



RYCO **Annual Report** **2024**

Foreword

As we reflect on 2024, it is with great pride and a deep sense of responsibility that I present this annual report on behalf of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO). This past year has been one of remarkable progress, resilience, and impact. Through our collective efforts, RYCO has maintained strong focus on the European future of the region, has strengthened its institutional framework, expanded its advocacy outreach, and secured resources to further our mission of youth empowerment and regional cooperation in the Western Balkans.

Through our work this year we have shown that RYCO is not just an European project and organization linked closely to the Berlin Process; It is the main foundation, and a strong pillar dedicated to fostering peace, reconciliation, and cooperation among the youth of the Western Balkans. Born from the need to heal historical divisions and build a future based on trust, mutual respect, and shared opportunities, RYCO has been instrumental in transforming the regional landscape by empowering young people as agents of change. RYCO brought the notion of peace in every discussion, invigorated and empowered the European dream among the youth in WB.

Through our programs we have secured regional cooperation in all areas concerning youth including education, culture, activism, entrepreneurship, sports, environment and peace. RYCO has supported youth organizations, schools, teachers, cultural workers, National Youth Councils, and grassroots organizations by providing grants, building capacities, and organizing advocacy initiatives and events.

One of RYCO's major achievements in 2024 was the further institutionalization of our work. In terms of institutional development one of RYCO's major achievements this year was the finalization of the institutional reform process, management of change and arrival to the final consolidation of the institution. Throughout the year, we streamlined our internal processes, enhanced cross-departmental coordination, and reinforced the capacities of our staff and our Local Branch Offices (LBOs). 2024 will be also marked as the first year of full decentralization, bureaucratization and digitalization as this is the first year where RYCO has fully implemented a digitalized system of management. By investing in management and grant platforms that will make our work more effective and easily accessible to our grantees.

Advocacy has remained at the core of our work in 2024. We have actively engaged with policymakers, regional institutions, and international stakeholders to advance the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) Agenda. Through high-level meetings and policy dialogues, RYCO has successfully advocated for greater investment in youth programs and the integration of youth perspectives into policy frameworks. Additionally, RYCO facilitated numerous advocacy campaigns at the local level, ensuring that our work resonates beyond institutional settings. Our engagement with educational institutions, youth organizations, and grassroots initiatives has strengthened the role of young people as active contributors to peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts in their communities.

2024 also marked a year of significant progress in fundraising and resource mobilization. RYCO successfully secured new funding partnerships with European institutions, international organizations, and regional donors. This financial support has enabled us to expand our programs, launch new initiatives in support of the YPS agenda in 2025, and provide direct grants to youth-led organizations working on reconciliation and peacebuilding.

Lastly, as in previous years, RYCO has demonstrated its fiscal responsibility and its ability to manage large scale grants in an effective manner. Our latest audit reports show that RYCO is a credible organization worthy of the task it has been given – to support the youth sector and the youth in building peace through its many programs and initiatives.

As we move forward, our focus remains on deepening our impact, expanding our outreach, and further institutionalizing youth participation in regional decision-making processes. The launch of the RYCO Strategic Plan 2025-2027 sets a clear roadmap for the years ahead, outlining our commitment to strengthening youth mobility, fostering intercultural dialogue, and advocating for inclusive policies that empower young people.

The success of 2024 would not have been possible without the dedication of our team, the unwavering support of our partners, and most importantly, the engagement of the young people who drive our mission forward. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who has contributed to RYCO's journey this year.

Together, we will continue to build a Western Balkans where young people are at the forefront of change, shaping a future based on peace and cooperation.

Albert Hani,
Secretary General of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office



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AB	Advisory Board
AFD	Agence française de développement (French Development Agency)
AIESEC	International Association of Students in Economics and Business
BMZ	Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (Germany)
CBT	Capacity Building Training
CfP	Call for Proposals
CP , ALB, BIH, KOS, MNE, MKD, SRB	Contracting Party 1. Albania 2. Bosnia and Herzegovina 3. Kosovo* 4. Montenegro 5. North Macedonia 6. Serbia <i>* 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</i>
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
Forum ZfD	Forum Civil Peace Service
GB	Governing Board
GMFA	German Ministry of Foreign Affairs
GIZ	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Agency for International Cooperation)
HR	Human Resources
HO	Head Office
LBO	Local Branch Office
HLBO	Head of Local Branch Office
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation

List of abbreviations

NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OC	Open Call
OFAJ	L'Office franco-allemand pour la Jeunesse (Franco-German Youth Office)
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
REL	Research, Evaluation, and Learning
RISE	Regional Incubator for Social Entrepreneurs
RYCO	Regional Youth Cooperation Office
SE	Social Entrepreneurship
SEEYN	South East European Youth Network
UN	United Nations
WB	Western Balkans
WB6	Western Balkans six
WB YCF	Western Balkan Youth Cultural Fund
YR	Youth Representative
YPS	Youth, Peace, and Security

1.Executive summary

In 2024, the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) reinforced its role as a key actor of reconciliation and youth empowerment across the Western Balkans. At a time when the region continues to face social and political divisions, RYCO's work has been crucial in creating opportunities for young people to engage in meaningful dialogue, build lasting connections, and contribute to peaceful coexistence.

Throughout the year, RYCO remained committed to fostering regional collaboration, mobility, and intercultural learning, ensuring that young people had the tools and platforms necessary to shape a more inclusive and stable future. By bringing together youth from diverse backgrounds, RYCO directly addressed longstanding barriers to trust and understanding, enabling young people to become active participants in the region's reconciliation efforts.

As part of its mission in 2024, RYCO expanded its outreach and strengthened its partnerships with key institutions, governments, and civil society actors. This led to an increase in regional initiatives that foster youth cooperation and create sustainable networks of peacebuilders. Through its diverse programs and policy engagement, RYCO has continued to bridge the gap between youth and decision-makers, ensuring that young voices are heard and included in shaping the region's future. In 2024, RYCO strengthened its programs, built new partnerships, and increased youth participation across its initiatives.

Key highlights of the year include:

Successful Implementation of the 6th Open Call for Proposals, reinforcing RYCO's commitment to supporting both grassroots organizations and developed organizations. With 152 applications received, 13 projects were funded, supporting initiatives that prioritize youth-led activities in peacebuilding, reconciliation, and active engagement in civic life. RYCO improved the grant application process by introducing an online management system and inclusive pre-application information sessions.

Western Balkans Youth Cultural Fund, successfully launched two open calls in 2024, supporting 40 projects in arts, culture, and creative activism. The fund promoted youth-driven cultural initiatives that contribute to regional dialogue, identity-building, and peacebuilding through artistic expression.

RYCO's role in the Berlin Process, particularly in organizing the Western Balkans Youth Forum 2024 in Berlin. This event gathered over 100 young participants, government officials, and key stakeholders to discuss topics such as youth participation, democracy, and the future of the region within the European integration framework. The Forum also provided a platform for youth to contribute their perspectives on regional cooperation and peacebuilding efforts.

Promotion of the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) Agenda, a priority area for RYCO in 2024. Through 29 youth-led local initiatives, RYCO supported projects that enhanced institutional trust, strengthened peacebuilding mechanisms, and encouraged youth participation in national and local governance. Additionally, the organization published materials and created podcast episodes under the “Generation Peace” series to foster knowledge-sharing and regional dialogue.

Strengthened Local Branch Office (LBO) engagement, ensuring that RYCO’s presence and impact are felt across WB6. The LBOs played a key role in implementing projects at the local level, conducting stakeholder consultations, and advocating for youth-inclusive policies. This approach solidified RYCO’s role as a connector between young people and decision-makers.

Apart from implementing activities on a regional and local level, during 2024, RYCO looked to the future with the creation of the RYCO Strategic Plan 2025-2027. This key document was created through a highly participatory and consultative process designed to ensure that youth and their needs both regional and local are met. This strategic framework will guide RYCO’s future actions, emphasizing innovation, youth engagement, and sustainable regional cooperation. Key phases of the strategy development process included:

Extensive stakeholder consultations: Over 140 stakeholders, including youth organizations, policymakers, and institutional representatives, were engaged in discussions to align RYCO’s priorities with the evolving needs of young people in the Western Balkans 6.

Youth participation through Strategy Circles: The Western Balkans Youth Forum 2024 served as a platform for youth consultations on the new strategic plan, ensuring that young people’s voices are embedded in RYCO’s future direction. Strategy Circles provided valuable insights into four key pathways for change, which will define RYCO’s operational focus until 2027.

Integration into the Berlin Process: The strategy development was discussed at high-level meetings with EU and Western Balkans leaders, further emphasizing RYCO’s role in shaping regional youth cooperation policies.

As RYCO transitions into its next strategic cycle, the organization remains committed to deepening youth participation in policy processes, fostering reconciliation, and promoting sustainable regional cooperation. The 2024 Annual Report highlights a year of progress, collaboration, and meaningful youth engagement, setting a strong foundation for the ambitious goals outlined in the **RYCO Strategic Plan 2025-2027**.

2.RYCO's results: Program mission

2.1 Grant Making

2.1.1 RYConnecting Youth 5th/6th Open Call



The 6th Open Call is in line with RYCO's commitment to support both small organizations and established organizations with experience in RYCO's thematic areas and project cycle management.

Development and Objectives of the 6th RYCO Open Call

The RYCO team designed the 6th Open Call for Project Proposals to align with the current RYCO Strategy and to prioritize empowering young people not merely as participants in project activities but as co-designers and co-implementers. The Call also aimed to provide substantial support to grassroots organizations. Drawing on lessons learned from previous calls, the application process was simplified and complemented by inclusive information sessions held prior to the submission deadline.

