16 May 2025, serving as a key capacity-building and networking moment for participants. The visit was designed to provide both theoretical grounding and practical exposure, while also creating space for interaction between young researchers, entrepreneurs and experts from the Austrian ecosystem.

The program was structured into two parallel tracks, tailored to the specific needs of the two target groups:

- **Research track:** focused on strengthening participants capacities in policy-oriented research, including sessions on research methodologies, policy brief writing, and analytical frameworks. Participants engaged directly with mentors and academic experts, receiving guidance on structuring their research and aligning it with policy relevance.
- **Entrepreneurship track:** focused on business development and exposure to innovation ecosystems, including visits to Austrian institutions such as innovation hubs, chambers of commerce, and organizations supporting start-ups and social enterprises. This track provided practical insights into how entrepreneurial support structures function in a developed ecosystem.

In addition to the parallel sessions, joint activities such as opening sessions, networking events, and informal exchanges created a shared learning environment and strengthened cohesion between researchers and entrepreneurs.

Online Mentorship Phase

Following the study visit, participants engaged in a structured online mentorship phase that extended the learning process and provided continuous support throughout the development of their research outputs. The mentorship component involved WB6 diaspora experts based in Austria, who played a central role in guiding participants through the research process. Their dual understanding of regional contexts and international academic and policy environments ensured both relevance and quality of the outputs.



Two regional research teams were formed: Youth Unemployment team and Brain Drain team. Each team brought together six researchers from across the Western Balkans, ensuring diverse regional perspectives. The teams held 9–10 structured online mentorship sessions, combining group work and mentor feedback and worked progressively on refining research questions, conducting literature and policy reviews, developing data collection tools (including interviews), and drafting policy briefs.

Throughout the process, participants strengthened their analytical, research, and writing skills, while also developing the ability to collaborate across the region. The mentorship phase not only supported the production of high-quality policy briefs but also fostered a culture of peer learning, critical thinking, and evidence-based policy engagement.

The final outcome of the project was the development of two policy briefs. One brief focused on youth unemployment, proposing ways to improve the effectiveness of Youth Guarantee schemes and make them more youth-centered. The other brief addressed brain drain, offering recommendations for retaining young talent in the region and fostering conditions that encourage re-engagement with local economies. These briefs were the result of intensive training, research, and mentoring throughout the project.

The project culminated in the final conference in November 2025, titled “From Research to Action: Youth Policy Briefs on Brain Drain & Youth Unemployment in the Western Balkans”. The conference brought together over 40 stakeholders, including civil society, academic institutions, media, and embassy representatives, as well as government officials. It served as a platform for participants to present their policy briefs, engage in discussions with stakeholders, and explore how to implement the proposed recommendations. The event provided a valuable opportunity for further regional cooperation and ensured the long-term impact of the research by fostering collaboration beyond the project's lifetime.

Implementation and Support

Implementation of the Research Mentorship Program was supported through a structured combination of capacity building, mentorship and continuous coordination by RYCO.

A key component of the program was the mentorship system, which connected participants with WB6 diaspora academics based in Austria. These mentors provided continuous guidance throughout the research process, supporting participants in refining research questions, developing methodologies and producing policy briefs. The mentorship process also served as a mechanism for knowledge transfer and engagement with the diaspora, directly addressing aspects of brain drain through skills exchange and collaboration.

M&E Data	Total
1. Number of Multipliers	18
1.2. Number of participants in capacity-building measures	12
1.3. % of participants reporting increased knowledge and skills	81%

IV Advocacy and Policy Engagement

Advocacy and policy engagement remain a core component of RYCO's work, complementing program implementation and ensuring that youth perspectives are reflected in regional and local processes. In 2025, RYCO continued to facilitate dialogue between young people, institutions and stakeholders, contributing to more inclusive and participatory approaches to youth cooperation across the Western Balkans.

At the regional level, the Berlin Process served as a key framework for engagement. Through platforms such as the Western Balkans Youth Forum and its follow-up activities, RYCO supported the articulation of youth perspectives and their positioning within regional policy discussions. The development and promotion of youth-led recommendations provided a structured contribution to ongoing regional dialogue on priority issues, including migration, security and economic development. At the national level, RYCO maintained close cooperation with institutions working with youth, especially Youth Ministries, as key partners and members of the Governing Board. Through continuous engagement, consultations and joint activities, RYCO contributed to strengthening the link between regional initiatives and local policy frameworks, while supporting the integration of youth perspectives into decision-making processes. LBOs play a central role in this process. Through their day-to-day engagement with national stakeholders, civil society organizations, and youth representatives, LBOs act as key facilitators of dialogue at the local level. Their work includes organizing consultations, supporting follow-up to regional processes, and creating opportunities for interaction between young people and institutions. In this way, LBOs ensure that advocacy efforts are grounded in local realities and that regional initiatives are translated into meaningful engagement at local level. RYCO's advocacy efforts are closely linked to its programmatic portfolio. Initiatives such as the Research Mentorship Program, RISE Local Forums, and Youth Forum follow-up activities contribute to generating evidence, policy proposals and spaces for dialogue. This connection ensures that advocacy is informed by practical experience and reflects the needs and perspectives of young people across the region. Through these combined efforts, RYCO continues to support structured engagement between youth and institutions, contributing to more responsive and inclusive policymaking processes in the Western Balkans.

1. RYCO's role in the Berlin Process

The Berlin Process remains one of the most important regional cooperation frameworks connecting the Western Balkans with the European Union. For young people in the WB6, it provides a platform where regional challenges, such as migration, economic opportunities, and social cohesion, can be addressed collectively and linked to broader European policy discussions. In this context, youth engagement within the Berlin Process is essential to ensure that the perspectives and priorities of young people are reflected in regional dialogue and policymaking. As part of the Chair's Conclusions* Leaders acknowledged RYCO as a key regional mechanism advancing youth cooperation, mobility, and reconciliation across the Western Balkans. Additionally the RYCO Trust Fund* and Cultural Fund were highlighted as instruments for long-term youth and cultural collaboration.



RYCO plays a key role in translating the Berlin Process into meaningful youth participation. Through its regional mandate and network of Local Branch Offices, RYCO acts as a bridge between young people, civil society, and policymakers. Within the Berlin Process framework, RYCO's primary contribution in 2025 was the organization and facilitation of the Western

Balkans Youth Forum, which served as the main participatory platform for youth to engage in policy discussions and formulate recommendations for regional cooperation.

*Western Balkans Summit on the Berlin Process, 22 October 2025; Chair's Conclusions

*The Trust Fund is a new initiative of RYCO, supported by the German Government that will provide predictable and strategic financing for youth cooperation and reconciliation initiatives across the Western Balkans

The Youth Forum was preceded by an extensive preparatory phase lasting several months. A central element of the preparation was a regional consultation process implemented through RYCO's six Local Branch Offices. Outreach consultations were organized in Sarajevo, Belgrade, Pristina, Skopje, Tirana, and Podgorica, providing young people with an opportunity to share their perspectives on key regional challenges and expectations regarding youth engagement in the Berlin Process. These consultations ensured that the agenda and structure of the Youth Forum were grounded in the lived experiences and priorities of young people across the Western Balkans.

The consultations revealed several recurring concerns among youth. Participants highlighted the need to address migration pressures and limited opportunities in the region, emphasizing that many young people consider leaving due to economic uncertainty and lack of career prospects. Discussions on security also expanded beyond traditional political or military definitions to include psychological well-being, social cohesion, and the impact of polarization and digital misinformation. Economic development and employment opportunities emerged as a major concern, particularly regarding low wages, limited internships and insufficient support for innovation and entrepreneurship.

Young participants also emphasized the importance of interactive and participatory event formats, calling for shorter panels, more practical workshops, and opportunities to exchange experiences with peers and experts. These insights directly informed the design of the Youth Forum program.

1.1. *Western Balkans Youth Forum*



The Western Balkans Youth Forum 2025 took place from 16 to 19 September 2025 in Pristina, bringing together 112 participants, including 91 youth delegates from the six contracting parties, regional experts, panelists, institutional representatives, facilitators, and support staff.

The Forum was supported by the Government of the United Kingdom and benefited from strong local institutional support from the Government of Kosovo* and the Municipality of Pristina. The program was designed as a four-day process combining policy discussions, skills development, and collaborative work on youth recommendations.

The Forum opened with an official ceremony that introduced participants to the Berlin Process framework and the objectives of the Youth Forum. The opening program included remarks from institutional representatives, an artistic performance by a youth orchestra Amadeus, and an opening panel titled “Youth as Regional Connectors in the Berlin Process Era.” This first day focused on situating youth participation within regional cooperation processes and highlighting the role young people can play in strengthening dialogue and collaboration across the Western Balkans.

