

# YOUTH IN THE BALKANS: BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, MONTENEGRO, KOSOVO\*, SERBIA, NORTH MACEDONIA

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COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS



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## **Balkan Regional Platform for Youth Participation and Dialogue**

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# **YOUTH IN THE BALKANS: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo\*, Serbia, North Macedonia COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND PRACTICE**

Publication prepared by  
Slađana Petković, Dragan Stanojević

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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The purpose of this study is to provide analysis on the key challenges that young people face, together with related policy and legal responses in the Western Balkans, which were addressed within the research component of the multi-annual project **Balkan regional platform for youth participation and dialogue**<sup>1</sup>, implemented from 2015-2018 by the lead applicant – the European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA) and co-applicants (Local Democracy Agencies: Central and Southern Serbia, Subotica, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, Mostar, Prijedor, Zavidovici in Bosnia and Herzegovina and ALDA Skopje).

Balkan regional platform for youth participation and dialogue aims on increasing awareness on youth participation, youth activism and the possibilities of young people creating and influencing the policies closely related to them. One of the goals of the Platform is to improve cooperation and the coordination between Civil Society (CS) and the public authorities with the active participation of youngsters, through (*inter alia*) the creation Regional Network for Local Democracy. Easing youth activism and participation and raising the awareness of local authorities, policy and decision makers, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and youth leaders in targeted countries on EU standards, policies and practices on youth participation is the main scope of every activity within the platform. Open dialogue between youth and stakeholders in their communities but also in Balkan region countries is the main objective and position of youth, which the creation of the platform seeks to achieve.

This study is conducted in line with the objective of the research project component in 2018, which is to contribute to increasing the focus of governments (at all levels) in the Western Balkans to provide more favourable conditions for enhancing youth participation in policy and decision making.

## 1.1 Methodology

The study is based on desk review of the results and achievements of previous research conducted throughout entire four-year programme implementation (2015/2018), grouped in five work packages that have effectively contributed to:

- Empowering youth groups through quality, innovation and recognition of youth work in the local communities involved in the action;

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<sup>1</sup> More information at: <http://www.aldabalkan-youth.eu>.

\* This designation is without prejudice to position on status, and is in line with UNCSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

- Engaging for youth participation in civic life, policy and decision making, creative cultural initiatives;
- Connecting the youth groups from diverse communities across the Western Balkans for learning the culture of dialogue, enhancing mobility, solidarity, intercultural understanding;
- Creating sustainable regional thematic CSO networks.

Further to this, the study incorporates the mid-term external evaluation report findings, activity reports presented by the Local Democracy Agencies within the project work packages as well as relevant contemporary research findings conducted beyond this project.

## 2. CHALLENGES OF YOUTH IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

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Reflecting on key problems and challenges that young people face in the WB region, this chapter provides a summary of main findings of the ALDA 2015 report on 'Policy and legislative framework for youth participation in the Balkans' which partly relies on the data provided by FES Youth Studies in East Europe ('YEE studies')<sup>2</sup>, conducted from 2011-2015 in four countries relevant for this report (apart from Montenegro). Summarising some of the main findings of FES YEE studies (see Taleski and Hope 2015), the first five ranked problems in the society perceived by youth in four WB countries refer to:

1. Unemployment (BiH, Kosovo\*, North Macedonia, Serbia);
2. Poverty (BiH, Kosovo\*, North Macedonia, Serbia);
3. Job insecurity (BiH), Increased incidence of chronic diseases (North Macedonia), territory (Kosovo\*), Insufficient fight against corruption (Serbia);
4. Justice (BiH), Environmental pollution (Kosovo\*), Job insecurity (North Macedonia), Improving the position of young people (Serbia);
5. Insufficient fight against corruption (BiH), Job insecurity (Kosovo\*), Environmental pollution (North Macedonia), Social justice and Security for all (Serbia).

The youth place unemployment and poverty among the two priority issues, followed by job insecurity and problems related to insufficient fight against corruption, chronic diseases, environmental pollution, and the position of youth in the society. Having in mind that, in the final instance, these perceptions influence a level of optimism of youth placed in the future, the results can be perceived as alarming (Potocnik 2015), having in mind that young people in BiH, for example, urgently need some positive impetus in order to see some better future prospects. On the other hand, youth in Kosovo\* and Serbia, despite many constraints that they are facing, keep an optimistic individual perceptions of their future.

In addition, this study reflects on results of the recent regional study (FES SEE 2018) conducted in all five countries concerned (including Montenegro). According to it, youth across the region continue to suffer from high unemployment and experience precarious working conditions, while many of them are without a job, and are not undergoing education or training (NEET). A large majority of SEE youth also express anxiety about being without a job. They report a very strong preference for public-sector employment, while political party membership is considered to play a very important role in finding a job in this sector. Due to high unemployment and inadequate state support, young people from SEE region are highly dependent on their parents for financial, housing, education-related and other types of

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<sup>2</sup> Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), with its offices in Zagreb, Belgrade, Skopje, Bucharest, Sofia, Sarajevo, Pristina and Tirana has initiated, implemented and financed FES youth studies in East Europe (YEE). Studies from nine countries (Albania (2011), Bosnia and Herzegovina (2014), Bulgaria (2014), Croatia (2012), Kosovo (2012), Macedonia (2013), Romania (2014), Slovenia (2013) and Serbia (2015)) are a part of a cross-national research project carried out by FES and collaborating researchers.

support. Apart from being a burden on parental families, this also means that their transition to adulthood is prolonged.

While young people's trust in family members is very high, their trust in state institutions and political leaders is still extremely low (FES SEE 2018). Institutions in which the youth in the WB region places trust depict public sentiments towards institutional and civil framework and can be related to a level of social engagement and a sense of belonging. It is therefore interesting to note that in some countries an apparatus of state force (e.g. the police) goes hand in hand with religious institutions while CSOs are not present at the first five positions. In BiH and Kosovo\*, for example, young people have the greatest trust in religious leaders, and in North Macedonia the most trusted institution is the EU. As for the least trusted institutions, in North Macedonia and BiH those are political parties and in Kosovo\* UNMIK (Hullerman et al., 2015:29). In Serbia, young people have the most trust in the military and the Church and the least in political parties (Tomanović et al. 2015:104).

The vast majority of young people in the WB region feel poorly represented in national politics and believe that they should have a stronger say. The data on shares of youth interested in different ranges of politics shows that only Kosovo\* reported somehow higher youth interest in politics (Potocnik 2015). In BiH 19% of young people reported that they have voted in the last national elections, in Kosovo 16.9% and in North Macedonia 41.6% (Hullerman et al. 2015:47). In the Serbian survey, 20.6% of young people reported that they knew who they would vote for if there were elections held at the time of survey, while 46.1% said they did not want to vote, 15.5% that they did not know whom to vote for and 17.8% refused to answer (Tomanović et al. 2015:100). Other than voting, recent regional study confirms that young people have little experience with political and civic participation, and only a small minority holds political offices. The majority of SEE youth surveyed state that their political knowledge is poor and that they are disinterested in politics (FES SEE 2018).

Engagement in voluntary activities, often indicates a level of social capital and networking potential in framework of social sciences, for instance, 21% of youth from Kosovo\* had volunteered, 13% from North Macedonia and 19% from BiH (Hullerman et al., 2015, p. 25), while the percentage measured in Serbia was 39.4% (Tomanović et al. 2015:69). Although it has become a truism for everyone engaging with the region that youth are apathetic when it comes to traditional politics, a lack of political activity at a political party level might not necessarily mean disengagement, as many young people are currently involved in their local communities and volunteering (FES SEE 2018).

When it comes to satisfaction with democracy, young people are significantly more dissatisfied than satisfied. Only 18.4% of young people in BiH and 6.2% of young people in North Macedonia are very or somewhat satisfied with the democracy in these societies (Hullerman et al., 2015:31). In Serbia, 8.6% of young people reported being very or just satisfied with democracy (Tomanović et al. 2015:125).