Enhancements were introduced through the online grants management system, which improved application quality and contributed to a significant increase in the number of applications (lead applicant and partners numbers) compared to the 5th Open Call. Additionally, a program negotiation phase was incorporated for projects of lower technical quality the same as previous call. This phase will allow grantees to receive targeted feedback to refine their proposals, ensuring the overall quality of RYCO-funded projects.

Additional sub-activities were included in the guidelines to address key RYCO focus areas, such as peace-building and reconciliation

Key Aspects of Valued Projects:

- Meaningful Engagement: Projects that prioritize active participation and co-creation with youth.
- Opportunities for Learning and Understanding: Initiatives fostering knowledge exchange and mutual understanding among participants.
- Innovative Use of Digital Tools: Creative integration of digital solutions to address project objectives.
- Proposed Sub-Areas for Projects Focused on Peacebuilding and Reconciliation

Category	Total
Received applications (5th OC)	137
Received applications (6th OC)	152
Total number of partners	242
Total entities involved (applicants + partners)	395
Average number of partners per application	1.7

The thematic areas are as follows:

- *Thematic Area 1:* Peacebuilding and Reconciliation - 72 applications (47%)
- *Thematic area 2:* Youth empowerment and engagement in society – 80 applications (53%)

Divided by the RYCO Contracting Party, the origin of the applicants was as follows:

Contracting Party	Applicants	Partners	Final Applicants	Final Partners	Total Entities
Albania	33 (22%)	37 (15%)	2 (15.4%)	5 (17%)	7 (16%)
Bosnia and Herzegovina	24 (24.16%)	34 (14%)	2 (15.4%)	4 (14%)	6 (14%)
Kosovo*	25 (16%)	38 (16%)	2 (15.4%)	5 (17%)	7 (16%)
Montenegro	15 (15%)	25 (10%)	1 (7.7%)	5 (17%)	7 (16%)
North Macedonia	23 (15%)	39 (16%)	2 (15.4%)	3 (10%)	5 (12%)
Serbia	32 (32.21%)	69 (29%)	4 (30.7%)	11 (26%)	11 (26%)

The overall financial package for 13 grantees selected on the 6th OPEN CALL

supported by RYCO: 300 000 EURO

Duration of the projects: 4 months - 8 months

Implementation period: March 2025 - October 2025□

2.2.RYCO Donor funded projects

2.2.1 Western Balkans Schools Exchange Scheme (Superschools)



Implementation of the 3rd Open Call (2024-2025)

Superschools exchange scheme is a regional initiative aimed at fostering peacebuilding and reconciliation in the Western Balkans through school-to-school partnerships. These partnerships are formed between two secondary schools from different RYCO Contracting Parties, working collaboratively to design and implement Superschools projects. At the heart of each project is the Superschools youth exchange, a short-term learning mobility program that brings together young people and their school staff from both schools. Each partnership organizes two youth exchanges—one hosted by each school—providing opportunities for regional cooperation and intercultural learning. The exchanges play a crucial role in promoting reconciliation and peacebuilding in the region by developing intercultural competencies among participants.

In the 3rd Open Call, a total of 113 applications were submitted. The platform Superschools.net received 579 schools registered, with 21 long-term partnerships applying with project ideas. Out of these, 45 partnerships were awarded, highlighting the success of the initiative in fostering collaboration and innovation within the educational sector.

ALB (16)	BiH (16)	MNE (5)	KOS* (8)	MKD (15)	SRB (30)
KOS (2)	ALB 2	ALB 1	ALB 2	ALB 1	ALB 10
BIH 2	KOS 2	BIH 1	BIH 2	BIH 2	BIH 9
CG 1	MNE 1	KOS 1	MNE 1	MNE 1	MNE 1
MKD 1	MKD 2	SRB 1	MKD 2	KOS 2	KOS 1
SRB 10	SRB 9	MKD 1	SRB 1	SRB 9	MKD 9

Of the 113 applications, 21 were for long-term partnerships supported that included well-developed project ideas. These partnerships represented a significant portion of the overall applications and were a key feature of the open call's success. The exchanges were carried out by teachers whose capacities were raised to design and implement quality youth exchanges improved through the Superschools program.

The core idea of the new project was to further develop the Superschools exchange scheme based on the lessons learned from the previous two calls. The project aimed to further customize the scheme to accommodate the needs and capacities of schools, on one hand, and meet the objectives of the RYCO program, on the other hand. The ultimate goal was to create a sustainable, user-friendly, efficient, impact-oriented, and regionally recognizable scheme for secondary school exchanges that would contribute to reconciliation efforts in the Western Balkan region. In 2024, the Superschools 2.0 project successfully carried out activities under two distinct LOTs, each contributing to the overarching goals of fostering youth exchanges, building partnerships, and ensuring the sustainability of the program's impact. The project unfolded in five phases, from the application process to capacity building, all of which played a critical role in the successful implementation of the initiative.

Superschools program is part of a multi donor project co-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 the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO).

2.2.2 The Regional Incubator for Social Entrepreneurs (RISE)



The Regional Incubator for Social Entrepreneurs (RISE) aims to strengthen and enrich the regional ecosystem in the Western Balkans 6, empowering young people to develop innovative social ideas and transform them into impactful solutions. Through this, RISE fosters reconciliation, cooperation, and mobility across the region. In 2024 RISE opened new opportunities for reconciliation between young people in the Western Balkans through its support program, The RISE Journey. The program aims to encourage social entrepreneurship among young people in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, Northern Macedonia and Serbia. RISE is also committed to strengthening the capacity of the regional ecosystem by providing ongoing support to six local incubators to refine their support systems. In 2024 the call for applications was open from September to October 2024, leading to the selection of 160 young social entrepreneurs for RISE Journey #4.

The final number of applications for each contracting party in the open call 2024 is listed below:

Albania	34 applications
Bosnia and Herzegovina	22 applications
Kosovo	24 applications
Montenegro	20 applications
North Macedonia	30 applications
Serbia	30 applications

The selected RISErs have explored a diverse range of themes for their social business ideas, including employment, the circular economy, social inclusion, health, education, ecotourism, sports, agriculture, the creative industry, innovation, and high technology. While employment, the circular economy, and ecotourism emerged as the most prominent topics, many other important themes have been addressed by the participating teams. 160 risers, young entrepreneurs in the Region started the RISE Journey #4 with ideation phase. Their path during 4 months of the ideation phase went through packages of trainings, meet ups mentoring sessions coaching and experts; consultations. Based on the time framework of the RISE project 160 young entrepreneurs composed in 50 teams selected on Ideation phase successfully completed all 8 modules of training (for the details please refer to the table below) for 4 months. After 4 months of the ideations phase, RYCO organized 6 DEMO Days in February, where the risers' teams pitched their ideas before the jury members composed for each CP who is composed of professionals and experts in the field of social entrepreneurship and youth topics. Based on the scores of the jury the RISErs were granted awards to continue working on their business ideas. Finally, the regional Mobility program- RMP supported 54 risers to travel in the Region. Through the RMP they had the opportunity to connect with their peers/social enterprises, explore the similar concepts of social entrepreneurship in the WB6 and share the lessons learned and the positive stories and to strengthen regional perspective.

Type	Activity name	Participants
Launching the 4th open call	Kick Off RISE 3 Journey	160
Info session for 4th open call	6 Local Info Sessions	135
Training	6 Regional intercultural training	115
Training	33 training sessions on social business development,	148
Meet -ups	19 meetups for community building	88
Mentoring	182 mentoring sessions, (involving the pool of experts)	130
Coaching	135 one-to-one coaching sessions	60
Consultations	26 experts' consultations,	35
Mobility	Regional Mobility Program	54
Events	Rise 5th anniversary	252
Visibility and Media activities	Project's staff media appearances	24
Total participants		

On November 5, 2024, RISE (Regional Incubator for Social Entrepreneurs) marked a significant milestone by celebrating its fifth anniversary in WB. The events served as a platform for underlining the project's achievements over the years and showcased the impact created by bringing together prominent stakeholders, inspiring young social entrepreneurs, diplomats, and entrepreneurial leaders from the Western Balkans. The RISE project is launched by a consortium composed of the RYCO, AFD, EC, GROUPE SOS Pulse and OFAJ and 6 Local Incubators.

2.2.3 Western Balkan Youth Cultural Fund



The Western Balkan Youth Cultural Fund aims to bring together the cultural scenes from across the region by supporting grass-roots cultural initiatives which will serve as a valuable contribution to foster regional cooperation and mutual understanding of intercultural dialogue, peacebuilding and reconciliation processes. In order to achieve this the project provides grants to cultural organizations and cultural practitioners as well as provides opportunities for capacity building for this target group through trainings and workshops.

In 2024 the project supported 40 grantees, organized 7 local workshops, 1 annual regional training, 2 onsite info sessions, 7 online info sessions, and 2 online regional info sessions. In 2024, two open calls (2nd and 3rd) were launched. The 2nd Open Call for Project Proposals, WB Youth Cultural Fund was launched on 11 March 2024 and the deadline for submission of the applications was 11 April 2024. During the 30-day period, the total number of submitted applications was 90 (45 applications proposals for Lot 1 and 45 applications proposals for Lot 2). The 3rd Open Call was launched on 10 September 2024 and the deadline for submission of the applications was 10 October 2024. During the 1-month period, the total number of submitted applications was 95 (40 applications proposals for Lot 1, 47 applications proposals for Lot 2 and 7 applications for Lot 3, Peace Champions Grant). In total, 185 applications were received for both open calls last year. The number of the awarded partnerships for all the three lots for both open calls is 42.