The second day combined thematic discussions with skills-based learning activities. Participants attended a high-level panel titled “Roots and Routes: Youth, Skills & Stability,” which explored the connections between economic opportunities, education systems, and youth mobility. In addition, a series of peer-to-peer Skill Labs provided participants with practical learning opportunities in areas such as employability skills, climate diplomacy, psychological safety and the future of the labor market. The program also included cultural activities and visits, including a city tour, a visit to Innovation Center Kosovo and a documentary screening organized in cooperation with the Goethe Institute and the German Embassy. A breakfast meeting with the Prime Minister of Kosovo further enabled direct dialogue between youth participants and political representatives.

The third day was dedicated to collaborative work and the development of policy recommendations. Participants were divided into thematic working groups corresponding to the three main topics addressed through the Youth Forum and the Berlin Process discussions: migration and mobility; security and peace; economic development and skills.

Each working group followed a structured methodology that included identifying key challenges, conducting root cause analysis, and drafting policy proposals using participatory tools such as problem-tree analysis and iterative peer review. This process allowed participants to transform their discussions into concrete and actionable policy recommendations. The day also featured a high-level panel on youth, security, and peace, as well as an evening networking activity organized with the Astronomical Association of Kosovo. The final day of the Forum focused on presenting and validating the results of the working groups. Rapporteurs from each thematic group presented their recommendations during a closing panel session, outlining the challenges identified, the rationale behind the proposals, and the expected regional impact of the recommended measures.

*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.

In total, the participants developed 13 consolidated regional recommendations addressing migration and mobility, security and peace, and economic development and skills. These recommendations represent the collective voice of youth participants and provide a basis for continued youth engagement in regional policymaking and cooperation initiatives within the Berlin Process. The recommendations developed during the Youth Forum were the result of a participatory process that combined regional consultations, knowledge-building sessions and collaborative drafting during the event. Participants worked collectively to identify root causes of key challenges and formulate proposals using SMART criteria to ensure clarity, feasibility, and measurable impact. The recommendations focused on strengthening youth mobility opportunities, improving economic prospects for young people, enhancing youth participation in peace and security initiatives, and creating more supportive environments for innovation and skills development across the region.

The full set of [Youth Forum 2025](#) recommendations was published online and made publicly available through RYCO's communication channels, ensuring accessibility to policymakers, stakeholders, and the wider public.

1.2. Participation in other Berlin Process Events

In addition to organizing the Youth Forum, RYCO continued to contribute to broader Berlin Process discussions and events throughout the year. Through its participation in high-level meetings and regional dialogue platforms, RYCO ensured that youth perspectives, captured through the Youth Forum recommendations were represented in conversations involving governments, institutions, and international partners.



The Youth Forum recommendations were further promoted and shared at key Berlin Process moments, including the Berlin Process Leaders' Summit held in London in October 2025. During the Summit the Secretary General was given the opportunity and honor to address the European leaders, share the recommendations and take part in the main discussions regarding the future of the region and the role youth play in it. This ensured that the priorities identified by young people were positioned within the official Berlin Process agenda and communicated directly to decision-makers at the highest political level. In addition, RYCO leadership, including the Secretary General and relevant team members, participated in a series of preparatory meetings, policy discussions, and regional events linked to the Berlin.



Process throughout 2025, such as the Ministerial of Foreign Affairs, Civil Society Forum and Business Forum. These engagements provided further opportunities to advocate for youth inclusion in policymaking processes and to reinforce the relevance of the Youth Forum recommendations in shaping regional cooperation priorities.

Following the Youth Forum, participants expressed strong interest in continuing collaboration and translating the recommendations into concrete initiatives. The event fostered new networks among youth leaders, civil society actors, and institutional stakeholders across the Western Balkans.

As a next step, RYCO Local Branch Offices began organizing local follow-up activities aimed at further discussing the recommendations, promoting youth participation in regional cooperation and engaging local stakeholders in dialogue around the Forum's outcomes. These activities help ensure that the results of the Youth Forum extend beyond the event itself and contribute to ongoing youth engagement in the Berlin Process and regional cooperation initiatives.

2. RYCO's work with Members of Parliament



As part of its efforts to strengthen youth participation in policymaking within the Berlin Process, RYCO also facilitated dialogue between young people and political decision-makers. Recognizing that meaningful youth engagement requires both bottom-up participation and institutional support, RYCO worked with young members of parliament (MPs) to connect the outcomes of the Youth Forum with local and regional policymaking processes. Engaging with young MPs represents an important component of RYCO's broader strategy to ensure that youth perspectives are not only heard but also translated into policy discussions and legislative processes.

During the Western Balkans Youth Forum 2025 in Pristina, RYCO organized a dedicated side event bringing together young members of parliament from across the region. The meeting created an open platform for discussion between youth delegates participating in the Forum and elected representatives who are actively involved in shaping local policies. The dialogue focused on several key topics, including youth participation in governance, challenges in translating youth priorities into policy agendas and opportunities for stronger collaboration between youth organizations and political institutions. Young MPs shared insights into the political dynamics and institutional processes within their respective contracting parties, explaining both the opportunities and the limitations they face when advocating for youth-related initiatives.

The session also provided an opportunity for youth participants to present their perspectives on migration, economic opportunities, and security, three thematic pillars that structured the Youth Forum discussions. Through this exchange, MPs gained a deeper understanding of the concerns raised by young people across the region. Importantly, the engagement went beyond a single panel discussion. Several MPs joined the Forum's thematic Working Group sessions, where they interacted directly with participants, responded to questions, and provided feedback on the policy ideas being developed.

3. RYCO's work with relevant Ministries



Through 2025 RYCO continued to work closely with Ministries of Education and Ministries responsible for Sports and Youth across the Western Balkans as these institutions represent key partners for both the governance and the implementation of RYCO's initiatives.

Ministries responsible for Youth are directly represented in RYCO's Governing Board, where they contribute to the strategic direction and oversight of the organization, ensuring institutional ownership and regional political support for RYCO's activities. Their institutional support is therefore essential for ensuring political ownership of RYCO's initiatives and for strengthening regional cooperation among young people. This governance role is particularly important in light of the RYCO Strategic Plan 2025-2027, which emphasizes strengthening partnerships with governmental institutions and creating a supportive policy environment for youth participation, mobility, and regional cooperation.

Cooperation with Ministries of Education is particularly important due to the nature of RYCO's flagship program, the Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme (Superschools), which focuses on establishing cooperation between secondary schools across the region. Due to Superschools nature (involvement of teachers, headmasters), collaboration with Ministries of Education ensures that exchanges can be implemented in coordination with local education systems and school networks. Through this partnership, RYCO is able to reach schools more effectively, facilitate participation of teachers and students, and ensure achievement of program priorities and standards. Through these partnerships, RYCO contributes to the strategic objective of increasing opportunities for youth mobility, intercultural learning, and regional cooperation, which represent key outcomes of the organization's strategic framework for the period 2025-2027.

Involvement of formal education provides structured opportunities for dialogue, learning, and intercultural exchange, which are in the focus of RYCO mission. Through school exchanges, joint workshops, and collaborative learning activities, students are able to engage with peers from across the Western Balkans, challenge stereotypes, and develop a deeper understanding of the region's diversity. Programs such as Superschools create spaces where students can interact beyond negative narratives and experience everyday life in another community.

In 2025 RYCO increased its collaboration with the relevant Ministries working in the area of sports due to the inclusion of the Sports for Development methodology as a relevant institutional tool for reconciliation. Sports development (S4D) methodology perfectly matches educational exchange goals by creating informal environments where teamwork, cooperation, and shared experiences are central. Unlike competitive elite sports, which traditionally dominate regional sports cooperation, through applying S4D methodology, RYCO promotes non-competitive sport initiatives with a strong social dimension. These activities focus on inclusion, cooperation, and social development rather than competition, making them a valuable tool for strengthening interpersonal connections among young people.

By combining educational exchanges with sport-based activities, RYCO aims to create holistic learning experiences that support reconciliation, encourage dialogue, and promote a culture of cooperation among high-school students across the region.

3.1. Regional meeting of authorities responsible for Education and Sports in the Western Balkans

A regional meeting of authorities responsible for education and sports in the Western Balkans took place on 17 June 2025 in Berane, Montenegro, bringing together representatives of ministries from Serbia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Montenegro, alongside representatives from RYCO and GIZ.