Socio-political values of youth in WB region are focused on economic and social security. Recent data show that youth across the region are overwhelmingly pro-European and advocate a welfare state-

based model rather than a neoliberal model of Europeanisation. This idea of a strong welfare state enjoys overwhelming support across the entire region, especially among youth with a lower socioeconomic status as youth from underprivileged social backgrounds who are considerably less likely to have access to higher levels of education, to participate in political or civic activities, to engage in activities related to self-development, to use ICT for educational and informational purposes, or to find adequate employment (FES SEE 2018).

The FES SEE 2018 study also shows that young people have a strong ideological and moral stance about what their societies ought to look like. Coupled with frustration over the ongoing stasis in the region, political views express themselves in a variety of diverging ways. Some exhibit a conservative stance and even voice nationalist sentiments. Others appear ready to tap into the global trend of 'millennial socialism', though few persons in the region seem to articulate their views using this language. The values reported by youth, however, demonstrate that many young people have left-leaning views. Rejuvenating a social-democratic option would seem to be a means of bringing these views into the political realm. What pushes youth towards both political extremes on the left-right spectrum is mainly the perceived lack of a welfare state.

Overall, it can be said that the above presented findings are cause for both optimism and concern. In one hand, youth across the region strongly identify with being European and place relatively great trust in the EU, which is strongly associated with greater economic prosperity. A vast majority of them are also in favour of solidarity-based Europeanisation. On the other hand, economic factors and negative perceptions of their home country's situation appear to be the strongest drivers of youth emigration. Although the intent of youth from SEE region to emigrate remains high, it has decreased in recent years. These and other major findings from the above-mentioned studies have a number of important implications for both policy and practice in terms of young people's future and well-being, and especially in terms of their role in society.



### 3. YOUTH POLICY AND YOUTH WORK RESPONSES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

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#### 3.1. Youth policy framework in the Western Balkans (2015-2018)

*“All countries do in fact have a youth policy – by intent, default or neglect. After all, doing nothing still affects young people’s lives” (Prof.Dr. Howard Williamson)*

In order to address multiple challenges mentioned above, the governments of WB5 countries concerned need to develop an adequate policy responses in the framework of the EU accession where the (potential) candidate countries are invited to address problems of their youth as one of the key priorities. In order to be in line with the EU common objectives, especially those stated in the [EU Youth strategy 2010-2018](#) of the European Commission and Council of Europe’s [Agenda 2020](#), respective countries of the WB region developed youth policies and relevant legislation and established governmental authorities responsible for youth. While realising the youth capacities are crucial for building more stable and cohesive societies, the governments of the WB5 countries renewed most of the national youth policy and legislative documents from 2015 - 2018, taking more proactive approach.

Despite the fact that the national youth policies across the region share a common tradition in youth policy development and implementation, there is no standardisation of youth policy development in WB 5 countries, a variety of models and forms of the existing strategic and legal frameworks can be identified (see Table 1). Furthermore, there is no consensus over the definition of the concept of ‘youth’ in WB5 countries which is mainly based on ‘age’, covering ranges from 15 to 24 (in Kosovo\*), 15 to 29 (in North Macedonia) and 15 to 30 (in Serbia, Montenegro and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina). According to the youth policy briefing (2011), in Republika Srpska, this ranges from 16 to 30 years of age, while the third self-governed Brcko District in Bosnia and Herzegovina does not have a legal definition of youth. Therefore, young people are treated differently by sector specific acts and policies, such as education system related laws, the law on juvenile justice, family law, etc.

On the other hand, there are various common characteristics of the approaches to youth policy development across the region which seem to be changing from the previous ‘problem oriented’ towards more ‘resource oriented’ youth policies. Although the “youth” is seen as a social category holding the huge potential for social progress, it is also perceived as a highly vulnerable to social and economic changes in society.

Table 1: Strategic, legal and institutional framework for the national youth policy in WB5

Country	Strategic and legal framework	Institutional framework
<b>Bosnia and Herzegovina</b>	<p>The Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina formed a <a href="#">Working Group</a> in 2015, the document “<a href="#">Analysis of Federation Bosnia and Herzegovina Youth Conditions and Needs</a>” was produced in 2013 and the <b>Draft Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina Youth Strategy</b> was adopted by members of the Working Group in 2015.</p> <p>The National Assembly of the Republika Srpska adopted the Proposal of the third <a href="#">Youth Policy of the Republika Srpska for 2016-2020</a> in 2016. The Brcko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina does not have a Youth Strategy.</p> <p>The <a href="#">Laws on Volunteering and Youth Organisation of the Republika Srpska (2008)</a> and the <a href="#">Youth Law of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2010)</a> define the youth policy framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina outlining legal protections and provisions for youth rights, youth work, and youth councils. The Brcko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina does not have a law on youth.</p>	<p>The <a href="#">Department for Youth</a> within the <a href="#">Ministry of Family, Youth &amp; Sports</a> has responsibility for youth in RS.</p> <p>The <a href="#">Division for Youth</a> within the <a href="#">Ministry of Culture and Sports</a> has responsibility for youth with the <b>FBiH</b> and is responsible for the <a href="#">youth law</a> (2010), coordination of federal and international youth programmes, participation, identifying youth needs and supporting the development of the federal youth strategy.</p>
<b>Kosovo*</b>	<p>The <a href="#">Youth Strategy 2013-2017 and Action Plan 2013-2015 (KSYAP)</a>. In the process of development of the <b>new</b> National Youth Strategy 2018-2023 and “Youth Action Plan 2018-2021”.</p> <p>The <a href="#">Law on Empowerment and Participation of Youth</a> (2009).</p>	<p>The <a href="#">Youth Department</a> within the <a href="#">Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport</a>.</p>
<b>Montenegro</b>	<p><a href="#">Law on Youth (2019)</a> and the <a href="#">Strategy on Youth 2017 - 2021</a> were created through an evidence based and participatory approach.</p>	<p><a href="#">Directorate for Youth</a> under the supervision of the <a href="#">Ministry of Sports and Youth</a> is responsible for youth affairs.</p>

Republic of North Macedonia	<a href="#">National Youth Strategy (2016-2025)</a> . <b>Two laws</b> related to youth work: <a href="#">Law on Volunteerism</a> and <a href="#">Law on Associations and Foundations</a> .	<a href="#">The Agency for Youth and Sports</a> and 'youth coordination of associations', are responsible for the implementation through actions plans.
Serbia	<a href="#">National Youth Strategy 2015-2025</a> and <a href="#">The Law on Youth</a> .	The <a href="#">Department of Youth</a> within the <a href="#">Ministry of Youth and Sport</a> has responsibility for youth affairs and policy in Serbia.

Similarities of the current youth policies in WB5 can be summarised as follows:

- Youth policies in the Balkans are recognised as an important part of the strategic state development agendas (EU, CoE, SEE);
- There is a paradigm shift in approaching youth policy development and service design (towards more efficient and effective outcome oriented and measurable policies);
- Approach to youth policy development is transversal and holistic (in order to address complex social issues);
- There is a clear political commitment to an evidence based and participatory policy making (improved mechanisms of consultation with youth and stakeholders);
- Cross sectoral approach through a horizontal, inter-ministerial or interdepartmental collaboration across various policy domains, aiming at maximising the potential of youth policy can positively influence the entire governance system of a country, not only youth policy;
- **Legal framework for youth policy and youth work is becoming increasingly effective and in place;**
- Values and principles in line with European standards (participation, inclusion etc.)
- Awareness raised about importance to support local level youth policy and youth work development (*"Currently, in 135 municipalities in Serbia there are local youth offices. The Ministry of Youth and Sports supports programmes and projects of youth offices aimed to NYS implementation and encouraged local authorities to allocate funds to the youth activities which is expressed through local youth action plans"* (MOS).