The final number of applications for each contracting party in two the open calls of 2024 is listed below:

Contracting Party	Number of applications
Albania	35 applications
Bosnia and Herzegovina	31 applications
Kosovo	21 applications
Montenegro	17 applications
Nort Macedonia	41 applications
Serbia	40 applications

In the table below, you can find the division of the 40 grantees awarded per each contracting party in 2024:

Contracting Party	Lot 1	Lot 2	Lot 3
Albania	2	3	1
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2	4	1
Kosovo	3	3	1
Montenegro	2	2	1
Nort Macedonia	3	3	1
Serbia	2	5	1

The contracts of the 2nd cycle entered into force on June 17th, 2024, and shall remain until April 30th, 2025, when all the 19 granted grantees will have to finish all the reporting work of their implemented activities.

In addition to the granting scheme throughout the year, a series of Information Sessions and Workshops focused on social change through art and culture were organized across all 6 Contracting Parties. These sessions and workshops were designed to disseminate essential information and knowledge to potential applicants. Moreover, there were 14 online Info Sessions and 7 workshops for the 2 nd call and the 3 rd call during the past year. In addition, 2 regional online information sessions were organized per each call.

Additionally, during 2024, more than 50 articles have been published in local online media portals, newspapers and magazines where Youth Cultural Fund projects have been covered. Also, organizers and staff of YCF activities have participated in more than 50 tv show interviews and news media coverages. So, in total, according to our calculations YCF has been part of 110 media appearances in the local media outlets.

The Western Balkans Youth Cultural Fund (WB YCF) is a project funded by the German Federal Foreign Office and co-financed by the Ministries of Culture of each Contracting Party.

2.2.4 RYCOGNIZED – Enhancing peacebuilding and reconciliation in WB6

The RYCOGNIZED project aims to foster peacebuilding, reconciliation, and regional cooperation in the Western Balkans (WB6). It focuses on strengthening institutional trust, promoting youth participation in decision-making, and advocating for effective and regional policies that support sustainable peace. The objectives of this project are to enable environment in the Western Balkans for peacebuilding, regional youth cooperation, and improving the position of youth and also to support the creation of the local and regional architecture for the implementation of the initiatives aimed at promoting youth involvement in peace and security through capacity building and investment in advocacy efforts.

To achieve these goals in 2024 two measures were to be taken:

Measure 1: Capacity Strengthening on the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) Agenda

The project expanded the RYCO Know-How Hub, a growing network of contributors focused on generating and sharing YPS-related knowledge. This included maintaining the YPS Subpage, an online platform where 33 research materials were published, along with launching six podcast episodes under the title “Generation Peace.” These podcasts provided insights on key peace and security topics, fostering dialogue and regional collaboration.

The YPS Academy was implemented as a structured, three-month capacity-building initiative for CSOs and expert communities. It included preparatory meetings, online sessions, and culminated in an onsite closing session in Tirana. This initiative empowered participants with the skills and knowledge necessary to advocate for peace and security within their communities.

A dedicated three-day training session for RYCO staff took place in Budva, enhancing the capacity of 44 staff members to effectively advocate for the integration of YPS principles into policy frameworks. This training emphasized key aspects of peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and the role of institutions in fostering meaningful youth engagement.

At the local level, 29 youth-led activities were successfully organized in collaboration with National Youth Councils (NYCs), reaching over 620 participants. These initiatives provided young people with the opportunity to take an active role in peacebuilding efforts, fostering dialogue between youth and policymakers, and promoting local ownership of the YPS agenda.



Measure 2: Strengthening Advocacy and Policy Engagement

A key component of the project was the development of the Peace Capital Methodology, a strategic framework designed to localize peacebuilding efforts. Through stakeholder consultations and working meetings, this methodology was refined and introduced to policymakers as a tool to systematically integrate peacebuilding initiatives into local governance structures.

In parallel, extensive consultations with over 140 stakeholders across the region contributed to the development of RYCO's Strategic Plan on Youth Involvement in Peace and Security.

This plan, covering the 2025-2027 period, provides a roadmap for institutional engagement and policy advocacy in the field of youth-led peacebuilding.

To strengthen the role of media in peacebuilding, the Peace Broadcasters Program was launched, offering capacity-building training for 12 young journalists. Through this initiative, participants received mentorship and guidance, leading to the production of seven articles focused on peace and security themes, which were published by Deutsche Welle and other media outlets.

Additionally, the project implemented a large-scale social media campaign, "Youth Shaping the Peacebuilding Process in WB6," which reached over 10,000 people. This campaign included promotional videos showcasing local YPS initiatives, amplifying the visibility of youth-led peacebuilding efforts across the region. The project is funded by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

2.2.5 Partnership between RYCO and the Federal Ministry of European and International Affairs of Austria

The primary aim of the project was to enhance youth participation in policymaking, promote regional cooperation, and strengthen the role of young people in the European integration process of the Western Balkans. The project also aimed to establish stronger connections between Western Balkans youth and the diaspora in Austria while facilitating knowledge exchange with Austrian institutions supporting European integration.

The project included a series of activities aimed at fostering youth engagement and collaboration. The first major activity was a study visit to Vienna from April 24-26, 2024, which brought together 23 participants from the Western Balkans and the diaspora in Austria, who engaged in structured consultations focused on identifying youth priorities and empowering national youth councils. Participants met with Austrian Ministries to learn about youth inclusion in legislative processes and held discussions with international institutions such as the OSCE, the Energy Community, and the Austrian Institute for International Affairs. Additionally, RYCO presented its Strategy Development Process 2025-2027, and participants interacted with the "Speak Up!" initiative, which supports proEuropean forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina.



The second major activity was the Youth MeetUp held in Sarajevo from July 22-24, 2024, an event focused on several key themes, including the Youth, Peace, and Security agenda, the integration of youth perspectives into policymaking, and the significant role of the diaspora in the socio-economic development of the Western

Balkans. The event gathered representatives from youth umbrella organizations, academia, and independent researchers, fostering a dynamic exchange of ideas. The project successfully strengthened dialogue between Western Balkans youth and diaspora in Austria, providing a platform for networking and collaboration among youth councils, policymakers, and stakeholders. It enhanced awareness of EU enlargement priorities and Austria's commitment to supporting the Western Balkans' integration process. Furthermore, it facilitated knowledge-sharing on youth participation in decision-making and established new partnerships that will contribute to long-term cooperation. The project was supported by Federal Ministry of European and International Affairs of Austria

2.2.6 Jeunes de 2 Rives (J2R)

Jeunes des 2 Rives (J2R) is a project focused on education in citizenship and international solidarity, aiming to empower young people from the Mediterranean basin and encourage their civic commitment. Targeting youth aged 15 to 25, the project aims to improve understanding and perception of solidarity and living together, to encourage and develop critical thinking, and to help them learn about cross-border citizenship. Led by Solidarité Laïque and co-funded by the French Development Fund, J2R provides young people with the tools and opportunities to actively shape their communities.

The J2R project was launched in Albania in December 2023 and was finalized in March 2025. The official kick-off event took place on February 1, 2024, in Tirana, bringing together four local organizations that played a key role in implementing project activities:

1. *Initiative for Social Change ARSIS – Tirana*
2. *HANA – Hand to Hand Against Nation Apathy – Lezhë*
3. *Center ‘Epoka e Re’ – Fier*
4. *The Youth of Ura Vajgurore – Dimal*



Over the course of the project, several key activities have taken place:

- **Capacity-building workshops:** 4 workshops were conducted to strengthen local NGOs' capacities in project implementation, media visibility, video production, and youth exchange implementation. These workshops equipped local NGO representatives with skills for implementing and promoting their initiatives.
- **Youth exchanges:** Two local exchanges and one international exchange, fostering cross-cultural dialogue and collaboration on environmental and cultural preservation were implemented by the partner organization in Albania, through small grants up to 5000 EUR. Activities included environmental protection workshops, trail marking and upcycling workshops.

• **Local Initiatives:** Partner organizations involved in this project implemented youth-led initiatives as part of the Youth Exchanges, to address specific community challenges, such as environmental conservation, with participants actively engaging in projects like tree planting, forest signage creation, and the promotion of sustainable practices.

Main Achievements:

• **Successful implementation of three youth exchanges fostering community engagement and international collaboration.**

• **47 direct participants, including young people from Albania and France and 33 indirect beneficiaries.**

• **Increased visibility of local NGOs through media workshops and video production, resulting in a stronger online presence for the organizations involved. Through these efforts, J2R Albania has contributed to shaping a more engaged and socially responsible youth community, reinforcing the values of solidarity and cross-border cooperation.**

2.2.7 MIRAI – Western Balkans Meet Japan: A bridge into the Future

RYCO and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA) continued the joint collaboration for the fifth consecutive year on the highly anticipated youth exchange program “Western Balkans meet Japan: A Bridge into the Future”. Since its start in 2018, the MIRAI Program has been fostering understanding and collaboration between Japan and the Western Balkans. The program continues to serve as a bridge between diverse cultures and perspectives. The MOFA started the program to support socio-economic reforms and facilitate reconciliation and cooperation in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. MIRAI stands for Mutual understanding, Intellectual Relations and Academic exchange Initiative.



For the selection process of the latest edition of this program in 2024, a call was launched on June 10th, 2024, through which more than 380 applications were received. Out of all applicants, a total of 13 young people were selected to participate in the program.