The meeting was organized within the framework of the Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme and was held during the Regional Summer Camp, organized by GIZ, the Ministry of Sports and Youth of Montenegro, and RYCO. This setting allowed ministry representatives to directly observe youth activities and gain insight into the practical impact of regional cooperation initiatives.



During the meeting, participants were introduced to RYCO's Strategic Plan for 2025-2027, the planned activities of the Superschools program, and the Sports for Development methodology.

The discussions focused on identifying ways to strengthen cooperation between education systems and sport structures to support youth engagement and regional connectivity.

A central part of the meeting was dedicated to mapping relevant actors in the field of sports across the eastern Balkans, including sports federations, Olympic committees, civil society organizations, universities, and school sport associations. Ministry representatives shared information about the institutional structures within their respective countries and discussed how these actors could contribute to the implementation of on-competitive sport activities with a social and educational component.

The representatives of the ministries played an important role in the discussion by providing insights into local education and sport systems, identifying potential institutional partners, and highlighting opportunities for strengthening cooperation between Ministries of Education and Ministries responsible for Sports. The meeting concluded with a shared recognition that stronger cross-ministerial collaboration is necessary to expand opportunities for youth engagement through education and sport-based initiatives across the region.

4. Donor coordination meeting



The role of the RYCO in coordinating donors working in the field of youth is essential for ensuring effective, coherent, and impactful youth-related investments across the Western Balkans. Donor coordination helps avoid duplication of initiatives, improves the efficient use of resources and most importantly ensures that funding and programs respond to the real needs of young people in the region.

Within the framework of the RYCO Strategic Plan 2025–2027, particularly under Change Pathway 2: Supportive Environment, RYCO aims to strengthen policy coherence and alignment of youth-related investments. This includes supporting and engaging in policy-influencing efforts that promote better coordination of youth policies and funding across the six Contracting Parties at the local but as well on the regional level, as well as aligning them with international donor interventions and funding mechanisms (Intermediate Outcome 7).

An important milestone in this process was the official handover of the Youth Donor Coordination Mechanism from the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) to RYCO which took place during the regional donor coordination meeting “Youth in Focus: High-Level Coordination Meeting” that took place on 1st October 2025. This transition reinforces RYCO’s mandate as the intergovernmental body responsible for addressing youth-related issues in the region. It also ensures continuity of the coordination process while strengthening institutional ownership and leadership in the field of youth cooperation.

Through this coordination role, RYCO contributes to creating a more supportive environment for youth development, ensuring that policies, programs, and funding mechanisms work together to address the challenges and opportunities faced by young people in the Western Balkans.

The event gathered more than 15 international donors, representatives of the Western Balkans 6 (WB6) National Youth Councils, and government authorities responsible for youth policies. It served as a unique platform for exchanging current and future plans, while enabling youth representatives and organizations to voice their priorities directly to policymakers and donors.

The meeting started with a presentation of the recommendations drafted by young people during the Western Balkan Youth Forum 2025, with the idea that these recommendations would serve as guiding principles showcasing the needs of young people in the region.

Afterward, the donors' presentations of their programs and priorities began, starting with a presentation of RYCO's programs and principles, followed by presentations from other donors outlining their programs and priorities. From the perspective of the donors, their role was to outline their current and planned support for youth initiatives in the Western Balkans and to contribute to the discussion on future cooperation and coordination.

National Youth Councils provided the local youth perspective, highlighting the needs, expectations, and priorities of young people in the region.

Representatives of the Ministries of Youth participated in the dialogue as institutional stakeholders, engaging with both donors and youth representatives to explore how donor initiatives and youth priorities can be aligned with local youth policies and future cooperation.

By mapping these priorities and exploring potential synergies, RYCO aims to foster stronger collaboration among donors and improve the overall effectiveness and impact of youth-focused investments in the region.

V Local Branch Offices

Local Branch Offices represent RYCO's presence at the local level and play a central role in the implementation of its mandate across the Western Balkans. They ensure that regional programs are effectively delivered in each Contracting Party, translating regional priorities into concrete activities that respond to local contexts and needs. RYCO's structure, which combines a regional approach with dedicated Local Branch Offices in each Contracting Party, remains unique among regional organizations. This model enables RYCO to operate simultaneously at regional and local levels, ensuring both coherence and relevance. The organization places strong value on this structure, as it allows for direct engagement with local stakeholders and contributes to the effectiveness of its work across the region.

All regional programs implemented by RYCO rely on the active engagement of LBOs. In the RYConnecting Youth Open Call, the Western Balkans Youth Cultural Fund, and the RYCOgnizing Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) scheme, LBOs are responsible for outreach, promotion of calls, support to applicants, and continuous communication with grantees throughout the project cycle. During implementation, they provide day-to-day coordination, monitor progress and ensure that activities are delivered in line with programmatic and financial requirements. In the Superschools project, LBOs play a particularly hands-on role by working directly with schools and teachers. They support the application and partnership-building process, contribute to capacity-building activities, and provide continuous mentorship during the implementation of exchanges and outreach activities. Their close engagement with schools ensures that exchanges are delivered effectively and that intercultural learning objectives are achieved. Within the RISE program, LBOs work closely with local incubators and ecosystem actors to support outreach, identify potential applicants and ensure the visibility of the program. They also contribute to the organization of local events, such as RISE Forums, and facilitate connections between young entrepreneurs, institutions and other stakeholders at local level. In addition, through initiatives such as the Research Mentorship Program and Youth Forum follow-up activities, LBOs support the localization of regional processes by engaging participants, organizing consultations and facilitating dialogue with local stakeholders.

Beyond implementation, LBOs play an important role in advocacy and stakeholder engagement. Through continuous interaction with local institutions, civil society organizations, youth networks, and local communities, they contribute to strengthening dialogue around youth cooperation, reconciliation, and participation. Their proximity to local actors allows them to identify emerging needs, support inclusive participation and facilitate engagement between young people and institutions.

LBOs also serve as a key link between regional and local processes. They contribute to the localization of regional initiatives, including follow-up to the Western Balkans Youth Forum and other policy-oriented activities, while ensuring that local perspectives are reflected in regional discussions. This two-way function strengthens the coherence of RYCO's work and supports a more integrated approach to youth cooperation in the region.

Involvement of formal education provides structured opportunities for dialogue, learning, and intercultural exchange, which are in the focus of RYCO mission. Through school exchanges, joint workshops, and collaborative learning activities, students are able to engage with peers from across the Western Balkans, challenge stereotypes, and develop a deeper understanding of the region's diversity. Programs such as Superschools create spaces where students can interact beyond negative narratives and experience everyday life in another community.

In 2025 RYCO increased its collaboration with the relevant Ministries working in the area of sports due to the inclusion of the Sports for Development methodology as a relevant institutional tool for reconciliation. Sports development (S4D) methodology perfectly matches educational exchange goals by creating informal environments where teamwork, cooperation, and shared experiences are central. Unlike competitive elite sports, which traditionally dominate regional sports cooperation, through applying S4D methodology, RYCO promotes non-competitive sport initiatives with a strong social dimension. These activities focus on inclusion, cooperation, and social development rather than competition, making them a valuable tool for strengthening interpersonal connections among young people.

By combining educational exchanges with sport-based activities, RYCO aims to create holistic learning experiences that support reconciliation, encourage dialogue, and promote a culture of cooperation among high-school students across the region.

1. Local Branch Office in Albania



Throughout 2025, the RYCO Local Branch Office in Albania focused on strengthening youth participation through targeted capacity building activities and engagement with diverse youth groups. Emphasis was placed on advancing the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda while strengthening the capacities of Local Youth Councils and young civil society professionals in advocacy, project development, and community engagement. These efforts were complemented by local cooperation with both long-term and new partners to further promote youth engagement and dialogue.

Capacity Building Workshop for Local Youth Councils

Date: July 2025

Location: Shkodër, Albania

Participants: 15 youth representatives and activists

A three-day capacity building workshop for Local Youth Councils was organized in Shkodër in July 2025, in partnership with OSCE Presence in Albania, bringing together 15 youth representatives and activists from municipalities across northern Albania. The activity focused on strengthening youth participation in local decision-making and introducing practical tools for advocacy and community engagement, with particular attention to the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda. Through non-formal education methods, participants worked on identifying community challenges and developing youth-led initiatives that can be implemented through their Local Youth Councils, reinforcing the role of young people in local governance processes.

Capacity Building Training for Youth CSO Professionals

Date: October 2025

Location: Durrës, Albania

Participants: 13 young professionals from civil society organizations

A four-day training in cooperation with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Tirana held in Durrës in October 2025, gathered 13 young professionals from civil society organizations to strengthen their capacities in project development, regional cooperation, and youth engagement. The training focused on practical tools for project design and management, with an emphasis on initiatives that promote peacebuilding and advance the Youth, Peace and Security agenda.