Despite the fairly developed youth policy and legislation framework in WB 5 countries, remaining challenges of youth policy implementation mainly refer to<sup>3</sup>:

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<sup>3</sup> Source: 5 Components of youth policy: Youth policy-the essentials, EU-CoE youth partnership

- **Coverage** (geographical area and social groups that are covered, plus policy domains): national youth policy in the region tend to be centralised, focused on the mainstream youth, and cover different public policy domains (there is a slight shift in setting priorities between the 1st and 2nd youth policy cycle);
- **Capacity** (the role and relationship of government and youth NGOs): **information provision** and **knowledge share** on contemporary youth policies should be improved among both public and non-governmental organisations;
- **Competence (capacity building and qualifications)**: training programme for public servants and youth workers needs to be systematic and further improved;
- **Co-operation, policy coordination and coherence** (hierarchically and horizontally): dominant model of cross sectoral cooperation is transversal which means that one central actor is responsible for youth policy development and implementation and often not empowered enough to provide meaningful youth mainstreaming across the governmental departments. Both horizontal and vertical mechanisms for cooperation are lacking;
- **Cost** (the financial and human resources required): there are various funding schemes available but there is no sustainable and strategic approach in place. Qualified human resources are also lacking at national and local level (due to the frequent shifts the institutional memory is often lost).

Other key components of the national youth policy (Denstad 2009) relevant for the WB5 countries are:

- **Established links between local, regional and national levels have to be improved** - national youth policy recognises the competencies and responsibilities of local and regional authorities, and proposes ways of implementing policy in co-operation, coordination and partnership with them.
- **Consistency with international practice also needs to be enhanced** – taking into account the international dimensions, experiences, **improvement of standards** and recommendations.

### 3.2. Youth work in the Western Balkans (2015-2018)

Due to effects of economic crisis as well as due to progressing towards the European Union, the initiatives of better regional connection of young people from Western Balkans and tighter ties with the EU context are increasing. This process has officially started in 2014 following the Berlin conference and became known as Berlin process. As soon as during the following year the basis of youth policy were set in Slovenia during the Brdo Summit '*Positive Agenda for the Youth of the Western Balkans*' and confirmed in Vienna Summit in the same year. Two conferences were organised in the next year: '*Connecting Youth*' conference in Paris, France and '*Connecting Youth Work and Youth Policy*' in Ljubljana, Slovenia. These meetings have improved the Agenda for Youth by developing proposals on how youth work could improve youth policy in the Western Balkans region. The result of the conference was the Action Plan for youth work and youth policy. This meeting had a follow up in the second Europe-

Western Balkans Youth Meeting that held in Podgorica, Montenegro in 2018. In 2017 SALTO SEE organised a conference 'Connecting Youth - Moving Forward: EU - Western Balkans Forum on Youth' in Trieste, Italy. The status, the quality and the future of youth work in the Western Balkans region was one of main topics during the meetings.

### 3.2.1. Legal framework

Youth and youth work related legislation is unevenly developed in the region. Laws on youth exist in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Srpska, Montenegro and Serbia. In all countries in the region there are National Youth Strategies that define the main activities implemented by youth workers (as presented in Table 1 above). Youth work has been defined and goal to recognise the profession of youth work exists in all countries, except Kosovo\*.

The Law on Youth in Montenegro recognises youth work as *'youth activities that are implemented with young people and for young people, that are based on non-formal education, in accordance with the needs of young people aiming at achieving their independence and full personal and social potential as well as their participation in the life of a society'* while the National Strategy states that youth work *'is being implemented as a part of extracurricular activities, within youth clubs, youth centres, civil society organizations, institutions, schools, etc. and contributes to the development of young people in the aware, responsible and active members of society who contribute to the community development, demonstrate initiative and respect diversity'*. However, even though Law on Youth and National Youth Strategy stress the importance of these activities, youth work is not recognised as a profession.

The Law on youth in Serbia recognises the youth work as *'a part of youth activities organized young people and for young people that are based on non-formal education and conducted within the free time of young people and are implemented in order to improve the conditions for individual and social development of young people in line with their needs and abilities and with their voluntary participation'*. The National Strategy set as one of the objectives *'recognition and validation of youth work as a service that contributes to the improvement of the position of youth'* that is to be achieved through *'the activities of professionalising youth work through formal and non-formal education in accordance with the standards of occupation of youth work'*, as well as *'creating mechanisms for the recognition of competences acquired through youth work and the recognition of occupation of youth work through NQF and Classification of occupations'*. The qualification of youth worker became part of the National Qualification Framework in 2018.

The Law on Empowerment and Participation of Youth is official framework for empowerment and participation of youth in Kosovo\*. The main policy documents are the Kosovo Strategy for Youth and the Action Plan. Taking into account that previous strategy was in action until do 2017 a new National Youth Strategy for the period 2018-2023 and the Youth Action Plan for the period 2018-2021, are being developed and should be introduced soon. The Law doesn't recognise youth work although the main

focus of the policy document is on the youth voluntary work. The Kosovo Strategy for Youth also does not recognise the youth work as a special form of activity performed by youth workers.

**The Youth Law doesn't exist in North Macedonia, but the policy area is regulated by the Youth Strategy.** The second Strategy for the period 2016-2025 is currently in place. In National Youth Strategy youth work is defined as *'an organised and systematic process of education and support of authentic development of young people with the aim of fulfilling their overall personal, social and civic potential. It is directly associated with the development of the local community, whereby young people not only become active participants in the process of their own development but also active participants in the life of the community'*. Youth work is not recognised as a profession by the Law, nor by any other legal frameworks.

Bosnia and Herzegovina neither have youth law nor youth strategy. There are youth laws at the level of entities, namely the Law on Youth Organisation in the Republic of Srpska and the Youth Law of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Brcko District does not have a separate law on youth. **In the Republic of Srpska and in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina there are active youth strategy documents.** The Youth Law in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina defines youth work as *'a planned, purposeful and conscious youth support through their voluntary participation that represents: 1. Extracurricular education, 2. Creative, artistic, sport and cultural activities with youth; 3. Activities and programs that are related to development of their abilities, skills and knowledge, as well as social activism; 4. Activities related to issues such as socializing, working environment, school, and family; 5. Activities and programs related to their well-being and social and health protection; 6. Youth counselling; 7. Youth recreation , 8. Programs designed for specific youth groups; 9. International youth work'*. In The Law on Youth Organisations of the Republic of Srpska youth work is defined as *'the part of youth activities organized with and for young people, which take place during the free time of young people and is performed in order to improve conditions for personal and social development of young people and the general social benefits in accordance with their needs, opportunities, and with their voluntary participation'*. Youth work is not officially recognised as a profession neither in two above mentioned entities nor in district Brcko.

### 3.2.2. Financial support for youth work

Foreign donors are the most significant sources of financial support of the sector whose funding is mainly project-based. In addition, all countries in the WB region have national and local level state funds. Funding is in majority of cases organised through projects for which calls are being published on yearly basis. There is a difference between countries in the level of funding on national level with Serbia and Kosovo\* allocating substantial amounts. However, funds that are to be allocated on local level are quite uneven, especially within the countries. Although there is a presumption in all countries that one part of the activities should be funded at the local level, this kind of funding exists only in economically more developed municipalities and big cities. Young people in smaller, poorer municipalities as well as in

rural areas in most cases remain without access to services and resources. An additional issue is reflected in the existence of back and forth practices at the local level, as some practices are receiving funds which leads to the development of some capacities and resources, that eventually loose funds mostly due to the change of government and the loss of political will. This practice leads to loss of resources and consequently the sector itself suffers. A significant challenge for the project-based funding models is ensuring the sustainability of youth organizations and their activities. Stirring from project to project carries the risk of ensuring the sustainability of long-term activities, changing the focus of youth workers, and their uncertain financial position as they engagement is mostly based on temporary contracts lasting as long as the project itself. Insufficient transparency of allocation of funds from public funds on national and local level is another risk of project-based funding model.