The exchange was implemented in the period 04 - 10 December 2024, which enabled the selected 13 participants from the Western Balkans to experience Japan. The group had the opportunity to visit Tokyo and Hiroshima and exchange experiences through different activities and interactive lectures on global issues with experts and students. Participants had the chance to visit Sofia University, Japan International

Cooperation Agency (JICA), Senso-ji Temple, Miyajima and other insightful landmarks during their stay.

So far, around 80 young people from Western Balkan region had an opportunity to participate in the MIRAI program, all sharing impressions of the life-changing experience that broadened their perspectives on intercultural relations, peacebuilding and networking.

2.3 Advocacy, cooperation and Partnership

In 2024, RYCO significantly advanced its advocacy efforts, fostering cooperation and building strategic partnerships to promote youth engagement, peacebuilding, and regional integration across the region. RYCO organized a series of high-level meetings, consultations, and strategic collaborations, in order to ensure that youth perspectives were integrated into national policy frameworks. Through engagement with decision-makers, RYCO successfully advocated for increased investment in youth initiatives, emphasized the importance of reconciliation in policy discourse, and facilitated stronger institutional links between government bodies and youth organizations.

On a regional level, RYCO actively engaged in collaborative efforts with European institutions and international organizations, reinforcing the importance of youth-driven solutions in addressing socio-economic and political challenges. By strengthening its network of partnerships, RYCO has laid the groundwork for long-term impact, ensuring that youth participation in governance, civic engagement, and cross-border cooperation remains a priority in regional decision-making processes. One of the main advocacy efforts was focused on the organization's role and its participation in the Berlin Summit, where RYCO provided the opportunity to young people to engage with European and regional policy makers and discuss youth challenges in the region. As part of the organization's engagement in the Berlin Process, RYCO organized the Western Balkans Youth Forum 2024 in Berlin. This event convened over 100 young participants, government officials, and key stakeholders to discuss youth participation, democracy, and the region's future within the European integration framework. The forum provided a platform for youth to contribute their perspectives on regional cooperation and peacebuilding efforts.

At the local level, RYCO's LBOs strengthened engagement by implementing projects, conducting stakeholder consultations, and advocating for youth-inclusive policies. Through the organization of local events and meetings with high-level representatives in respective CPs, the LBOs provided an opportunity for young people to engage in policy discussions and advocate for their needs and priorities.

Lastly, a key focus of RYCO's advocacy efforts in 2024 was promoting the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) Agenda, ensuring that young people across the region had a voice in peacebuilding processes. Advocacy for RYCO means supporting local actors in promoting key youth issues, especially when it comes to the YPS agenda. To fulfill this goal RYCO cooperated and supported National Youth Councils and Youth Umbrella Organizations to organize advocacy initiatives on a local level. These efforts have not only enhanced youth agency but have also positioned young people as key stakeholders in regional stability and progress.



Through these advocacy efforts, cooperative initiatives, and strategic partnerships, RYCO has reinforced its commitment to empowering youth, promoting peace and security, and fostering regional cooperation in the Western Balkans.

2.3.1 Role in the Berlin Process and engagement with Western Balkans leaders

In the framework of the 10th anniversary of the ‘Berlin Process’, in 2024 Youth Forum of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) was held at European House, Berlin where for over two days, more than 100 young people, representatives of government institutions and regional institutions from the Western Balkans gathered in and offered the participants from the Western Balkans the opportunity to express their ideas and opinions on political issues, economic and social challenges facing the region. This year's concept was extended by adding the European dimension. The Forum aimed at positioning young people as equal actors in the processes of regional cooperation and European integration. The central themes were strengthening regional dialogue, promoting peace and stability in the region/Europe, and promoting joint projects and initiatives that contribute to the further development and cooperation of the region. Particular attention was paid to the issue of European values, the importance of democratic processes and the role of young people in preserving and promoting these values. Another central question was that of active participation, the theme “Youth Participation and the Impact of Their Engagement”, which focused on the active involvement of young people in political and social processes.

The goal of the Youth Forum was to involve young people in the dialogue about the challenges and opportunities facing their region, but also to formulate concrete recommendations for political decision-makers and also to contribute to the development of future projects and initiatives and to provide feedback on the further development of RYCO and to strengthen concrete forms of support and cooperation.

The first day of the Youth Forum, October 13, began with the opening ceremony. The welcoming remarks and keynote speakers were followed by the first panel discussion titled “Youth Participation and the Impact of the Engagement”. The role of youth in politics and society was discussed with representatives of the governments of the Western Balkans and regional institutions and how their active participation in decision-making can have a long-term impact on the region and strengthen regional cooperation. It was also discussed how the Berlin Process and the work of RYCO plays a vital role in integrating young people into regional cooperation and policymaking. The panel discussion highlighted some positive examples of how ministries have increasingly organized talks and discussion rounds with young people before developing their strategies.



On the second day, October 14, the program began with further panels, including a discussion on the new dynamics of youth cooperation in the Western Balkans and an introduction to the strategic focus of RYCO. The day's program also included the “Strategy Circles for the Four Pathways of Change for 2027”, which served as a platform to gather feedback from young citizens, representatives of partner organizations and institutions involved in the conference for RYCO's further strategy development. All the inputs extracted from the pathways have been carefully considered for the new Strategy of RYCO 2025-2027.

In addition to the role that RYCO played in organizing the Youth Forum, the Secretary General of RYCO participated in the main summit of the leaders where he highlighted the importance that Berlin Process has had throughout the previous decade and with a special focus on fostering regional youth cooperation in the WB6. Part of the summit of the leaders were also six young people from WB6 selected by RYCO who had the opportunity to exchange their perspectives about the relevance of the regional cooperation and reconciliation with the leaders of WB6 as well as with EU states. They also shared their experience from the WB6 Youth Forum and demanded more support both political and financial in the next phase of the Berlin Process. Lastly, on October 14, RYCO Secretary General, Representatives of GIZ and Governing Board members of RYCO had a meeting with Mr. Sarrazin, the special envoy of German government for the WB6, where they discussed about the strategic partnership between RYCO and German Government as well as the important process which followed up after Youth Forum, such the approval of RYCO new strategy 2025-2027 and selection of new Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General.

2.3.1.1 Western Balkan Youth Forum international exchange

Prior to the organization of the Youth Forum RYCO in collaboration with Bürger Europas e.V, the Franco-German Youth Office (OFAJ DFJW), and supported by the German Federal Foreign Office, organized the international youth exchange “Being Active – The Participation of Young People for a Democratic Future.” This initiative brought together 30 young participants from the Western Balkans along with participants from France, Poland, and Germany, from the 9th to the 15th of October, in Berlin, culminating with the participation at the WB Youth Forum.

Participants engaged in high-level discussions with policymakers, activists, and institutional representatives, gaining first-hand insights into democratic processes and youth participation. A key highlight was the meeting with Mr. Manuel Sarrazin, Special Representative for the Western Balkans at the German Foreign Office, where youth participants discussed the role of the Berlin Process in fostering regional cooperation.



A visit to the German Bundestag facilitated an interactive exchange with Ms. Emily Vontz, the youngest Bundestag member, on the importance of youth engagement in politics. This session was followed by a guided exploration of the Reichstag building, deepening participants' understanding of Germany's democratic institutions. As the program progressed, participants visited the Berlin House of Representatives, engaging with young local politicians, including Ms. Klara Schedlich, to understand the role of youth in municipal decision-making.

The exchange culminated with the participants taking active part in the WB Youth Forum, where the young participants had the chance to engage with the highest level of policymakers in the field of youth and in the second day, participated in strategy circles aimed at shaping the new RYCO strategy. Discussions centered on institutional development, policy cooperation, youth networks, and active citizenship.

2.3.1.2 Western Balkans Summit – Permanent Logo Design and Promotion

In the framework of the Western Balkan Summit RYCO was tasked to design the permanent logo of the event. Through this project 6 young designers, each coming from different part of the Western Balkans region, has been chosen to work together in a group to create Western Balkans Summit Permanent logo, on the eve of the 10th Anniversary of the Berlin Process.

Project aimed to contribute to the meaningful participation of young people in the Western Balkans in the visibility and branding of the Berlin Process through the facilitation of quality regional co-design process and promotion. Furthermore, project aimed to foster cooperation and youth-led creative process, and to increase the promotion of the Berlin Process ahead of its 10th Anniversary. For the purpose of the project, RYCO launched an Open Call for designers between 18-30 years, promoting it on the RYCO website and social media platforms and through press release.

Preceding this, RYCO identified and chose experienced Creative Director to facilitate the process of selection of candidates and lead and coordinate the Creative team of young designers, serving as a mentor to the team. Following a competitive selection process, the talented team was selected, including Alkid Shuli (Albania), Rreze Guri (Kosovo), Amila Redzic (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Lana Klenak (Montenegro), Bojan Budzarovski (North Macedonia) and Milana Ruzic (Serbia).



Following face-to face 2-day workshop in Valbona, creative team continued working online and conducted several meetings during which logo proposals have been developed and discussed. After revision of submitted proposals, selection committee decided to choose the logo, thoughtfully crafted visual symbol of unity, cooperation, and shared aspirations between the Western Balkans (WB6) and the European Union (EU). For the 10th Anniversary of the Berlin Process, additional version of the logo has been produced.