The activity provided participants with the opportunity to exchange experiences, build networks within the civil society sector, and develop ideas for future regional cooperation initiatives.

Open Lecture on Youth Mobility and Intercultural Dialogue

Date: March 2025

Location: Canadian Institute of Technology, Tirana, Albania

Participants: 16 students

An open lecture in March 2025 with 16 students introduced youth mobility opportunities and highlighted the role of exchange programs in developing professional skills, intercultural understanding, and regional cooperation. The RYCO team presented the organization's mission and programs, while engaging students in discussions on career development and youth engagement.

Western Balkans Next Gen: Leading the Fight Against Corruption

Date: December 2025

Location: Tirana, Albania

Participants: 27 young participants, including youth representatives and young political actors

Partnership: Regional Anticorruption Initiative (RAI)

In December 2025, LBO Albania contributed to the organization of a workshop bringing together 27 young participants, including youth representatives and young political actors, to discuss ethical leadership and anti-corruption practices. The activity created a space for dialogue on transparency, accountability, and the role of young leaders in promoting integrity in public life.

EU Decision-Making Simulation School

Date: 8-9 April 2025

Location: Tirana, Albania

Participants: 30 high school students

Partnership: Epoka University

RYCO Albania partnered in April 2025 with Epoka University in the organization of an EU Decision-Making Simulation School engaging 30 high school students. Through interactive sessions and a simulation exercise, participants explored the functioning of EU institutions while strengthening debate, negotiation, and critical thinking skills, contributing to a better understanding of democratic processes and youth participation in public dialogue.civil society sector, and develop ideas for future regional cooperation initiatives.

Local follow up Consultation with Members of Parliament and Local Councilors

Date: 25 November 2025

Location: Tirana, Albania

Participants: 15 participants, Members of Parliament, municipal councilors, and youth representatives

Partnership: OSCE Presence in Albania and Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD)

As a follow up from the consultation, an informal dialogue brought together 15 participants, Members of Parliament, municipal councilors, and youth representatives to discuss advancing the localized recommendations emerging from the Western Balkans Youth Forum. The exchange enabled youth participants to present priorities directly to policymakers while strengthening cooperation on youth participation and policy engagement.

M&E Data – LBO ALB	Total
1.1. Number of capacity building activities	5
1.2. Number of participants in capacity building activities	101
2.1. Number of youth participation activities	4
2.2. Number of participants in youth participation activities	166

2. Local Branch Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina



During 2025, the RYCO Local Branch Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina focused its efforts on strengthening knowledge and awareness of the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) Agenda among young people and youth stakeholders. Through targeted educational and capacity-building activities, the LBO aimed to contribute to the development of foundational understanding of the YPS framework and to create the necessary preconditions for its future localization and implementation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

These efforts were implemented through collaboration with civil society organizations and international partners, with a particular emphasis on empowering young people to engage in peacebuilding processes and policy dialogue.

Open Lecture - Students for peace activity

Date: 14-17 July

Location: Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Participants: High-school students

Participants: Association of High School Students in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Within the framework of the “Students for Peace” activity led by the Association of High School Students in Bosnia and Herzegovina, under support of Možemo Bolje Project, RYCO facilitated training sessions aimed at providing participants with both theoretical and practical knowledge about the YPS framework. The activity brought together secondary school students and project governance representatives, enabling them to gain foundational knowledge on youth participation in peace processes and the broader role of young people in peacebuilding initiatives. The training combined theoretical presentations with interactive discussions, allowing participants to reflect on their perceptions of peace and to connect YPS principles with practical youth engagement initiatives, including secondary school exchanges based on the homestay principle.

Training session - Youth Peace and Security

Date: May 2025

Location: Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Participants: Young members of political parties and representatives of civil society organizations

Partnership: Boris Divković Foundation

Another important component of the LBO’s work focused on engaging young political actors and civil society representatives in dialogue on the YPS agenda. During a thematic session organized by the Boris Divković Foundation, RYCO facilitated a dedicated session on Youth, Peace and Security for young members of political parties and representatives of civil society organizations. The session introduced participants to the normative framework of the YPS agenda and explored its relevance within the political and institutional context of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Participants examined the five pillars of the agenda and discussed the extent to which these principles are reflected in existing political practices and youth engagement mechanisms.

Special attention was given to the challenges related to the implementation of the YPS agenda in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including the absence of an action plan and limited opportunities for meaningful youth participation in policy-making processes.

Through these activities, the LBO Bosnia and Herzegovina contributed to establishing the necessary groundwork for the future localization of the Youth, Peace and Security agenda. By strengthening the knowledge and capacities of youth actors, political representatives, and civil society organizations, the activities helped create a broader understanding of YPS as both a policy framework and an advocacy tool. The initiatives facilitated dialogue between political and civil society actors, strengthened networking among youth stakeholders, and identified entry points for integrating YPS principles into local initiatives and policy discussions.

M&E Data – LBO BIH	Total
1.1. Number of capacity building activities	2
1.2. Number of participants in capacity building activities	37
2.1. Number of youth participation activities	1
2.2. Number of participants in youth participation activities	24

3. Local Branch Office in Kosovo



In 2025, the Local Branch Office in Kosovo focused on promoting RYCO opportunities and programs, fostering youth participation through discussions, and building capacity for peace activism. Key activities included the creation of peace clubs, storytelling for peace, and training on countering disinformation in peace processes. Advocacy for the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda was also a central aspect, aiming to empower young people to take proactive roles in promoting peace.

Youth Talk "Marking Europe Day"

Date: 14 May 2025

Location: Pristina, Kosovo

Participants: 25 participants, representatives from diplomatic missions, academia and youth institutions

Participants: German Embassy in Kosovo

The event "Marking Europe Day" was organized on 14th May 2025, at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Pristina by the Local Branch Office in Kosovo in collaboration with the German Embassy to mark the celebration of Europe Day. The panel discussion, titled "At the Crossroads: Europe's Path Forward in a Shifting Global Order," brought together representatives from diplomatic missions, academia, and youth institutions to discuss Europe's current political landscape and its future direction. The event engaged students from the Department of Political Science in an interactive discussion on Europe's role in a rapidly changing global context. A total of 25 participants attended the event, contributing to an open exchange of views between students and the panelists.

"Voices of Peace" Project

Partnership: OSCE mission in Kosovo, Dialogue Academy for Young Women Alumni Network (DANA) and the Kosovar Youth Council

The 'Voices of Peace' project, in partnership with OSCE, aimed to empower youth while promoting the YPS and WPS agendas. The project focused on initiatives in collaboration with the Dialogue Academy for Young Women Alumni Network (DANA) and the Kosovar Youth Council. Key activities of the project included:

1. Peace Clubs: Establishing three peace clubs in schools in Prizren, Pristina, and Gjakova to foster youth engagement in peacebuilding. At least three meetings with each school were organized, in order to draft the annual plan of the club. 50 students were reached.

2. Capacity Building: One training session to equip young people with the skills and knowledge needed for effective peace activism. They created individual peace action plans. 10 young people attended.

3. Storytelling for Peace: One online workshop to train youth in the power of storytelling as a tool for promoting peace, alongside contributing to MagDa magazine. 10 young people attended.

4. Advocacy Efforts: Engaging with local municipalities, including meetings with the municipalities of Shtime, Ferizaj, and Pristina, as well as the Association of Municipalities, to advocate for the YPS agenda and ensure youth voices are heard in peacebuilding processes.

RYCO Chairmanship Activities

Kosovo held the chairmanship of RYCO in 2025, with Ms. Donika Zogu, the youth representative in the governing board, leading several activities with the support of Local Branch office. These activities reached out to 250 young people throughout Kosovo.

- *RYCO Tour: A tour was organized in Prizren, Drenas, Shtime, Rahovec, and Gjakova, where Ms. Zogu met with young people and mayors to explain RYCO's work, promote opportunities for youth, and distribute promotional materials.*
- *RYCO Tour in Peja: This tour included a panel discussion on the European pathways of WB6, aimed at raising awareness about the region's integration into the European Union and its youth's role in this process.*
- *Workshop in Malisheva: A workshop titled "Countering Disinformation in Peace Processes: A Youth Perspective" was held in Malisheva, engaging young people in discussions about the impact of disinformation on peace processes and how youth can contribute to counteracting it.*
- *Under the chairmanship, Gracanica Innovation Center as also supported in their Bite and Paint workshop, which focused on promoting creativity and innovation among the Serbian community of young people.*

M&E Data – LBO KS	Total
1.1. Number of capacity building activities	5
1.2. Number of participants in capacity building activities	71
2.1. Number of youth participation activities	11
2.2. Number of participants in youth participation activities	309

4. Local Branch Office in Montenegro



Throughout 2025, RYCO LBO Montenegro continued implementing local initiatives aimed at strengthening youth participation, supporting reconciliation efforts, and fostering dialogue between young people, institutions, and policymakers. During the reporting period, LBO MNE organized local activities engaging young people, educators, civil society representatives, and institutional stakeholders from across Montenegro.