Another form of project financing risk is reflected in insufficient transparency in the allocation of public funds at the national and local level. In addition, a lack of monitoring and evaluation of project results leads to the lack of trust at the national level.

### 3.2.3. Youth work education

Education of youth workers is primarily based on non-formal and informal learning. Having in mind that in many European countries, developing university-level curricula is still in its infancy, we can say that the WB region is not much lagging behind. In most of the countries, (young) people obtain education relevant for youth work in several disciplines within social science and humanities, such as: social work, criminology, psychology, pedagogy, sociology, law, linguistics, etc. Even though study programmes offering bachelor or master's degree for youth work at the university level do not exist, past attempts to develop them are no longer active.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro university courses already included training programmes for youth workers developed with the initial support of the PRONI Institute for Social Education and Jonkoping University in Sweden. Following a decade of support provided by this institution in developing MA curriculum, these programmes were not implemented due to the lack of funding at the national level. The PRONI was active in Serbia between 2001 and 2009: in 2007 it provided courses for youth work through non-formal education while in the period 2008-2009 an MA course was introduced and lasted only one academic year. PRONI was present also in Montenegro from 2002 to 2007 with a developed degree level course. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the non-formal courses organised by Jonkoping University initiative (PRONI) were available from 1998 to 2008 with a project for a degree level course between 2009-2012 at the University of Zenica (Petković, 2014; O'Donovan et al., 2018). During this period a significant number of young people acquired knowledge and skills enabling them to work with young people. Around 400 young people in Serbia and around 600 young people in Montenegro acquired qualifications in the form of youth work diploma for working with young people.

At the level of vocational education and continuous education and training, courses are being organised only in Serbia. The one-year programme named '*Leadership, youth work, community development*'



started in 2018 within the Organisation Centre for Youth Work (CZOR) in partnership with Jonkoping University Sweden. The capacity of the programme is 20 students (O'Donovan et al., 2018).

Even though there are certain delays, foundations for formal education within academic institutions have been set and can be functional again. Academic staff, knowledge and curricula do exist together with the field-related experience in the country and abroad. Developed practices and experience should be used as foundation on which to build further.

The most common way of acquiring skills and knowledge needed for youth workers is through non-formal education. There are several non-formal paths toward gaining skills and knowledge needed for youth work. Through training courses, seminars, and exchanges youth workers usually gain experience, knowledge and skills needed to practically engage in youth work. NGOs are the main stakeholders in providing services, trainings and courses in all countries whether they are youth NGOs or those working with young people. At the level of international organisations, the EU institutions are emerging as key sources of funding trainings, courses, exchanges and knowledge that future youth workers can obtain as well as key sources of validation acquired knowledge. Certificates for obtained knowledge and skills are in most cases being issued by organisations that implemented trainings. In Serbia only courses organised by the National Association of youth work practitioners (NAPOR), or its member organisations, are validated and recognised by all member organisations and the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Serbia. In none of the WB5 countries knowledge and skills gained this way have not been validated by the state institutions.

The most common way of learning provided by youth NGOs are workshops, international cooperation, seminars, conferences, peer learning, projects, etc. Besides, more general approach includes NAPOR in Serbia which has developed curriculum for youth workers comprising their competences, learning outcomes, topics, literature and methods. Main topics included in the learning process are human rights, community youth work, multicultural learning, conflict prevention, trainers' skills, teamwork, participation, leadership, project management, communication, etc. It is expected that various competences will be developed, including: critical thinking, organisational skills, leadership, empathy, management skills, trainers' skills etc. (O'Donovan, et al. 2018: 73-78).

#### **3.2.4. Youth work recognition**

Most countries in the WB region, as well as most other regions in Europe, do not recognise youth worker as a profession. However, some steps have been made in that direction in the WB5 economies. Several significant steps will be needed, among other the validation of acquired knowledge and skills, the official recognition of competences acquired through formal and non-formal education and recognising youth work in the system of national qualification frameworks (NQF). Youth sector in all economies is aware of the importance of these steps, and some efforts have been made in this direction. In Serbia, for example, youth work is recognised as distinct profession in national qualification framework in 2018. Similar efforts are being made in other countries as well.



## 4. YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LIFE IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

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Youth participation refers to 'ensuring that young people are consulted and more involved in the decisions which concern them and, in general, in the life of their communities' (EKCYP 2011:2). Therefore, 'youth participation in democratic institutions and in a continuous dialogue with policy makers is essential to the sound functioning of our democracies and the sustainability of policies which impact on young people's lives' (ibid.).

Despite the European standards and comprehensive policy framework, young people's patterns of participation in democratic life vary in line with different cultural norms, history and geography. Recent evidence pointed to the changing patterns of political engagement and new citizenship perceptions of young people across Europe where 'loss of community ties, little interest in and knowledge of political processes, low levels of trust in politicians and growing cynicism of democratic institutions are often seen as indicators of the younger generations' weakened sense of citizenship and political engagement' (EACEA 2014:2).

Accordingly, participation of European young citizens in both political and civic affairs in recent years follows the trend of a decrease in formal (conventional) forms and an increase in informal (unconventional) forms of participation linked with the fact that their access to power structures is often limited and suffers from a precarious economic situation compared to other age groups (EKCYP 2011:1). Petitions, public demonstrations, boycotts, wearing political symbols such as badges and stickers, become the means of more loose and informal participation in society and in politics, which many young people find worth experiencing. In addition, many young people resort to the Internet and its social media to interact with public authorities and exchange opinions on political issues (EC 2015).

A modern generation of young people in WB5 countries, however, is maturing in turbulent social circumstances. More recent scientific studies have shown that social and political changes that have occurred since 1990s have generally not increased the chances of young people to facilitate social integration nor participate in social life and decision-making processes (Ilisin 2015). Therefore, the author problematizes the democratic potential of young people in the WB region which stems from their political culture and represents an important resource for a better present and a stable future for a democratic society (Ilisin 2015: 18). On the other hand, an increased scope of opportunities for youth engagement in voluntary activities across the region indicates a level of social capital and networking potential, which can be related to increased potential for social action and participation among youth.

Still, the role of youth, as a social group capable to play a transformative role across societies in the Western Balkans, is traditionally perceived as passive, abstaining and submissive in relation to their local socio-political environment. Therefore, awareness raising and learning that youth participation is an essential element of citizenship in a democratic society, not only as political participation, but also as

participation in civil society, policy and decision making, culture and environmental activities, is essential.

The evidence (ALDA 2015) also show that young generation across the region has on its disposal more diversified means for practicing active citizenship. Advancing good practices of engaging youth in consultative and participatory processes with a view to influencing more effectively the national, cross-border and regional cooperation and dialogue on future perspective of the WB5 countries, becomes essential for promoting their role as key actors of youth policies contributing to social and economic development, prosperity and stability. It has been stated that youth engagement and active participation becomes, more than ever, a precondition for intrinsic ownership over the democratic reform process and as a guarantee for peace and stability in the Western Balkans.

## 5. YOUTH MOBILITY IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

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**Mobility is an opportunity for an individual, group or social strata to move and make choices in terms of residence, professional career or access of resources.** While there are different studies that focus on the mobility of young people in the WB region, the most comprehensive and comparable is the above mentioned FES YEE study (Hullerman et al., 2015) which provides comparable data on the motivation and attitudes of young people about internal migration and emigration outside the region, but it does not collect the data about intra-regional mobility. Similarly, recent RYCO (2018) report on 'What We Already Know About Young People in the Region' concludes that there are no studies that directly tackle the question of regional mobility and that we can only learn about young people's attitudes to and motivations for such mobility indirectly.