Articles on RYCO website received more than 5K views, and Instagram posts related to the competition and logo promotion received over 3,500 likes, while Facebook engagement exceeded 2,200 likes. The campaign achieved a remarkable reach of 204,630 people. When it comes to promotion of the permanent logo competition and logo reveal in traditional media, distributed press releases resulted in more than 50 regional media mentions. Furthermore, in a press release related to Youth Forum, RYCO mentioned the permanent logo creation process and team of young designers in the content. Distribution of this press release gained an additional 53 mentioning in media outlets.

Additionally, for visibility and promotion purposes, RYCO integrated new visual identity and Berlin Process 10th Anniversary in email signatures of employees, memorandums, and other visual communication outputs. Furthermore, promo materials with integrated permanent Berlin Process Summit logo, were produced for the occasion of the Youth Forum that took place in Berlin.

2.3.2 Promotion of Youth Peace and Security Agenda

RYCO's continued its commitment to the promotion of the Youth, Peace and Security agenda in the Western Balkan region through the implementation of the RYCOgnized project. During 2024 the organization focused on mapping strategic partners on a local level, supported National Youth Councils in implementing advocacy activities and engaged in the creation of the Peace capital methodology.

2.3.2.1 Mapping Process:

RYCO conducted extensive consultations across all 6 CPs of the Western Balkans in August to shape its strategic approach to youth involvement in peace and security and to map crucial stakeholders working in advancing and promoting the YPS Agenda. These sessions engaged diverse target groups, including teachers, civil society organizations, and young people. In total, 54 young participants from the region contributed with their perspectives, while 140 representatives from other stakeholder groups such as teachers, institutional representatives and CSOs which provided insights on fostering a more inclusive and effective approach to peacebuilding and youth engagement. A comprehensive assessment identified existing YPS initiatives, institutional gaps, and policy needs. This process included consultations in all six Contracting Parties (CPs), gathering input from over 140 institutional representatives and youth organizations.



Additionally, six new podcasts titled “Generation Peace” were launched by each Local Branch Office (LBO) from November 2024 to January 2025, featuring discussions on youth governance, cultural heritage, and conflict resolution to further promote YPS Agenda in the region. These efforts aimed to document and strengthen the YPS knowledge base across the region. All promotional materials and articles summarizing key findings were published on the YPS website and shared across social media channels to ensure wider outreach

Advocacy Activities with National Youth Councils (NYCs):

From September to December 2024, a series of local Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) activities were implemented across the region of the Western Balkans (WB6), engaging over 620 participants through various initiatives aimed at advancing the YPS agenda. To strengthen YPS initiatives at the grassroots level, small-scale activities were organized within each CP (contracting party). These activities aimed to address specific peace and security issues identified during earlier meetups, engaging local communities, youth organizations, and relevant stakeholders in their implementation. A total of 29 activities were carried out, combining capacity-building sessions, research dissemination, advocacy campaigns, and interactive discussions. These initiatives empowered youth, fostered interethnic dialogue, and strengthened institutional partnerships for regional peacebuilding. Key achievements included enhanced understanding of YPS pillars, development of youth-led action plans, and policy advocacy for integrating the YPS agenda at local and regional levels.

The local YPS activities implemented across the WB6 countries have significantly advanced the regional YPS agenda by fostering collaboration among youth, policymakers, and civil society organizations. These initiatives addressed pressing issues such as interethnic dialogue, youth migration, and the digitalization of peacebuilding. The outcomes demonstrate the importance of sustained engagement, inclusivity, and evidence based advocacy in promoting the YPS agenda. Continued efforts to address challenges, such as institutional involvement and resource mobilization, will further strengthen the impact of these activities in building a more inclusive and secure future for the region.



All the YPS local activities were promoted by RYCO social media and in the channels of the NYCs and other umbrella organizations. Additionally, many of the activities reached local media in each CP. These activities were well-documented on social media, engaging photos, videos, and detailed event summaries on RYCO's website sustained interest, while newsletters featuring these highlights generated additional enthusiasm. An article was published on the RYCO website summarizing these activities, showcasing their impact and incorporating participant feedback. It highlighted key discussions, outcomes, and reflections, offering a comprehensive look at the engagement and insights gained throughout the events.

Consultations with local branch offices on Activities Beyond RYCOgnized:

RYCO engaged in consultations in December 2024 with representatives from HLBOs to explore YPS initiatives beyond the RYCOgnized project. These discussions focused on integrating YPS principles into broader regional strategies. Several external initiatives were identified, including localized applications of the Peace Capital Methodology in select municipalities. Additionally, HLBO representatives participated in RYCO's advocacy efforts, ensuring alignment with international peacebuilding frameworks. Media outreach efforts, including social media campaigns and traditional media appearances, further amplified the visibility of YPS activities, with 17 media reports highlighting youth peace efforts across the region.

3. Local Branch Offices

In 2024, the Local Branch Offices (LBOs) of RYCO continued to be the key part of the organization, bringing its mission to life in communities across the region. From bustling city centers to remote towns, LBOs remained the first door young people knocked on when seeking opportunities to exchange, learn, and connect through RYCO's programs. Whether guiding teachers and students through the application process for exchanges like Superschools, mentoring grassroots initiatives through the Western Balkans Youth Cultural Fund, or empowering young entrepreneurs in RISE, the LBOs ensured that RYCO's impact was not just theoretical - it was felt, lived, and experienced.

Beyond being a resource for applicants, LBOs played an essential role in shaping partnerships. They were the bridge between youth and decision-makers, helping local governments, international organizations, and civil society recognize young people as key actors in peacebuilding and social change. Through countless meetings, panel discussions, and events, the LBOs worked to embed RYCO's mission into CP policies, ensuring that youth participation was not just encouraged but prioritized. Their presence in the media throughout the year further amplified these efforts, giving a voice to young changemakers and showcasing real stories of friendships, collaboration, and trust-building.

But supporting others also meant strengthening themselves. Throughout 2024, LBO teams engaged in intensive training and welcomed new members, including Local Program Officers and Finance and Administration Officers, to enhance their operational strength. This investment was not just about efficiency - it was about making sure that every young person, teacher, or partner who reached out to RYCO received meaningful guidance and support. The LBOs also played a crucial role in the process of creating a new Strategic Plan 2025-27, ensuring that young people's opinions reached management and leadership positions in the organization. As the year began, chairmanship within RYCO also saw a transition. Bosnia and Herzegovina, which chaired the Governing Board throughout 2024, passed the responsibility to Kosovo on January 1, 2025, with the vision remained the same: to create a Western Balkans where young people are not just beneficiaries of change but its driving force.

During 2024, new members of the RYCO Governing Board became Mr. Fatmir Limani, Government Representative of North Macedonia (Minister of Social Policy, Demographics and Youth of North Macedonia), Ms. Donika Zogu, Youth Representative of Kosovo and Ms. Marija Marković, Youth Representative of Montenegro. The table below shows an overview of overall activities implemented on a local level presented by CP.

	LBO AL	LBO BiH	LBO KS	LBO MN	LBO MK	LBO SRB
Number of LBO staff	4	4	4	4	4	6
Number of teachers participating in School Exchange Program (Superschools) 3rd cycle	32	32	16	10	30	58
Number of students participants in the exchange activities in School Exchange Program (Superschools) 3rd cycle	190	216	96	69	160	402
Number of implemented projects under RYCO's Superschools Program 3rd cycle	16	16	8	5	15	29
Number of awarded projects from 5th OC	2	2	2	1	2	4
Number of partners awarded for the 5th OC	3	6		4	8	4
Number of awarded projects from WB YCF (2nd and 3rd Open Call)	5	6	4	4	7	8
Civil Society Organizations supported through WB YCF (2nd and 3rd Open Call)	3	4	2	2	3	5
Individuals supported through WB YCF (2nd and 3rd Open Call)	2	2	2	2	3	2
Number of Peace Champions Award supported WB YCF (2nd and 3rd Open Call)	2	1	2	2	1	1
Number of partners for WB YCF (2nd and 3rd Open Call)	2	3		2	2	2
Number of info sessions organized for WB YCF (2nd and 3rd Open Call)	2	2	2	2	2	3
Number of participants attending info sessions organized for WB YCF	30	49	20	35	50	69
Number of participants attending the workshop organized for WB YCF	12	24	0	18	19	37
Number of YPS Local Activities	6	3	2	6	1	5
Number of participants attending YPS Local Activities	150	122	189	194	25	133
Number of young people reached through the LBO local events	56	78	106	357	307	353
Number of RISE teams during Incubation phase	3	3	3	3	3	3
Number of young people participating at WB Youth Forum in Berlin	5			1	6	6

3.1 Local Branch Office in Albania

LBO Albania experienced a successful year, marked by a wide range of activities in terms of topics and diversity of participants. We continued focusing on engaging with diverse local communities and expanding our reach to youth throughout Albania, resulting in fruitful partnerships and a stronger network of young people informed on RYCO's mission.



LBO Albania organized two editions of RYCO Youth Talk in Tirana, focusing on the 10th anniversary of the Berlin Process and on Digital Rights. These discussions provided young participants with valuable insights into key regional cooperation mechanisms and the evolving digital landscape, equipping them with knowledge to navigate and advocate for their rights in an increasingly interconnected world.

In addition, under the framework of RYCOgnized 2.0, the LBO actively contributed to the advancement of the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda in Albania, by supporting and jointly implementing initiatives with the National Youth Congress (NYC) and the United Nations Association Albania (UNAA). These initiatives were designed to strengthen the YPS agenda through targeted research, stakeholder engagement, and advocacy efforts. By addressing critical gaps in data and analysis, this work empowered youth and civil society organizations to take a more prominent role in peacebuilding and policy discussions, ensuring their voices are heard in shaping a more inclusive and resilient society.