RYCO LBO Montenegro continued to cooperate with partners such as the OSCE Mission to Montenegro, Parliament of Montenegro, CSOs, educational institutions, and international partners, contributing to the development of initiatives that promote youth participation, intercultural dialogue, and regional cooperation.

LBO Montenegro also continued activities related to the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda, implemented in cooperation with relevant stakeholders. These initiatives aimed to strengthen awareness of the YPS framework and promote youth participation in peacebuilding, reconciliation, and decision-making processes. LBO Montenegro strengthened cooperation with Members of Parliament of Montenegro, facilitating discussions on youth cooperation initiatives and the importance of regional youth mobility and exchange programs. Through these engagements, Members of Parliament were encouraged to support initiatives that promote intercultural dialogue and youth cooperation across the Western Balkans.

Capacity-building efforts also included the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) training, organized from 28 to 30 November 2025 in cooperation with the OSCE Mission to Montenegro in Budva. The training gathered representatives of secondary schools and civil society organizations and focused on strengthening capacities to promote peacebuilding, youth participation and reconciliation initiatives.

“Exchange of Experiences on Building Trust, Reconciliation, and Inclusive Policies” - Study visit with Members of Parliament to Berlin

Date: 8 – 10 October 2025

Location: Berlin, Germany

Participants: Members of Parliament of Montenegro

A study visit with Members of the Parliament of Montenegro to Berlin within the program “Exchange of Experiences on Building Trust, Reconciliation, and Inclusive Policies” took place from the 8th to 10th of October in Berlin. During the visit the delegation held a series of meetings, among which with Dr. Niels von Redecker, Head of Division Western Balkans at the German Foreign Office, Adis Ahmetović, member of the German Bundestag Foreign Affairs Committee the Bundestag, and Emmeline Charenton, Office of the Secretary General of Franco-German Youth Office (DFJW/OFAJ). Discussions focused on Montenegro’s European integration process, youth policies, and mechanisms for building trust and reconciliation in Western

“Berlin Process Youth Forum - Conclusions and Recommendations in the Context of Montenegro”

Date: December 2025

Location: Podgorica, Montenegro

Participants: 70 participants, including members of the Parliament of Montenegro, representatives of international organizations, institutions, and the youth sector

The local branch office in Montenegro organized Conference titled “Berlin Process Youth Forum - Conclusions and Recommendations in the Context of Montenegro” held in the Parliament of Montenegro in December 2025 broadcasted on TV, provided space for young people to contextualize recommendations from the Berlin Process Youth Forum, creating a platform for dialogue between youth representatives and policymakers. The conference brought together more than 70 participants, including members of the Parliament of Montenegro, representatives of international organizations, institutions, and the youth sector.

Through these initiatives, LBO MNE continued to contribute to strengthening youth participation, dialogue, and peacebuilding efforts in Montenegro while supporting the broader objectives of regional youth cooperation and reconciliation in the Western Balkans.

M&E Data – LBO MNE	Total
1.1. Number of capacity building activities	3
1.2. Number of participants in capacity building activities	67
2.1. Number of youth participation activities	5
2.2. Number of participants in youth participation activities	179

5. Local Branch Office in North Macedonia



In 2025, the RYCO Local Branch Office in North Macedonia focused on raising awareness and building partnerships around the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) Agenda among young people and youth stakeholders. By initiating partnerships and organizing educational and capacity-building activities, the local branch office aimed to contribute to the localization of the YPS Agenda and create the necessary conditions for its future implementation in North Macedonia. These efforts were carried out in collaboration with relevant international partners and civil society organizations working with youth.

Western Balkans Next Gen: Leading the Fight Against Corruption

Date: 26 February

Location: Skopje, North Macedonia

Participants: Young politicians and youth activists

Participants: Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative (RAI)V

In the first half of the year, LBO Montenegro organized a conference titled “Regional Cooperation and Youth Participation in the Process of Reconciliation” held in Podgorica, which gathered representatives of institutions, civil society organizations, youth organizations, and international partners. The conference served as a platform for discussing youth participation, reconciliation, and regional cooperation in the Western Balkans, while also highlighting the role of young people in strengthening democratic dialogue and contributing to regional cooperation processes. The main outcome of this conference was Declaration of Commitment to Youth Regional Cooperation, Intercultural Dialogue and Reconciliation, which was signed by a group of 12 Montenegrin MPs from all parliamentary clubs.

Local follow up consultation with CSOs and Youth on Localizing the Youth Forum Recommendations

Date: December 2025

Location: Skopje, North Macedonia

Participants: Youth Members of Parliament, young people – participants of Western Balkan Youth Forum

Partnership: Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD)

In December 2025 the Local branch Office in North Macedonia in cooperation with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), organized a follow-up event with young leaders who had previously participated in the Youth Forum. At this meeting, they presented their localized Youth Recommendations to members of the Club of Young MPs. The working session fostered discussions between youth representatives and young parliamentarians on practical measures to advance and implement the proposed recommendations, which mainly focused on necessary adjustments to existing laws or policies.

Sports for Development Capacity Building activities

Date: 1- 5 April 2025 and 10 – 15 June 2025

Location: Skopje and Prizren

Participants: Youth practitioners, youth workers and high-school teachers

Participants: GIZ – S4D Project

Additionally, the local branch office collaborated with the GIZ Sport for Development program to implement a capacity-building activity that included two in-person trainings in Skopje and Prizren for youth practitioners, such as youth workers and high school teachers from the region. These efforts linked the Sport for Development program with the Superschools Exchange Program at the regional level.

Throughout the year, the local branch office supported and participated in several youth-focused initiatives, including a donor coordination meeting related to the implementation of the Youth Strategy and the development of the Strategy's Action Plan for 2026. The office also facilitated connections among youth organizations and groups working with youth, encouraging networking and the sharing of best practices across

M&E Data – LBO MNE	Total
1.1. Number of capacity building activities	3
1.2. Number of participants in capacity building activities	29
2.1. Number of youth participation activities	1
2.2. Number of participants in youth participation activities	36

6. Local Branch Office in Serbia



Local Branch Office in Serbia has continued to place strong emphasis on building and maintaining partnerships with local stakeholders, recognizing their key role in advancing youth cooperation and participation. In this regard, particular focus has been placed on organizing capacity-building initiatives and activities that promote meaningful youth engagement at the local level. Throughout the reporting period, LBO Serbia team held a number of meetings with various local actors, including representatives of international organizations, governmental institutions, embassies, and civil society organizations, with the aim of strengthening cooperation and identifying opportunities for joint initiatives.

Capacity Building Training for Local CSOs (RYCO – OSCE partnership)

Date: 7–10 August 2025

Location: Kopaonik, Serbia

Participants: 14 representatives of local civil society organizations

The RYCO Local Branch Office in Serbia, in cooperation with the OSCE Mission to Serbia, organized a four-day capacity building training for representatives of civil society organizations from different local communities in Serbia. The training focused on strengthening participants' capacities in project cycle management and project proposal development, with particular emphasis on designing initiatives addressing youth participation, intercultural dialogue, and peacebuilding. Through a combination of theoretical inputs and non-formal education methods, participants developed practical skills in problem analysis, defining objectives and results, budget planning and risk mitigation, while also learning about funding opportunities available through RYCO and its partners.

Training on Youth Participation and the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda

Date: 16 October 2025 (online session), October 2025 (in-person training)

Location: Vrnjačka Banja, Serbia

Participants: 15 high school students from across Serbia

The RYCO Local Branch Office in Serbia organized a blended training program aimed at strengthening young people's understanding of youth participation and the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda. The training consisted of an online introductory module, a three-day in-person workshop in Vrnjačka Banja, and an online wrap-up session. Using non-formal education methods and workshop simulations, participants developed facilitation and leadership skills enabling them to act as peer facilitators within the Superschools program and conduct workshops in their schools on youth participation, dialogue and peacebuilding.