ALDA report on 'Youth mobility in the Western Balkans the present challenges and future perspectives' (2016) finds that the recent developments provide encouraging incentives to young people for regional cooperation and mobility. Although there are no functional bilateral cooperation platforms initiated, developed or financed by the WB5 countries themselves, there are various mobility programmes financed or co-financed by the European Union. In addition, a number of regional initiatives have been launched by the civil society organisations, although they are not strictly focused on mobility, rather on networking around specific issues like: youth at risk, provision of social services, reconciliation in the region etc.

The study furthermore shows that, for various reasons, knowledge on the existing mobility programmes among youth in the WB region is rather low. Most of them (76%) stated that there are no programmes of local and national governments that support the mobility of young people. Those who declared that they exist, when asked to name those programs mostly mentioned scholarships for secondary or tertiary education, financial assistance for travel to a sports or folklore competitions abroad. Nevertheless, knowing about the programmes or not, **91% of young people never used mobility programmes of local/national governments.** On the other hand, **18% of them used some of the youth mobility programmes of the European Union,** which is double comparing to 9% of youngsters that have used mobility programmes of the local/national governments (ALDA 2016).

Importantly, significant number of young people has been involved in the Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme mainly through youth exchanges, seminars, trainings, and the European Voluntary Service (EVS). Apart from E+YiA, youth from WB region took part in other mobility programmes such as: the European Youth Foundation funded projects, Cross Border Cooperation Programme of Franco-German Youth Office, CEEPUS, Daad, Zoran Djindjic Foundation, RIVERSEE program, Pestalozzi Children's Foundation etc (ibid.). In area of employment, according to the SEE 2020 Strategy Study on Labour Mobility (2015, in ALDA 2016), conditions for intra-regional mobility exist (due to differences in employment and unemployment rates and in wages), but the crisis has taken its toll on the labour market and probably led to increased out-of regional migration rather than mobility within the region.

Other studies gave us additional information about the steadily increasing number of young people who are willing to move away from the region. The percentage of young people that reported the intent to leave their home was rather high in each of the WB5 countries concerned, including BiH (49.2%), Kosovo\* (55.1%) and North Macedonia (52.8%). The main motives that young people mentioned were 'improving their standard of living, better employment possibilities or better educational prospects' (Hullerman et al., 2015:42). Building upon existing literature, the authors concluded that while in the past emigration intentions and desires were used as a proxy measure for the level of commitment young people had to the future of their own societies, today this does not necessarily have to be the case. In particular, in reviewing the contemporary literature, they found that a lot of young people today express both the desire to live abroad on the one hand and the wish to contribute to improving conditions in their own societies on the other (RYCO 2018).

Although there is not enough empirical evidence for meaningful assessment either of the personal or societal change that the existing mobility programmes produce, youth participating in the E+YiA youth exchanges highlighted a number of personal and organizational benefits that they received from taking part, including establishing new international contacts, the use of non-formal education methods and the development of the organization's scope of action. In addition, they reported developing communication in foreign languages, learning to learn, improving social and civic competences, an increased sense of initiative, and so on (Slana, 2011/2012, p. 2, in RYCO 2018). Some respondents expressed their opinion that participation in YIA projects enhances young people's employability.

When it comes to challenges, the respondents in the same study (Slana, 2015:18 in RYCO 2018) highlighted bureaucratic, economic and communication obstacles (notably long waiting periods for e-mail responses, language problems and cultural differences). We have also learned that opportunities to move within the region for the purpose of internships, volunteering, training and education (both formal and informal) are very limited and face many obstacles including infrastructural and legal ones. One of the examples would be a low quality of roads and the existing visa regime between BiH and Kosovo\* which significantly limits opportunities for young people to travel, meet and cooperate (RYCO 2018). In addition, the existing regional mobility institutional framework and support is weak, so when they move, young people usually follow 'inherited routes' (Montenegro-Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina-Croatia, etc). The history of conflict in the SEE region is reported both as **a learning opportunity benefit and as a challenge**.

Overall, countries in the region are putting a lot of efforts into regional and EU – WB networking and cooperation in the sphere of formal education, especially tertiary education, and promotion of best use of the EU programs for funding research and innovation. However, these measures are mainly targeting mainstream (and elite) youth, students or professionals who are highly educated. At the same time, there is a lack of mobility opportunities for vulnerable youth in the region. Most of possibilities for education, training and employment are centralized in capitals or cities that are university centres in the countries. It is clear that the Balkan countries have not yet been able to adequately address an

emigration and depopulation tendencies, while the institutional incentives to encourage young people to stay and contribute to social and economic development in their countries or local communities are still scarce.

Therefore the members of the Balkan Regional Platform for Youth Participation and Dialogue adopted a set of policy recommendations for the decision makers expressing, among other, the need to:

- increase the number of regional cooperation programmes financed by the national/regional and local governments in support to initiatives to enhance , educational, labour market (and apprenticeship), cultural and tourist youth mobility;
- create conditions for and/or enforcement of the regulations public transportation vehicles for youth with disability that would increase availability of educational, cultural, labour and tourist mobility;
- further develop and effectively translate into practice the local, national regional strategic plans on ways of intensifying exchanges aimed at the increased mobility of pupils, students and youth outside of the formal education system and NEET youth;
- establish adequate and sustainable funding instruments by the governments for the provision of scholarships for regional youth exchanges in area of culture, education, work and tourism;
- improve the normative and strategic framework in line with SEE2020 recommendations and to overcome the obstacles in youth employment in other countries in the region, that are related to different national legislations regulating employment, labour and migrations in general;
- help stimulate synergies between formal and non-formal education and in this way maximize the benefits for youth regional co-operation and mobility processes;
- enhance capacity building of the youth sector in order to improve the knowledge, information and competences needed to enhance youth mobility and the exchanges across the region;
- encourage more innovative policy framework for virtual/online mobility (educational - formal and non-formal education; for apprenticeship and labour force mobility) and improving the system for recognition of the skills and knowledge gained in this way. The appropriate use of internet in areas such as online news, online forums, online counselling, etc. could help promote self-reliance, psychological empowerment, lifelong learning and a better quality of life of young generation across the region.

## 6. YOUTH CULTURAL PARTICIPATION IN WESTERN BALKANS

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The right to participate in the “cultural life of a community, enjoy arts and share to share in scientific advancement and its benefits” (article 27) is listed in the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The recognition of cultural participation as a right of individuals and groups implies the responsibility of governments and local authorities to facilitate the recognition and articulation of this right.

Youth cultural participation is a well-researched concept. It is mostly based on measuring the participation of young people in cultural production and cultural reception. There are also numerous theoretical frameworks around the concept of cultural participation. One of the most quoted is Bennett’s definition used also by the UNESCO in measuring cultural participation. It states that cultural participation is “participation in the arts and everyday life activities that may be associated with a particular culture”. It refers to “the ways in which ethnically-marked differences in cultural tastes, values and behaviours inform not just artistic and media preferences but are embedded in the daily rhythms of different ways of life; and of the ways in which these connect with other relevant social characteristics – those of class and gender, for example .

The significance of cultural participation is recognised by the Council of Europe by establishing the Indicator Framework on Culture and Democracy (IFCD) and providing the data on two main domains: culture and democracy. The IFCD data is available for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. Among other, the data shows that there is a positive relationship between culture and democracy, culture and economy and culture infrastructure. Youth participation is consequently expected to have higher rates in developed democratic societies with stable economies and developed culture infrastructure.

Various research and policy reports tackling the youth participation issues in the Western Balkan countries (in this summary we refer to the WB5: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\* , Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia) identify similar conditions in all countries: very high youth unemployment rates, low youth income rates that come with lower educational levels and entering workforce at low(er) entry salaries, lower educational levels (in comparison to the EU average), low participation of people with disadvantaged background in education and labour market. Some reports also argue high levels of corruption and political centralisation of power. Similar economic and political condition as well as shared borders imply the need for increasing the regional cooperation which further on means that tackling listed issues in different fields can be more effective through regional programmes and projects. Consequently, the increment of number of programmes for regional cooperation as well as increment of funding and funding mechanisms is a precondition for dealing with listed issues.