To further promote youth engagement in cultural and artistic initiatives, the LBO organized two info sessions specifically tailored for cultural practitioners and civil society activists. Additionally, a dedicated workshop on “Positive Social Change through Arts and Culture” was held in Berat, emphasizing the transformative power of cultural expression in fostering dialogue and social cohesion. These activities were organized as part of the promotional efforts for the Western Balkans Youth Cultural Fund open calls, aiming to increase participation and representation from Albania.

LBO Albania significantly contributed to the organization of the Western Balkans Youth Forum in Berlin, in partnership with Bürger Europas e.V. and the Franco-German Youth Office (OFAJ DFJW). The Head of the Local Branch Office, supported by the task force, including the Local Program Officer from Albania, coordinated a week-long exchange for 30 young people from the Western Balkans. Participants engaged with young politicians from the German Bundestag and civil society representatives, discussing youth participation and the role of local governance within the EU, emphasizing youth involvement in local politics and civil society, and culminating with the participation at the WB Youth Forum.

The LBO staff actively organized, participated in, and contributed to over 36 meetings and 22 events hosted by local, regional, and European partners. These engagements provided valuable opportunities for networking, knowledge exchange, and collaboration on key initiatives. LBO Albania maintained consistent communication with its Governing Board members, the Ministry of Education and Sports of Albania, civil society representatives, and stakeholders involved in youth affairs. Additionally, the LBO office enhanced its collaboration with various embassies, including those of France, Germany, the UK, and Japan in Albania, as well as with the European Union Delegation.

3.2 Local Branch Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina



Throughout 2024, the Local Branch Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina remained committed to fostering regional youth cooperation by implementing impactful programs and strengthening partnerships, regionally and locally. While the scope of activities was more focused and streamlined, still significant milestones were achieved in promoting youth engagement, intercultural learning, and regional collaboration.

On a program level, 16 school partnerships from Bosnia and Herzegovina were awarded within the Super-schools program, out of which 12 are newly formed partnerships and 4 were partnerships which wished to deepen their collaboration, supporting student exchanges, peacebuilding and intercultural experiences. Additionally, 7 grants were awarded through the Western Balkans Youth Cultural Fund, fostering artistic collaboration, and 2 CSOs were supported by the 5th Open Call of the “RYCConnecting You(th)” granting scheme. These initiatives provided young people and organizations with resources to develop projects that contribute to regional cooperation and understanding.

The year began with a significant Anniversary Event dedicated to the Élysée Treaty, where RYCO organized a discussion featuring the German and French Ambassadors in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This event underscored the importance of Franco-German reconciliation as an inspiration for youth cooperation in the Western Balkans.

In line with regional efforts, the office successfully organized the “Youth Talks” event on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Berlin Process. The event gathered high officials from the German and French Embassies and the EU Delegation, along with youth workers and civil society representatives, fostering discussions on regional cooperation. Two additional “Youth Talks” events were organized: one during Pride Month, in partnership with the BH Pride March, focusing on the state of LGBTQ+ rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and another on responsible journalism, co-organized with Deutsche Welle.

Further advancing youth dialogue, the office collaborated with the Federal Ministry of European and International Affairs of Austria to organize a regional meeting in Sarajevo. This event provided a platform for representatives of national youth councils from the Western Balkans to discuss their perspectives and explore avenues for deeper cooperation with RYCO.

During July, the ethno-village Stanišić welcomed around fifty young people aged 17 to 24 from across the region for a four-day youth camp. Organized in partnership with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, forumZFD, and RYCO, with support from the German Government and the European Union, the camp focused on gender equality, peacebuilding, and community challenges. Through interactive workshops, debates, and creative projects, participants developed ideas to foster positive change in their communities while gaining valuable experience in collaboration and problem-solving.

Additionally, as part of the celebrations marking the 5th Anniversary of the successful implementation of the RISE program, Sarajevo was the first location in the region to host a celebratory event organized in partnership with RYCO's implementing partners.

A notable new local partnership in 2024 was the collaboration with the Goethe-Institut in Bosnia and Herzegovina, resulting in the "Culture for Climate Action" youth symposium in December. This initiative, organized in cooperation with the French Institute, the Austrian Cultural Forum, and the Embassy of Spain in Sarajevo, brought together young people to explore the intersection of culture and environmental activism.

By strengthening partnerships, supporting meaningful youth initiatives, and fostering intercultural dialogue, the Local Branch Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina continued to play a vital role in regional youth cooperation throughout 2024.

3.3 Local Branch Office in Kosovo

The year 2024 was marked by activities with high impact from the Local Branch Office in Kosovo (LBO Kosovo), with the Harmony Hero Award standing out as one of the key highlights. For the second consecutive year, the Harmony Hero Award was implemented in close partnership with the German Embassy in Kosovo, recognizing five new young individuals for their exceptional contributions to peacebuilding and reconciliation. This year's awardees came from four different ethnic communities, reflecting Kosovo's diversity and the importance of intercultural dialogue in building trust and understanding. Through this initiative, LBO Kosovo continued to promote and support young peacebuilders who are working to make a difference in their communities and beyond.



In addition to Harmony Hero, LBO Kosovo organized a RYCO Youth Talk in Pristina to mark the 10th anniversary of the Berlin Process. The event gathered young activists and students from various backgrounds to engage in discussions on regional cooperation, youth participation, and the role of youth in fostering dialogue and understanding across the Western Balkans.

Further efforts were dedicated to advancing the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda in Kosovo. In cooperation with the National Youth Council and the UN Youth Assembly in Kosovo, LBO Kosovo contributed to the organization of the "Student Peace and Security" conference, providing a platform for young people to address pressing issues related to peace and security. Additionally, a small-scale youth initiative was supported, bringing together a diverse group of young people to foster friendships and dialogue, translating YPS principles into concrete action on the ground.

Throughout the year, LBO Kosovo maintained strong collaboration with key institutional and international partners, including the German and French Embassies, the Ministry of Youth, Culture, and Sports, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Embassy of Japan, and the RYCO Governing Board. This ongoing cooperation allowed LBO Kosovo to ensure that youth voices remain central in peacebuilding efforts and regional cooperation processes.

LBO Kosovo also actively participated in numerous panel discussions, conferences, and public events, organized by local, regional, and international partners, bringing forward perspectives on youth cooperation and reconciliation in the Western Balkans.

Furthermore, the office engaged directly with individual young people throughout the year, providing support and motivation for their involvement in peacebuilding and intercultural dialogue.

Overall, 2024 was a year of deepened engagement with youth and partners, contributing to strengthening peacebuilding, dialogue, and regional cooperation efforts in Kosovo and the broader Western Balkans region.

3.4 Local Branch Office in Montenegro

Throughout 2024, RYCO LBO Montenegro organized 14 local events, engaging 357 young participants. Additionally, LBO staff actively participated in approximately 70 meetings and activities hosted by various stakeholders, further strengthening community connections. RYCO LBO Montenegro collaborated with organizations such as the OSCE Mission to Montenegro, the French, German, Slovak, and Czech embassies, "Hilfe von Mensch zu Mensch," the School of Political Studies, and the Youth Network of Montenegro. These partnerships facilitated the successful implementation of regional projects and local initiatives, enhancing RYCO's impact in Montenegro and beyond.



LBO MNE successfully implemented two editions of the Intercultural Youth Hubs in cooperation with the Slovak and Czech Embassies in Montenegro. These hubs gathered 40 young participants from different parts of Montenegro, enhancing their intercultural competencies and fostering youth participation.

For the seventh consecutive year, in partnership with the OSCE Mission, LBO MNE organized a Capacity Building Training Course for potential grant applicants from Montenegro, bringing together 20 representatives from civil society organizations. The training focused on developing essential elements of project applications and familiarizing participants with intercultural learning, reconciliation, youth participation, and social inclusion. It also explored possibilities for creating regional partnerships.

In cooperation with Hilfe von Mensch zu Mensch e.V., LBO MNE organized a study visit within the Balkan Tage Festival, which included 14 young participants from various Montenegrin cities (Nikšić, Bijelo Polje, Bar, Podgorica, and Tuzi). The visit featured workshops, exhibitions, and performances, providing participants with the opportunity to showcase their local communities, schools, talents, and skills while exploring Munich's artistic and cultural scene.

LBO MNE, in collaboration with the School of Political Studies of Montenegro (SPS), organized a seminar titled "Regional Cooperation Through the Process of Reconciliation." This event brought together over 20 participants, including representatives of Parliament, media, political parties, and CSOs, to discuss key topics related to regional cooperation and reconciliation. The seminar focused on Montenegro's multilateral relations, the role of its Parliament in fostering good neighborly relations, and the importance of regional youth cooperation. Participants gained both theoretical knowledge and practical political skills, contributing to their active engagement in peacebuilding and regional cooperation.

As part of the 10th anniversary of the Berlin Process, LBO MNE organized a RYCO Youth Talk event, bringing together 39 young people from across Montenegro alongside government representatives, ambassadors, youth leaders, and civil society organizations. Discussions covered topics such as regional cooperation, intercultural dialogue, youth activism, and Montenegro's EU integration process. The event served as a platform for open dialogue, fostering connections between young people and decision-makers. Key highlights included discussions on the progress achieved under the Berlin Process in strengthening regional cooperation and stakeholder collaboration.