Local follow up consultation with CSOs and Youth on Localizing the Youth Forum Recommendations

Date: 28 November 2025

Location: Belgrade, Hotel IN

Participants: 28 participants + 7 RYCO staff members; representatives of ministries, international organizations, youth organizations and Youth Forum participants

Following the Western Balkans Youth Forum 2025, the RYCO Local Branch Office in Serbia organized a local follow-up roundtable in partnership with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy in Serbia and the National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS). The event focused on localizing and operationalizing the Forum's recommendations within the Serbian policy framework, particularly in relation to the development of the Action Plan for the implementation of the Youth Strategy 2023–2030.

Youth Forum participants acted as co-facilitators, presenting recommendations structured around three thematic clusters: migration, economic growth and development, and security. The event strengthened dialogue between youth representatives, institutions and international partners and identified concrete entry points for integrating youth recommendations into local policy processes.

Training on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) and Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agendas

Date: 13–14 December 2025

Location: Belgrade, Serbia

Participants: 20 representatives of civil society organizations

The RYCO Local Branch Office in Serbia, in partnership with United Nations agencies in Serbia (UNFPA and UNDP), organized a two-day capacity building training for civil society organizations focused on the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) and Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agendas. The training aimed to strengthen participants' understanding of global YPS and WPS frameworks and their relevance for the Serbian policy context, including links with the Youth Strategy and related public policies. Through interactive sessions, participants explored youth-inclusive analysis, early warning mechanisms, and community-based approaches to preventing social tensions, countering misinformation and hate speech, and promoting intercultural dialogue and reconciliation. The training also introduced participants to RYCO funding opportunities and practical tools for developing youth-led peacebuilding initiatives.

M&E Data – LBO MNE	Total
1.1. Number of capacity building activities	3
1.2. Number of participants in capacity building activities	49
2.1. Number of youth participation activities	2
2.2. Number of participants in youth participation activities	39

Data-driven programming remains central to RYCO's approach, ensuring that program design, implementation, and adaptation are grounded in reliable evidence and systematic analysis. Throughout 2025, RYCO remained committed to strengthening its Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) capacities within the principles of systematic research, monitoring, evaluation, and learning.

A significant milestone during this period has been the development of a new Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for RYCO's 2025–2027 strategic phase. Building on previous experience and lessons learned from former program implementation cycles, this framework serves as a strategic tool to align monitoring and evaluation processes with RYCO's Strategic Plan and broader organizational priorities. The framework introduces a structured system for tracking outputs, outcomes, and impact, while also strengthening the integration of qualitative and quantitative indicators. By establishing clear reporting structures, defined indicators, and improved mechanisms for data collection and analysis, the framework supports a more consistent and systematic assessment of program impact. This development represents an important step toward ensuring that monitoring processes not only track activities but also contribute to a deeper understanding of program effectiveness and RYCO's long-term impact.

Alongside the development of the new M&E framework, particular emphasis has been placed on the harmonization of monitoring and evaluation tools. The standardization of the M&E tools has enabled consistent data collection and reporting, and it has significantly improved the comparability of results across regional programs and local activities. It has also facilitated the aggregation of data at the organizational level, enabling RYCO to assess progress toward its strategic objectives and ensure that the generated insights can inform decision-making at both programmatic and institutional levels. In parallel, field monitoring visits conducted by RYCO staff have provided real-time insights into project implementation, allowing to better understand operational challenges and identify opportunities for improvement.

The reporting period has also marked an important stage in the evolution of RYCO's Monitoring and Evaluation functions. The ongoing development of the Research, Evaluation, and Learning (REL) unit reflects the organization's long-term commitment to institutionalizing monitoring, evaluation, and research as core components of its operational structure. By consolidating M&E and learning processes within a dedicated REL unit, RYCO has further strengthened its capacity to generate evidence, conduct systematic analysis, and translate findings into actionable recommendations for program improvement.

VII

Communications

In 2025, the Communications Department continued to position RYCO as a visible and credible regional platform connecting young people, institutions, and communities across the WB6, and translating RYCO's work and mission into compelling public narratives.

The year was marked by the introduction of RYCO's new leadership, which opened a new phase in the organization's development. One of the first major moments of engagement under the new leadership was the Western Balkans Youth Forum 2025, within the framework of the Berlin Process, bringing together young people, policymakers, and regional stakeholders. Particular attention was given to the Youth Forum Recommendations, which address priorities such as mobility, democratic engagement, security, and regional cooperation. Communication related to the Youth Forum resulted in more than 30 media publications, and follow-up activities aimed at localizing the Youth Forum Recommendations as well as presentation during the Berlin Process Leaders' Summit generated almost 40,000 organic reach across social media platforms.

The Communications Department also ensured the visibility of institutional and leadership activities, including strategic engagements with regional and international partners, reinforcing RYCO's role as a credible regional actor working at the intersection of youth cooperation and policy dialogue.

Another important milestone during the year was the launch of RYCOgnizing YPS, the first regional granting scheme dedicated to advancing the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda in the Western Balkans. Communication efforts accompanied the launch of the initiative and promotion of selected projects across the region, generating nearly 80,000 reach across social media platforms.

At the same time, the department continued to support communication around RYCO's core programs and opportunities. Promotion of 6th Open Call activities, as well as the opening of the 7th Open Call, ensured that opportunities reached civil society organizations and youth groups across the region.

Visibility of the Superschools exchange scheme remained in focus of Communication activities. Through participant stories, visual storytelling, and multimedia coverage, communications highlighted how youth exchanges foster trust, friendship, and lasting connections. Communication efforts also supported the Western Balkans Youth Cultural Fund, promoting activities of young artists and the launch of new call, which together reached more than 60,000 people across platforms, highlighting youth cultural activism as a powerful tool for dialogue, reconciliation, and regional cooperation.

In addition to flagship programs, several thematic initiatives were supported, linking youth engagement with broader social challenges. From opening the Call to promoting the program, Communications Department supported the Youth4Peace international initiative, aimed to empower young leaders to advance democracy, dialogue, and peacebuilding in the context of the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, attracting more than 250 regional applications. Additionally, communication supported the Just Energy Transition call for young journalists, encouraging youth reporting on sustainability, climate action, and the region's energy transition.

Digital communication remained the backbone of RYCO's outreach strategy in 2025. Throughout the year, RYCO published approximately 1,130 pieces of content across its digital platforms, surpassing 3.4 million views and nearly doubling the organization's reach compared to the previous year. Audience engagement also continued to grow, with more than 30,000 interactions recorded across social media platforms.

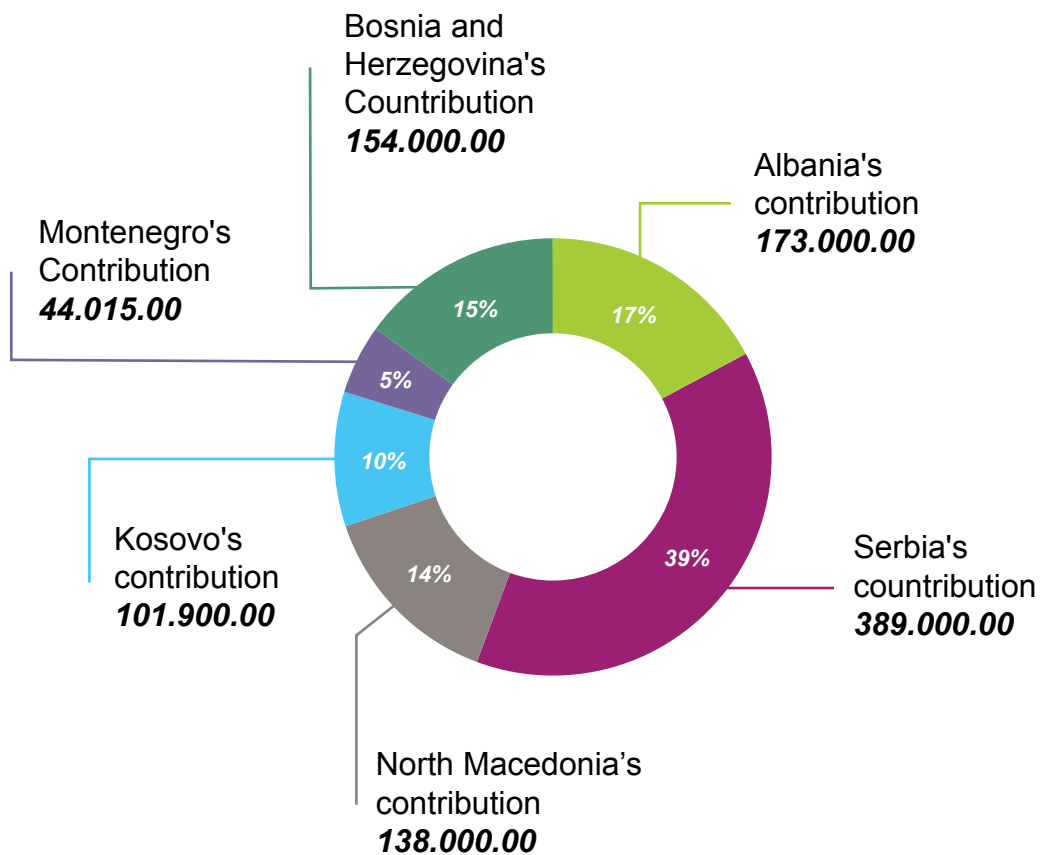
RYCO's website remained the central hub for information, participation, and program visibility. In 2025, the website attracted more than 81,000 active users and nearly 78,000 new users, connecting young people and organizations with RYCO's opportunities and initiatives. To maintain regular communication with partners and stakeholders, the Communications Department also continued the production and distribution of the RYCO Newsletter, sharing updates on programs and events.