This conclusion is even more relevant when it comes to topics such are cultural participation and youth that seem to be underfunded in all W5 countries. The main sources of funding of youth and youth organisations comes from the EU sources through various development and mobility programmes.

National and local governments do have different funding mechanisms that are earmarked for youth organisations, though reports suggest that they are often insufficient, different between local communities and seldom available for promoting regional cooperation.

Apart from similar youth living conditions in the WB5 countries research articles come to similar conclusions when looking at youth cultural participation. All countries have set their strategic and legal framework that targets youth in similar way through youth strategies, action plans and laws. They all participate in the same EU funded programmes albeit with different participation rates. National and local governments are responsible for funding priorities identified by strategic documents. However, funding for culture and youth seems to be under a level that would enable dynamic development of youth cultural participation both in the terms of increasing participation rates and in terms of diversifying offer of cultural content.

One of the main conclusions that can be drawn from different reports is that cultural reception has much higher rates among young people than the cultural production. In addition, private cultural reception (reflected in at home activities: spending time on internet, watching television, reading etc.) has higher rates than public cultural reception (visiting museums, concerts and various public events). Still, reports suggest that young people in the WB5 countries do value cultural content and wish to increase their cultural participation. There is also a lack of well-developed cultural infrastructure as well as low rates of bottom-up initiatives together with lower youth activism rates.

The main conclusions of different reports can be summarised around four main topics:

1. There is a need to increase funding for programmes that would target the increment of regional cooperation and youth participation respecting and promoting multi-ethnic composition of local communities, social cohesion and increasing youth cultural participation. Decentralisation of governance aiming at decentralising youth cultural production.
2. **Further development of institutional and strategic frameworks** to support the development of youth sector and its alignment with regional and European policies.
3. **Widening the scope of participation:** both in the terms of the development of cultural infrastructure, the increment of cultural production among young people and the inclusion of individuals with disadvantaged background.
4. **Support the multi-sectoral approach** aiming at tackling main youth issues: from reducing unemployment, increasing self-employment, rates of highly educated young people to increasing and diversifying youth cultural participation. It also refers to the development of diverse inter-sectoral strategic partnerships between different industries, the development of information and transport systems, increasing youth mobility and projects including the representatives of different sectors.

## 7. LOCAL DEMOCRACY AGENCIES

### LOCAL YOUTH POLICIES AND PRACTICE

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This chapter provides description of main areas of activities of LDA partners over the past 4 years (2015-2018), and examples of good practice developed in the context of a programme Youth fund carried out in co-operation with local governments and intended for formal and informal youth groups.

- **LDA Prijedor, Bosnia and Herzegovina**

**Main areas of activities:** improving citizen participation in policy/decision making, support programme for poverty reduction, local civil society development, youth empowerment, support to social inclusion and local economic development, promoting the culture of remembrance, intercultural dialogue, preservation of cultural heritage;

*Local Youth Initiative: My City Intercultural City*

Informal Youth Group Alternativa is a group of young creative artists working together since 2017 formed in order to help enrich and diversify cultural expressions in their local community. They initiated a series of youth creative workshops to encourage young artists to explore cultural heritage of their city through presenting the historic narrative of the people whose names were given to the street names. They collected the data and created a set of interesting biographies of famous people from the city of Prijedor. An electronic and printed publication was created containing the narrative of outstanding individuals who have made the history and are part of the cultural heritage of Prijedor.

The team of ten students of secondary schools aged 15 to 18 conducted both the field research about the street names and created the data basis of the people the city streets were named after.

The organized a workshop with a local ethnologist, Mr Milenko Radivojac known also as “walking history book” who presented the personal narratives of some of the most important persons belonging to different historic eras. The cooperation with the city library “Cirilo and Metodije” was established in order to ensure scientific support in checking the historic data and explore more details from the professional and personal life of the selected persons. In this way their first publication containing the personal narrative of famous local writers, painters, sculptors, heroes from the World War 2 was prepared. My City Intercultural City is a collection of personal narratives presented through the lenses of youth in the form of a user friendly online and printed publication and serves as a kind of history textbook dedicated to the citizens of Prijedor.





*My City Intercultural City, Prijedor*

- **LDA Zavidovici, Bosnia and Herzegovina**

**Main areas of activities:** education for active citizenship, youth and women's empowerment, social welfare and service provision, CSO development, local sustainable development

*Local Youth Initiative: Strengthening the youth work in cultural and sports life in municipality of Zavidovići*

A group of young enthusiasts and basketball fans created an informal youth association Duh-Anima with only one aim: to transform an old, dilapidated parking lot in the downtown area of Zavidovici into the basketball playground and start organising basketball tournaments.

They started with their own hands – cleaning the dirt on and around the parking lot, setting up the benches, planting the trees around, fundraising for the basketball table, communicating their initiative with the neighbouring community. Simultaneously they launched the first open call for tournament via fb and other social networks and as a result 16 local teams were registered. The volunteers helped a lot in the preparatory stage and especially during the tournament. Clear procedures of writing requests, appeals and notices in application for the tournament were adopted.

In the second stage, the informal youth group wanted to make some bigger steps. They registered the sport-cultural youth associations „Duh-Animus“ in order to promote and revive youth sport activities, culture and tourism and at the same time encourage diverse cultural and artistic expression of young people in the Zavidovići municipality. Local municipal authorities supported them, and the year two was marked with organising cultural programmes, including a rock concert of „Zabranjeno pušenje“. Combining the basketball tournament, cultural animation and organisation of the rock concert, Duh-Animus succeeded in gathering some two thousand young people from BiH and the region in Zavidovici.

Further recognition came from the European FIBA, main basketball home, who included Zavidovici tournament in FIBA's calendar of streetbasket tournament 3x3 players.

In the next year the initiative has become an international tournament, and other than the teams from Bosnia and Herzegovina, teams from Serbia, Austria and Lithuania have also participated. The youth association actively advocates the youth participation in local policy making and for the first time the Municipal Youth council was established in Zavidovici, thus enabling youth groups to apply for funding from the municipal budget. A small youth initiative has become a factor of positive change in society. Informal youth groups joined and organised different activities: wall painting (the wall that separates the road from the playground and has not been renovated since the war conflict), with the help of local partners, they have also built bunks with a 120 seat capacity, a further motive why this tournament will be well visited in the coming years. Proactive youth engagement of Duh –Animus in co-operation with other youth associations resulted in enriched programmes and their increased participation at local level promoting Zavidovici as youth friendly municipality.



*Strengthening the youth work in cultural and sports life, Zavidovici*

- **LDA Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina**

**Main areas of activities:** education for active citizenship and participation in local policy / decision making, education for democratic governance and responsive performances of local self-government; empowerment of youth, women and marginalized groups, strengthening inter-sectoral co-operation, promotion of of EU integration in local community;

*Local Youth Initiative: Youth is the future (Na mladima cvijetostaje )*

LDA Mostar has established co-operation with informal youth group "Ekoomladina" (EcoYouth), in order to encourage youth activism for resolving some of the common citizens' concerns in local community of

the divided city of Mostar. They initiated youth workshops under a common title – „Good neighbors” and “Green wall”, intended for the youngsters aged 7-14 to raise awareness among young people on the importance of permaculture and recycling both from the point of increased information and knowledge share and practical implementation. Young participants had an opportunity to learn about the phases of planting, to find out more about the plants which are compatible with one another and to build their own green wall from the recycled plastic bottles.

In co-operation with the CSO Zemljani that has been successfully engaged in the promotion and practical application of modern and ecological methods of food production, “Ekoomladina” prepared the necessary conditions for continuing their project through information dissemination among the youth in rural area Potoci near the City of Mostar. The hand built log cottage was later used for the small school of promoting ecological agriculture and will provide conditions for continuing activities aimed at disseminating knowledge about sustainable and innovative practices in organic farming. Knowledge gained at the “Green Wall” workshop allowed participants to share it via social networks with hundreds of their schoolmates.