LBO MNE conducted six activities aimed at raising awareness and promoting the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) Agenda in Montenegro. By analyzing the implementation status of the YPS Agenda and identifying relevant partners and stakeholders, LBO MNE tailored activities to Montenegro's specific context. These efforts were informed by the Analysis of the Implementation of YPS in Montenegro, developed in cooperation with the OSCE Mission to Montenegro. LBO MNE also identified key partners actively engaged in this field, including the Youth Network of Montenegro, the School of Political Studies (a Council of Europe program), the Faculty of Political Science at the University of Montenegro, and the OSCE Mission in Montenegro.

LBO MNE initiated efforts to engage Members of Parliament (MPs) in Montenegro as advocates for regional youth cooperation programs complementary to the YPS Agenda. As part of this initiative, LBO MNE drafted a Declaration on Commitment to Regional Youth Cooperation, which was presented to MPs. Additionally, LBO MNE conducted six local YPS consultations with youth, engaging approximately 194 participants. These consultations aimed to enhance youth understanding of the YPS Agenda and gather their perspectives on its implementation in Montenegro. Furthermore, LBO MNE organized a Meet-up event that convened national and international stakeholders, including 12 MPs from all major parties and parliamentary groups. The Declaration was validated by young participants through these consultations and outlines key priorities for youth advocacy and regional cooperation.

Beyond these local initiatives, LBO MNE within the WB Youth Cultural Fund's second and third cycles, organizing capacity-building training tailored for cultural workers, artists, and young individuals interested in the cultural sector. This training brought together 18 cultural practitioners. Within the Fifth Open Call RYConnecting Youth, one lead CSO and four partnering CSOs successfully implemented project activities. Additionally, under the third Open Call of the Superschools program, five schools from Montenegro were awarded. Among these, four were newly formed partnerships, while one long-term partnership was awarded for the second consecutive year due to its previous achievements and commitment to deepening collaboration in student exchanges and peacebuilding efforts.

Through these diverse initiatives, LBO MNE continues to strengthen regional cooperation, youth participation, and peacebuilding efforts in Montenegro and beyond.

3.5 Local Branch Office in North Macedonia

Throughout 2024, the focus of the Local Branch Office in North Macedonia was on providing conditions for fostering regional youth cooperation, with North Macedonia at the center of many regional activities such as the Regional Conference on Sport for Development; Regional events dedicated to the role of the media attention in regional cooperation and awarding youth journalism; Regional conference uniting student representative bodies from WB6 in celebration of the International Students Day; Training of the RYCO team on the application of the "Sport for Development" methodology; Workshop with the RYCO management on visioning the new RYCO strategy (2025-2027); Celebration of the 8th birthday of RYCO together with the whole RYCO team and its close friends.



On a program level, 15 school partnerships from North Macedonia were awarded within the Superschools program, 7 grants were awarded through the Western Balkans Youth Cultural Fund, and 2 CSOs were supported by the 5th Open Call of the “RYCConnecting You(th)” granting scheme. Within the 6th Open Call of this granting scheme, initiated in 2024, a total of 23 lead applicants and 39 partner organizations from North Macedonia applied.

Synchronized with all other RYCO offices in the region, we successfully organized the “Youth Talks” event on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Berlin Process, together with high officials from the German and French Embassies, as well as youth workers and representatives from the youth civil society sector. The office provided significant contribution to the implementation of WB6 Youth Forum in Berlin with ministers and youth representatives from the Western Balkan region, and Europe as whole.

We enhanced the cooperation with the media by organizing work meetings with local journalists covering youth topics, to introduce RYCO’s efforts in the field of intercultural learning, cooperation and peacebuilding. The Local Branch Office continued its fruitful cooperation with the United Nations Association in North Macedonia by supporting their 3rd Edition of the MUNA Academy by providing logistical support to its implementation in the duration of several weeks.

A newly established local partnership in 2024 was the collaboration between the Local Branch Office and the International Foundation for Electoral System (IFES) which resulted in implementation of a capacity building workshop for enhancing the capacities of the Youth Political Wings. The workshop “Advocacy in Politics: Pathway to improved youth participation in decision-making ahead of Local Election 2025” aimed to empower participants, representatives of Youth Political Wings, by providing them with practical tools for effective advocacy and strategies to amplify the voices of young people in politics. Through interactive sessions and hands-on activities, the workshop focused on equipping attendees with the skills and knowledge needed to drive meaningful change and actively participate in the political landscape. The workshop was attended by 23 participants representing 9 political parties.

The LBO supported a three-day conference “Regional Student Station” organized in partnership with Youth Educational Forum and the University Student Assembly of the University “St. Cyril and Methodius in Skopje. The goal of this event was to enhance regional cooperation, advance student leadership, and foster dialogue on key issues affecting youth in academia in the region. A key highlight of the event was the development of regional project ideas. Students worked together to brainstorm initiatives that could address shared challenges, from environmental sustainability to cross-cultural exchange. These projects reflect the creativity and drive of young leaders determined to make a tangible impact in the region.

Through the “RYCOgnized” project, the LBO in cooperation with the National Youth Council of Macedonia (NYCM) and Youth Alliance Krushevo organized a multistakeholder event: “Youth Connect: A Dialogue for Peace and Security”, aimed to identify complex issues in the peace and security ecosystem, with a special focus on youth as a key demographic group in building and maintaining protection. Through the system mapping format, 25 young participants engaged in topics to identify the main, key factors, important documents and relationships in the peace and security ecosystem in the context of North Macedonia, but also with the WB6 perspective. The main objective of this approach was to create a “Comprehensive System Map for the Youth, Peace and Security Ecosystem” that will visually demonstrate how this system works.

Substantial efforts were put in the implementation of the regional “Scoring Development: Regional Cooperation and Youth Empowerment through Sport” conference, organized in collaboration with the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) office in Skopje. More than 70 participants from the WB6 region collaborated in groups, sharing examples and perspectives on utilizing sports for development.

To mark the 5th Anniversary of successful implementation of RISE, celebratory events occurred in all the contracting parties which was organized by RYCO in partnership with the implementing partners, including one in Skopje. North Macedonia hosted the Regional training for all regional awarded grantees in the 2nd Open Call from the Western Balkan Youth Cultural Fund. Over an engaging and productive weekend, our grantees immersed themselves in various aspects of activism and culture, bringing their project ideas to life.

Last, but not least, the Local Branch Office was proud to be able to host the whole RYCO team and our close friends and partners in the celebration of the 8th Anniversary of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office. This milestone is not just a reflection of our achievements but a renewed commitment to creating a more harmonious region.

3.6 Local Branch Office in Serbia

LBO Serbia organized 16 activities in 2024, 15 local and 1 regional. Besides local activities related to implementing RYCO's projects (Superschools, Western Balkans Youth Cultural Fund, RYCOConnecting, RISE), the most important activities were the ones organized with local partners. Around 640 young people (287 through Superschools and 353 through other activities) and over 260 individuals working with youth (teachers, representatives of CSOs, youth and cultural workers, etc.) were directly reached in 2024 by LBO Serbia. Indirectly, through social and traditional media, but also multiplying activities, a much larger audience was targeted and informed about RYCO's work.



LBO Serbia continued supporting the implementation of the project Western Balkans Youth Cultural Fund in 2024 by organizing two local capacity-building workshops for young artists and cultural workers. Both workshops were organized in June 2024 – in Divčibare for individuals and in Mokrin for CSO representatives – gathering a total of 37 participants. Besides efforts put in capacity building and equipping all interested applicants with skills needed for applying for grants, LBO Serbia invested in establishing closer ties with independent cultural scene in Serbia, by organizing various meetings and consultations with members of the associations of independent cultural actors.

As part of the strategic planning process, as all other RYCO Local Branch Offices, LBO Serbia organized several local consultation meetings in the beginning of August with around 50 of the most important beneficiaries and stakeholders for RYCO's work. In addition, LBO Serbia organized the meeting of the task force for the development of the Strategic Plan 2025-2027 in Belgrade in the end of August.

In 2024 LBO Serbia continued with the organization of RYCO Youth Talks, providing space for 67 young people to engage in discussions on different topics of importance to youth in Serbia. The first discussion was organized on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Berlin Process on March 22 in Belgrade. It aimed to review the results of this process, highlighting RYCO as one of the most tangible results, explore the perspectives of this process, as well as the process of European integration of the region. The second was organized as part of the Beldocs Documentary Film Festival in Belgrade on May 25th under the title “Can We Escape War Games?” The discussion was based on the documentary “How to Disappear – Deserting from Battlefield” and brought together young people to discuss important issues related to peacebuilding in the region through the lens of documentary films and computer games. The third one was also organized in Belgrade on 24 November as part of the SEEDIG Youth School, which brought together 30 talented young people from the Southeast Europe and provided an opportunity for a discussion on the intersection of the UN Agenda for Youth, Peace and Security and cybersecurity. The vital role of youth in addressing digital challenges while fostering peace and reconciliation in the Western Balkans and SEE region was highlighted.

With the support of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, LBO Serbia organized for the seventh year in a row a Capacity-Building Training for Civil Society Organizations from Serbia on project proposal writing in the areas of intercultural exchange, peacebuilding and reconciliation on Kopaonik mountain from August 23 to 26, 2024. 14 representatives of CSOs took part in this training, out of which 12 were young people.

Main tools that were used on the training, Beginner’s Manual for Project Proposal Writing 101, and “Participation Game”, were developed jointly by the RYCO LBO Serbia and OSCE Mission to Serbia as tools to support the design of project proposals. The Manual is conceptualized to support the advancement of project writing skills for the successful design of projects and initiatives that can connect the Western Balkan youth, while the card game serves as a tool for the inclusion of young people in the project development process.