Overall, communications in 2025 played an important role in amplifying youth voices and showcasing concrete examples of cooperation. By combining storytelling and campaign-based communication, the Communications Department ensured that youth cooperation, regional dialogue, and youth-led initiatives remain visible and accessible topics in the Western Balkans public space.

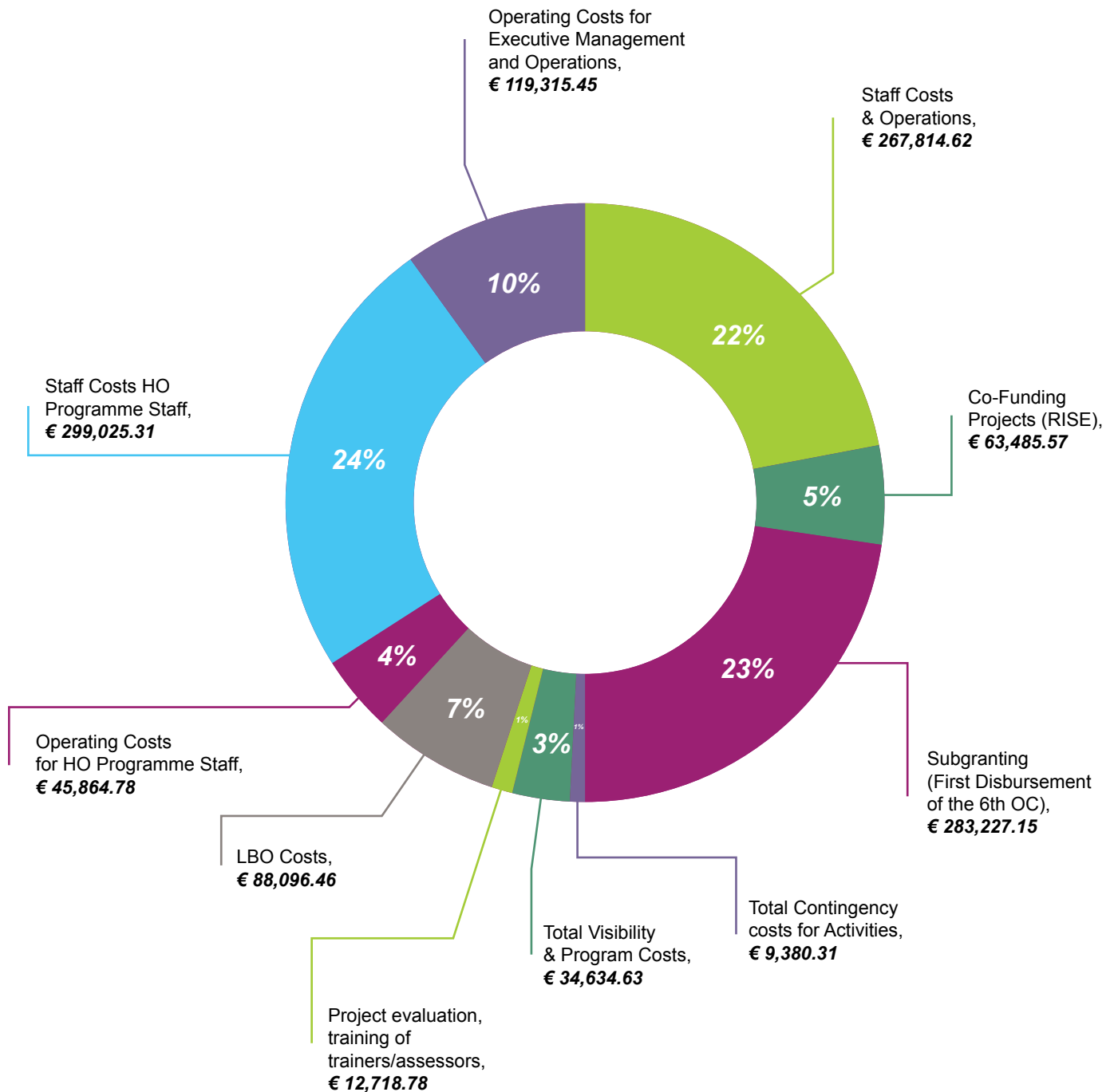
The financial report of RYCO focuses on RYCO's Core Budget Overview including:

- Total Contracting Parties' annual financial contributions to core budget
- Total core budget expenditures
- Total Local Branch Offices' expenditures
- Core budget total expenditures by LBOs
- Consolidated revenue overview for 2025

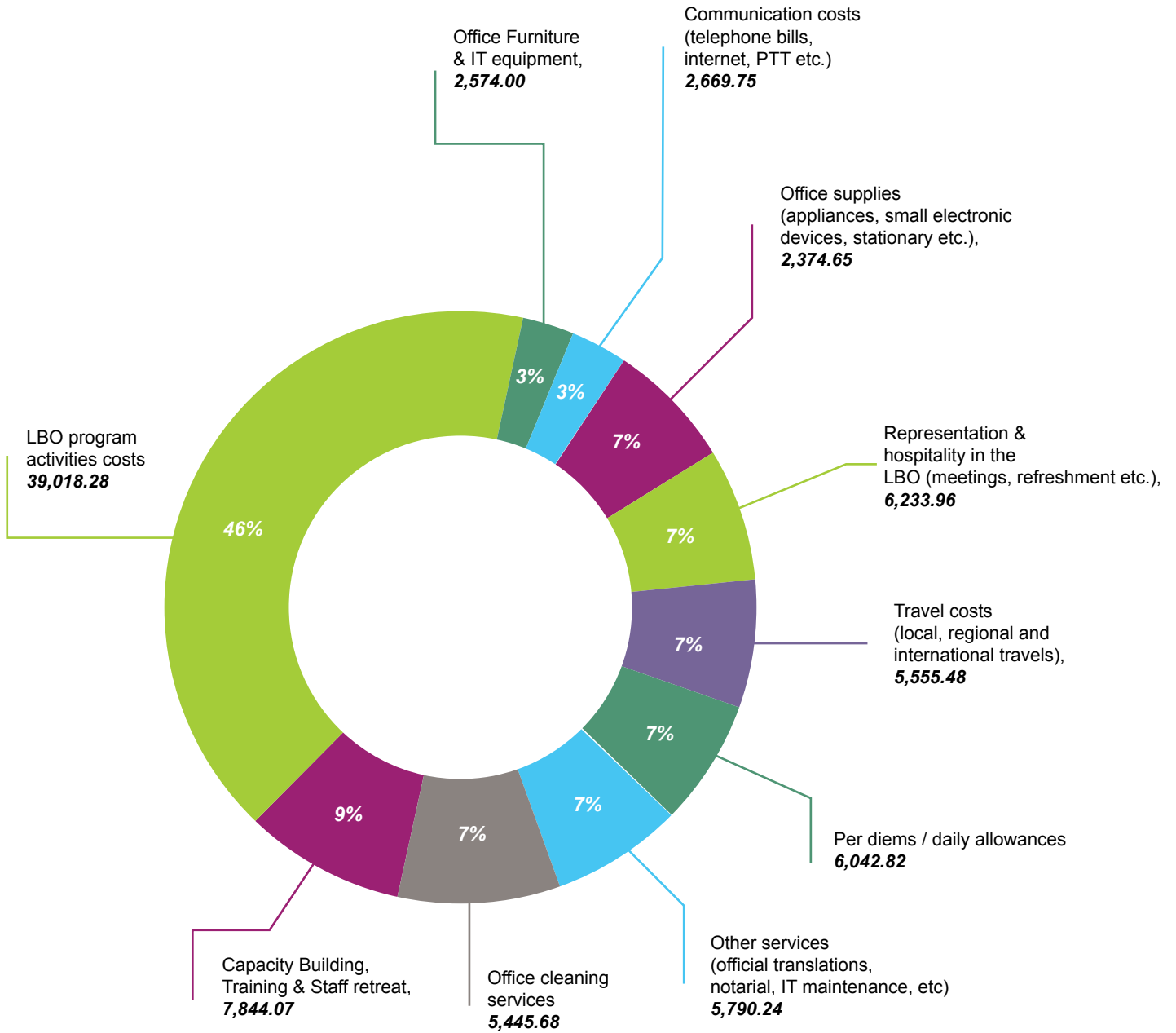
Total Contracting Parties Annual Financial Contributions to core budget for 2025