*Youth is the future, Mostar*

- **LDA Central and Southeast Serbia, Knjazevac Serbia**

**Main areas of activities:** Development of local democracy in the communities of Eastern, Southern and Central Serbia thru capacity building programmes for active citizenship and establishment of institutional sustainable mechanisms of citizens’ participation in policy/decision making; youth empowerment, education for youth cultural participation;

### *Local Youth initiative: Knjaževac – where the friends are*

LDA CSS has been working with a group of youngsters who gathered as volunteers in local NGO Centre for creative development. In order to get the young people from small community of Knjaževac closer to diverse cultural identities from around the globe, they came up with the idea for a project that will bring elements of other cultures closer to the local youth while promoting positive personal connections with peers from the region and all across the world. Main activity of the project “Knjaževac – where the friends are” was the exhibition of photographs taken by the friends of youngsters from Knjaževac that they met while participating in international exchanges, seminars, trainings. The concept of the project was such that youngster from Knjaževac invited their friends from all over the world were to take a selfie in front of the famous cultural heritage spot in their city, while holding a sign with words “Knjaževac – where the friends are” written in their native language. Each photo was accompanied with a name of a young person in the photo, name of their city and country and short description of the cultural heritage presented in the photograph.

Main goal of the project was to raise awareness of local youth about diverse cultures, languages, the richness of cultural heritage in other countries, as well as to point out the importance of the respect for cultural diversity while promoting intercultural dialogue through positive personal stories of their peers and their connections with the youth of Knjaževac.

Collection and selection of materials for the exhibition has been done during July and August 2017 by about 40 young volunteers of the Centre for creative development. Total of 94 photographs from 38 different countries and about 73 different cities from Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo\*, Malta, France, Germany, UK, Switzerland, USA, Brazil, China, Japan, Australia, Somalia and Serbia were collected.

After two weeks of promoting the main event among the youth of Knjaževac, on September 15<sup>th</sup>, an exhibition of collected photographs has been organized at the main pedestrian square of Knjaževac. A group of 20 volunteers setup the exhibition, organizing the photographs and captions, putting them on the panels. About 150 young visitors were present at the opening event. The event sparked interest of local media and had good visibility in the general population of Knjaževac. It is estimated that at least 1000 other visitors saw the exhibition during the next day. As an integral part of the exhibition a promotion of the mobility programmes for youth has been organized in cooperation with the Info point Knjaževac, a local voluntary youth info service established within the project “Balkan Regional Platform for Youth Participation and Dialogue” in the LDA office. This was a way to raise awareness and interest of local youth for concrete opportunities for their participation in some of many intercultural projects taking place all over the world.





*Knjazevac - where the friends are, Knjazevac*

- **LDA Kosovo, Peja/Pec Kosovo\***

**Main areas of activities:** promotion of diversity of cultural expressions, promoting equal opportunities, empowerment of youth and women's associations, education for human rights and intercultural dialogue in multiethnic local community;

*Local Youth Initiative: Summer school PLAY, LEARN and be ACTIVE*

LDA Kosovo has established co-operation with local youth groups to help develop creative potentials and encourage them for learning artistic animation skills development so as to make short animated films to express their main concerns and to present them to the local public. Promotion of youth volunteering and informal education formats was combined with inclusive education activities with the aim to ensure equal access to marginalized group from neighbourhood "7 Shtatori". Animated movies designed and produced by the youngsters were presented at the final conference where they presented the results of the workshops and also initiated an open debate with the representatives of local government and local cultural institutions.

All together, the summer school programme involved 58 participants, divided in three groups facilitated by two senior trainers - animators per each group. Interactive workshops included a wide range of creative expressions - painting, drawing, and a lot of group games. Training programme included workshops with the aim to jointly create two animation movies, while the young trainees had the opportunity to follow all steps of the creation of a short animation movie, through the support of international experts, getting knowledge and using specific IT tools for the creation of short movies. The working process passed in these phases: Definition of topics of the animation movies, Story board creation and implementation, Creation of the characters, Creation of the scenery/setting, Frames shooting and Video editing. On the occasion of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the awarded group "NismapërPaqedheUnitet" together with Trentino con i Balcani organized the workshop promoting children's rights at the LDAK office. During the workshop participants made

drawings based on some of the articles that are in this Convention. They were focused on the equality principles, health care, social welfare, education, the right to play and nutrition.



*Summer school PLAY, LEARN and be ACTIVE, Peja-Peć*

- **LDA Subotica, Serbia**

**Main areas of activities:** Capacity building programmes for local civil society development and responsive performances of local self-government, promotion of intercultural dialogue and education; cross-border and regional co-operation programmes, youth empowerment, monitoring public administration reform, promotion of EU integration in local community.

*“Inclusive Youth Forum Theater”*

LDA Subotica was working on Inclusive Youth Forum Theatre within a project implemented by the association “Zajedno” in the framework of the public call within the Local Youth Initiatives: "Increasing access of young people to culture and creative tools, especially young people with less opportunities". Young people with disabilities were involved in cultural, sports and recreational and other social activities to a large extent exclusively within organized group visits by parent associations or school institutions they attend. The lack of support for young people with disabilities, as well as the conditions for adequate inclusion in cultural contents, is negatively reflected in the quality of leisure time making, which is a major problem for the general population of young people. This project was based on learning the social community theatre approaches methodologically developed and adjusted to the youth group involved by the association “Zajedno”. Participants were encouraged to give examples of violence and discrimination that exist in the school and social life of young people and together with artistic trainers created three different Forum Theater performances. Forum theater workshops with high school students were organized in three high schools in Subotica with the total duration of one Forum Theater of three school classes. Forum Theater methodology is a form of interactive theater - the so-called

"Theater of the Oppressed" in which the character named "joker" (leader), after performing a scene of violence or discrimination, involves the audience. The audience responds to a certain part of the scene and takes up the role of the character they can identify with, and in this way "change" the course of the performance.

The following results were achieved within the framework of the *"Inclusive Youth Forum Theater"*: 21 drama workshops with secondary students were realized. Forum performances were realized in three secondary schools with 80 students applied engaging them to interact both with their peers and teachers through the social community theatre methodology and in this way help them better understand "the other" and make positive changes in the school environment.



*Inclusive Youth Forum Theater, Subotica*

- **ALDA Skopje, North Macedonia**

**Main areas of activities:** international decentralized co-operation development, education for active citizenship, civil society development, good governance at local level; promotion of EU integration at local level;

*Youth initiative: "Cultural (R)evolution"*

As the cultural and entertaining offer of the city of Kavadarci directed at youngsters was low and unsatisfactory the informal Youth Council Kavadarci decided to take the matter in their hands and with the financial help of the Youth Fund of the Balkan regional platform for youth participation and dialogue organized a one-day youth festival with an excellent cause, filling the shelves of the high school libraries of Kavadarci with new books.





*Cultural (R)evolution, Kavadarci*

Musicians, bands and ballet schools from Kavadarci were part of this musical event that has a bigger goal than promoting good music to the locals. Everyone was invited to join the initiative and enjoy the performances if they have the entrance ticket – book donation. All the persons from the audience donated old and new books as an entrance ticket. About 100 people of all ages performed traditional and modern Macedonian songs, as some famous international songs, and finally danced different routines for the peoples of Kavadarci. Many of the musicians donated their time for the event, in their way contributing to the cultural expressions development of Kavadarci. The Municipality of Kavadarci fully supported the project and the event and provided the space for the performances.

The Youth council of Kavadarci gathered around 200 books from the event. After the event they were approached by other citizens who missed the event but still wanted to contribute. The volunteers were receiving the books even two weeks after the event. The aim of the project was to promote reading books and increase the library funds in Kavadarci schools, so the project showed a stunning success. The organizers believe that the project will inspire similar initiatives in the future.

- **LDA Montenegro, Niksic, Montenegro**

**Main areas of activities:** Capacity Building for NGOs and local self-government, promoting human rights and inclusive development in local community, empowering youth for participation in local public life, promotion of social welfare and sustainable development, awareness raising of EU accession negotiation in local community;

*Local Youth initiative „Equal and Different“*

LDA Montenegro has established co-operation within the project **“Equal and Different”** submitted by informal group of former and current students of the elementary school “MilevaLajovicLalatovic” as an initiative for inclusion. Project’s aim was to promote equal access to education for all, especially Roma



people and children with disabilities. During the public debate “Let’s erase linguistic barriers (too)” which was focused on linguistic barriers that Roma children face in their daily school routine and defining it as one of the biggest obstacles for social inclusion of Roma students. The local public debate was followed by fundraising activities in order to contribute to the construction of hydraulic wheelchair elevator in school. This activity was a real success. It gathered the former students of school, local community and broader community. Former students together with art teacher in this school prepared successful exhibition of 20 paintings. It was a very successful fundraising event for the whole community. Large number of people showed up at the exhibition, willing to donate by buying pieces of art made by former students. Municipality of Niksic supported this project and to encourage citizens to actively participate in similar actions. This was the first time in Niksic that former students and professors took action towards meeting (their former) elementary school needs. Small initiative also brought together the school and the LDA MNE and broadened their further cooperation through additional project proposal to the Ministry of Education in order to make school completely without barriers (linguistic, physical, architectonic, social etc) for all of its students.



*Equal and Different, Niksic*

Links:

<https://www.mladiniksica.me/os-mileva-lajovic-lalatovic-bivsi-ucenici-za-vecu-inkluziju/>

<https://nasasarenaslagalicawordpress.com/2018/10/24/jednaki-a-razliciti/>

<https://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/niksic-bivsi-ucenici-pomazu-da-skola-dobije-hidraulicno-dizalo?slika=0>

## 8. CONCLUSION

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The project **Balkan regional platform for youth participation and dialogue**, implemented from 2015-2018 by the lead applicant – the European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA) and respective co-applicants, dealt with all major topics relevant to young people in the area: citizen participation in policy/decision making, civil society development, education for active citizenship, support for poverty reduction, local civil society development, youth empowerment, women's empowerment, support for social inclusion and local economic development, local sustainable development, culture of remembrance, intercultural dialogue, preservation of cultural heritage, strengthening inter-sectoral co-operation, promotion of EU integration, dialogue in multiethnic local community, cross-border and regional co-operation and other. These activities are good examples of regional cooperation of young people and the youth organisations.

Importantly, the project pointed out that the opening up of countries in Central, Eastern and Western Europe and their accession as member states to the European Union brought new dimension to youth issues. A general aspiration for a full membership in the EU poses is an important catalyst for the strategic and legislative reform and institution building in WB5 countries concerned, although that are still undergoing democratic transformation. The commitment to systematic approach to youth policies resulted in the form of establishment of institutional, strategic and legal frameworks at all levels of governance. However, the region is characterized by unevenly developed infrastructure for youth work and still insufficiently developed regional cooperation initiated and supported by local governments. That is the reason why projects like this should receive wider institutional support.

Furthermore, youth participation become a means for promoting democracy and active citizenship in this context. Aiming to assure meaningful young person's social inclusion, stakeholders are encouraged to include youth in the process of social change at the local level, as well as in a more global society, regardless of their age, class, cultural background, gender identity and sexual orientation, lifestyle, religious and political affiliations, residence and ethnicity, particularly Roma young people and their families. Nevertheless, the legislative treatment of vulnerable and marginalised groups has been mainly neglected across the region. Apart from unemployment and poverty, discrimination is identified as one of the most important issues colouring realities of contemporary youth in the WB5 countries and is mainly based on economic status, political affiliation, residence and ethnicity.

A distinctive factor lies in a widespread belief amongst youth that participation requires a particular set of skills including aptitude in interpersonal relations, rhetorical dexterity, and networking ability. Such a perception is even more evident amongst youth experiencing social and political exclusion, most of whom consider an omnipotent political power as alien and intimidating. Education for active citizenship (through informal and formal learning) within the context of powerful political influence and weak

democratic institutions is therefore proven to have a pivotal role for making the environment of youth participation more conducive and for the democratic life across the region.

In order to boost and amplify youth participation in the Western Balkans, recommendations for policy and practice are focusing on the following areas of improvement:

1. *Fostering a shared understanding of democratic participation of young people in public policy/decision making through improving fundamental conditions for youth participatory practice at local/national level thus overcoming the dominant perception of youth as marginalized or passive;*
2. *Furthering the legislative and institutional framework in support to increased regional mobility in education, youth employment opportunities, entrepreneurship development, social inclusion of marginalized youth groups providing incentives at grass-root level for youth to stay (and not only to leave the country);*
3. *Developing adequate formal and informal educational platforms for active citizenship through sustainable regional exchange programmes, educational and volunteering opportunities, peer-to-peer exchange, e-learning modules adjusted to diverse youth groups;*
4. *Encouraging youth inter-cultural dialogue and understanding, through exchange programmes at cross-border and regional level making use existing European practice and through introducing innovative co-operation platforms enabling a constant information flow and effective participation in civil dialogue;*
5. *Providing accessible co-operation and learning platforms for youth to engage more effectively in democratic reforms and consultation process on EU integration perspective of the Western Balkans.*

In the end, it is reasonable to conclude that the implementation of the project **Balkan regional platform for youth participation and dialogue** (from 2015-2018) has set a platform for the future developments in this area.

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## COORDINATION

ALDA - European Association for Local Democracy  
c/o Council of Europe, 1, avenue de l'Europe  
F-67075 Strasbourg , France

Phone: +33 3 90 21 45 93

Fax: +33 3 90 21 55 17

E-mail: [alda@aldaintranet.org](mailto:alda@aldaintranet.org)

[www.alda-europe.eu](http://www.alda-europe.eu)



[www.alda-balkan-youth.eu](http://www.alda-balkan-youth.eu)

**ALDA SKOPJE**  
[www.alda-europe.eu](http://www.alda-europe.eu)  
[aldaskopje@aldaintranet.org](mailto:aldaskopje@aldaintranet.org)

**LOCAL DEMOCRACY AGENCY  
CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN SERBIA**  
[ldacss@aldaintranet.org](mailto:ldacss@aldaintranet.org)

**LOCAL DEMOCRACY AGENCY KOSOVO**  
[ldakosovo@aldaintranet.org](mailto:ldakosovo@aldaintranet.org)

**LOCAL DEMOCRACY AGENCY MOSTAR**  
[www.ldamostar.org](http://www.ldamostar.org)  
[ldamostar@aldaintranet.org](mailto:ldamostar@aldaintranet.org)

**LOCAL DEMOCRACY AGENCY NIKŠIĆ**  
[www.aldnk.me](http://www.aldnk.me)  
[ldamontenegro@aldaintranet.org](mailto:ldamontenegro@aldaintranet.org)

**LOCAL DEMOCRACY AGENCY PRIJEDOR**  
[ldaprijedor@aldaintranet.org](mailto:ldaprijedor@aldaintranet.org)

**LOCAL DEMOCRACY AGENCY SUBOTICA**  
[www.lida-subotica.org](http://www.lida-subotica.org)  
[ldasubotica@aldaintranet.org](mailto:ldasubotica@aldaintranet.org)

**LOCAL DEMOCRACY AGENCY ZAVIDOVIĆI**  
[www.lida-zavidovici.org](http://www.lida-zavidovici.org)  
[ldazavidovici@aldaintranet.org](mailto:ldazavidovici@aldaintranet.org)



Balkan regional platform for  
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