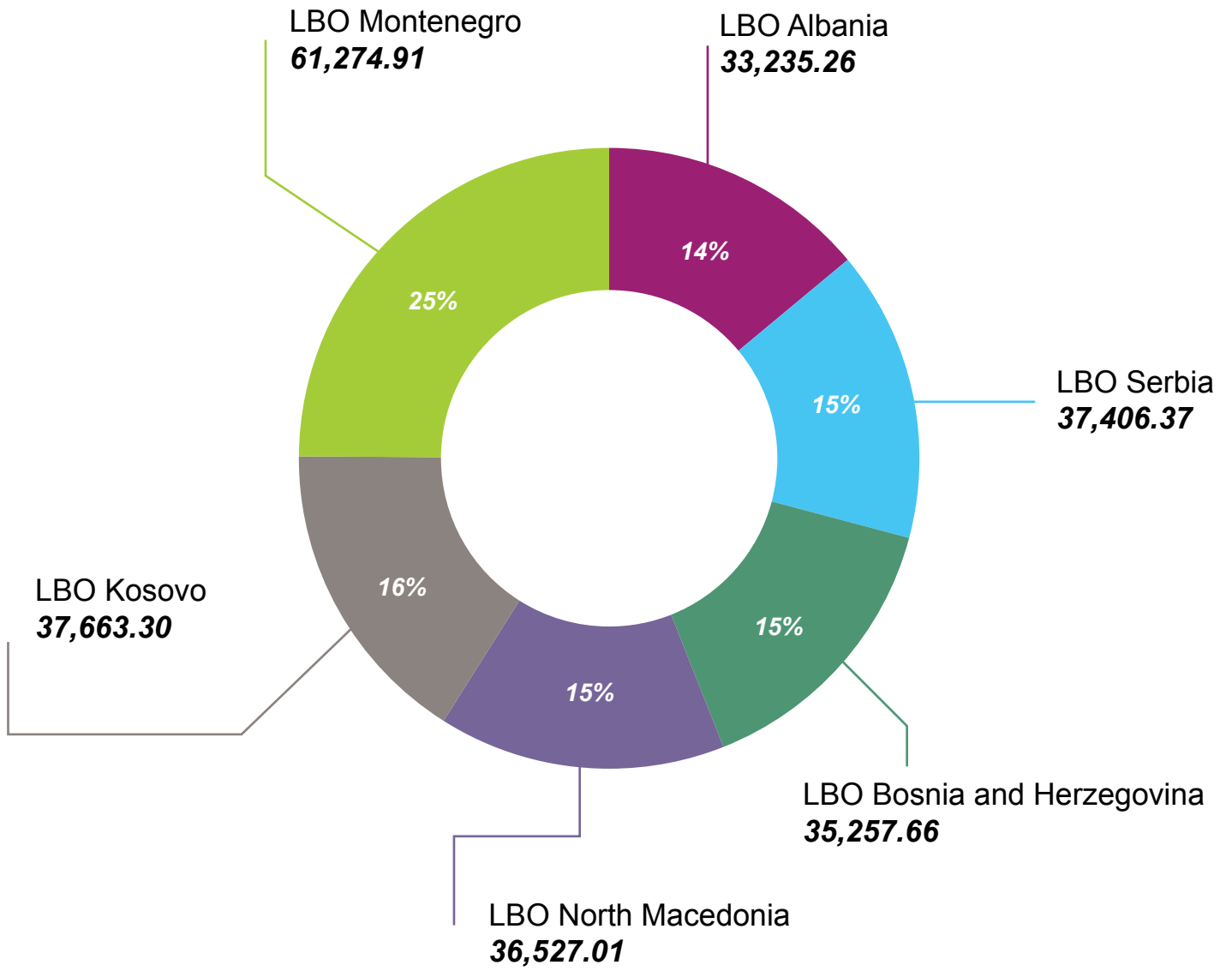
Core Budget Expenditures



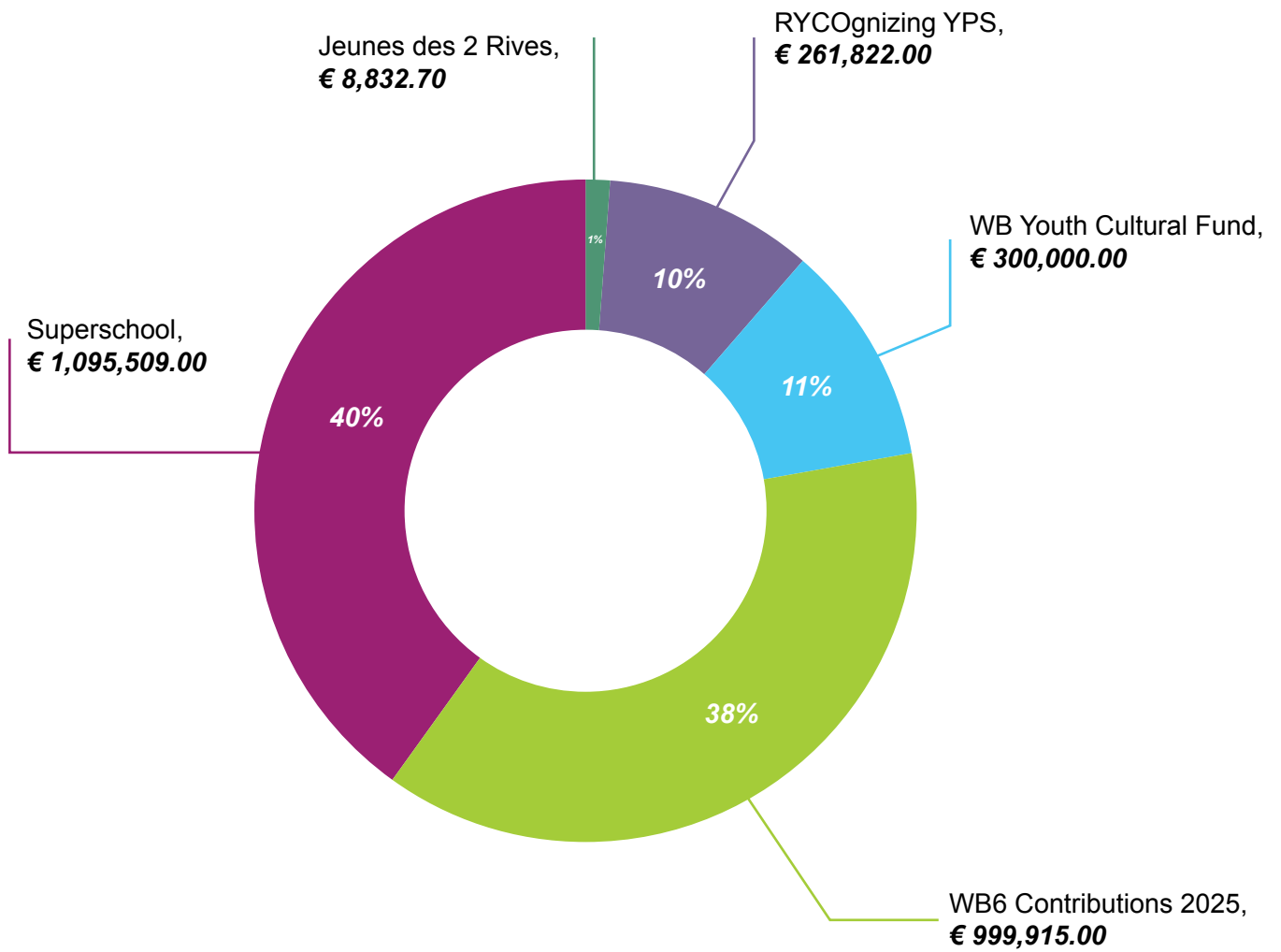
LBOs Core Budget Expenditures



LBOs Core Budget Expenditures



RYCO 2025 Total Revenue Overview



RYCO 2025 Total Expenditures Overview