Strategic cooperation on empowering young students in writing and implementing projects focused on the YPS Agenda continues between LBO Serbia, OSCE Mission to Serbia and Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Belgrade, by organizing for the second consecutive year Capacity Building Training, this time on Srebrno jezero, from 7 to 10 June 2024. 25 students developed three different projects that, through several topics, address the UN Youth, Peace and Security Agenda and the current challenges that young people face in Serbia.

The “RYCOgnized 2.0” project continued in Serbia in 2024, running from August to December: focus remained on the implementation of the UN Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda, but with an increased emphasis on its local-level impact and the development of advocacy platforms engaging relevant institutions. Local activities were implemented by National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS) that organized three local events in Niš, Pančevo and Čićevac, as well as a final conference in Belgrade that gathered around 60 participants. Besides these activities, also the meetings were held with the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications and the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue.

The biggest challenges identified by young people during this process include the safety of young people, especially young activists, brain drain of young people from smaller communities as well as the imposition of obligatory military service for young men, and the issue of not involving young people in decision-making and consultation in this process. The young people also created proposals for further steps so that these challenges could be addressed in the right way by relevant institutions. One of the deliverables of this project is also a translation of the “Analysis of UN YPS Agenda in the context of Serbia” to English language to make it presentable in other CPs of RYCO.

LBO Serbia supported the Third Belgrade Symposium on History Teaching, held in April 11–12, 2024, organized by Edukacija21, as part of the 75th anniversary of the Council of Europe. The symposium gathered history educators and professionals from across Europe to explore innovative approaches to history teaching and reconciliation under the theme “Disarming History.” A key panel focused on how youth in the Western Balkans can confront different historical narratives to foster peace and understanding, emphasizing the importance of critical thinking and intercultural dialogue in shaping a more peaceful future. Discussions highlighted the need to equip young people with the tools to analyze and question historical interpretations, preventing the instrumentalization of history by political narratives. The role of non-formal education and exchange programs, such as Superschools, was underscored as a means to promote greater understanding and cooperation among youth in the region.

LBO Serbia was part of the celebration of five years of the RISE program, which took place in Belgrade as part of a regional series of events in Tirana, Sarajevo, Pristina, Podgorica, and Skopje. The Belgrade event highlighted the program’s significant impact on empowering young social entrepreneurs across the Western Balkans since its launch in 2019. The event showcased the achievements of RISE participants, who shared their experiences in developing innovative social businesses and overcoming challenges. The discussions emphasized the importance of social entrepreneurship in fostering regional stability and sustainable development.

LBO Serbia supported the implementation of 30 school exchanges in Serbia as part of the Superschools program, out of a total of 100 awarded schools from the region. Two key events preceded the implementation: the contract signing ceremony with Serbian high schools, titled “Meet the Superschools in Serbia” on August 28, 2024 in Belgrade, which gathered 70 school principals and teachers, and the regional training for teachers held in Vrnjačka Banja from September 25 to 28, 2024, which brought together 124 coordinators from the region.

LBO Serbia organized four info sessions for the Superschools program, two for the Western Balkans Youth Cultural Fund (WBYCF), and one for the 6th Open Call of RYConnecting Youth for potential applicants across Serbia.

LBO Serbia staff also participated in various activities organized by local CSOs, governmental and international organizations, often as panelists and speakers. Meetings were held with representatives of Serbian institutions, including the Ministry of Tourism and Youth, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Information and Telecommunications and the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, but also French and German Embassies, EU Delegation in Serbia, OSCE Mission to Serbia, UNFPA, UNDP, Westminster Foundation for Democracy and others.

4. Research, Evaluation and Learning



In line with RYCO's long-standing mission of evidence-based program design and project planning, we have remained committed to improving our Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) capacities throughout 2024. Building on previous progress, our approach continues to be guided by the principles of Participatory Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting, Research, Accountability, and Learning.

Some of the key achievements in RYCO's Research, Evaluation and Learning endeavors relate to the initiation of the M&E logical framework for the 2025-2027 period. This framework serves as a strategic tool to align M&E efforts with RYCO's strategic plan and broader organizational goals, ensuring a structured and measurable approach to assessing impact. Additionally, efforts have been made to improve the integration of qualitative and quantitative data for a more comprehensive evaluation and understanding of program outcomes and impact. Throughout 2024, several internal and external evaluations have been conducted to assess the effectiveness of RYCO's programs and local activities. These reports have been used to inform adjustments and decision-making in the structure and implementation of programs and local activities, such as RYCOConnecting Youth and Western Balkans Youth Cultural Fund.

By strengthening our monitoring and evaluation, and research capacities, we can ensure that our programs remain impactful, relevant, and responsive to the evolving needs of youth in the region. As such, the establishment of the Research, Evaluation, and Learning (REL) unit remains central to RYCO's long-term commitment to fostering a culture of continuous improvement and informed decision-making. For this purpose, in 2024, RYCO started developing the methodology for the new study on youth perceptions about peace and security in the Western Balkans. The initial stage involved a comprehensive review of all recent documents and research on the region's youth, highlighting essential themes, findings, and conclusions. A focal point of RYCO's study was the Shared Futures research conducted by RYCO with UNDP in 2020, serving as a baseline and a reference for future research methodology.

The methodology is based on three main pillars: the mission of RYCO, the UN Youth, Peace and Security Agenda, and the priorities highlighted by young people in the Western Balkans. The initial framework was tested by organizing 13 focus groups with young people to understand the challenges young people face, their anxieties, fears, sources of insecurity, views on regional cooperation, the roles of institutions and actors, and specific challenges confronting women and minorities, among other topics. The insights gained by 94 focus group participants here were instrumental in identifying youth priorities and intersecting them with RYCO's mission and the YPS agenda.

Capacity-building initiatives have also been undertaken to strengthen competencies within RYCO staff. These efforts aimed to foster a culture of continuous learning, adaptability, and accountability across all levels of project implementation. RYCO staff have actively conducted several field monitoring and evaluation visits to assess project implementation in real time. These visits have provided valuable insights into the challenges and successes of ongoing initiatives, allowing for timely support and adaptive management. Engaging directly with our partners on the ground has further strengthened RYCO's participatory approach in monitoring and learning, ensuring that programmatic decisions are informed by first-hand observations and continuous feedback. As part of our ongoing efforts to enhance the capabilities and performance of our team, an evaluation and assessment of internal capacities and needs of RYCO staff has been conducted to provide tailored training and utilize in-house knowledge.

5. Communications



In 2024, RYCO achieved noticeable results when it comes to external communication and the organization's visibility. The majority of communication outputs were related to RYCO's projects - (Superschools, WBYCF, Open Call, RISE, RYCOgnized etc), along with a variety of local and regional activities. Moreover, regular communication efforts were undertaken to keep the public updated on various meetings and high-official visits of the RYCO leadership and its LBOs.

During 2024, the Communication Department recorded 386 mentions of RYCO in WB6 media outlets, which is significantly higher compared to previous reporting period. It is worth mentioning that all media reports have a positive tone. Moreover, RYCO can report significant success on its social media platforms, where the number of followers compared to 2023 has increased from 3,3% to 16% depending on the platform, indicating consistent growth in the audience base. Moreover, in 2024, RYCO achieved significant growth in audience's engagement across platforms, shifting from broad visibility to meaningful interactions and higher participation. On Facebook, content interactions increased by 4.1%, and visits grew by 8.5%, indicating stronger audience interest and retention.

On Instagram, content interactions doubled ($\uparrow 100\%$), and link clicks rose by 63.7%, showing improved audience responsiveness. Compared to 2023, 2024 marked more audience-driven engagement, higher interaction rates, and improved call-to-action effectiveness. Furthermore, RYCO's website recorded a significant number of 68K website users.

When it comes to communication key highlights, we can emphasize that:

RYCO Communication Department successfully implemented several activities when it came to the RYCOgnized 2.0 Program. Youth Peace and Security Agenda (YPS) was in the focus of communication activities, featuring promotion of local activities and YPS Academy that reached cumulative social media audience of 25,000. Furthermore, six new podcasts were developed by each RYCO's LBO under the title "Generation Peace". These podcasts explore diverse topics relevant to the YPS agenda, including youth governance, cultural preservation, and conflict resolution.

Podcasts are promoted on RYCO social media platforms, YouTube, and the dedicated YPS website. In addition, a new Spotify channel was launched, creating a centralized platform for listeners to access this valuable content. With training in Skopje and closing ceremony in Pristina, one more significant milestone in Peace Broadcasters Program has been achieved, underscoring journalism's vital role in promoting peace and inter-cultural dialogue across the WB6. Social media posts promoting the program reached RYCO's cumulative audience of 60,000 across all platforms.

The promotion of this year's Western Balkans 6 Youth Forum, celebrating its 10th anniversary, was supported by an extensive, multi-channel campaign that spanned both digital and traditional media. The communication team kicked off with the teasing campaign, including the branding of all the internal documents and email signature with the 10th anniversary mark. This helped to build awareness of both the Berlin Process and the forum itself within internal networks. Started with a short animated video to highlight the Berlin Process refreshed branding and sparking early excitement on social media, campaign continues with announcement of Agenda, followed by series of testimonials and aftermovie. Created content gained more than 1K likes and 100 shares.

In collaboration with regional media outlets, the Forum received around 100 mentions across various media platforms. Moreover, a variety of promotional materials were distributed to participants, further increasing awareness of the event and the Forum.

From a kick-off event that announced a new cycle of RYCO's flagship program, to promotion of exchange activities and regional collaboration initiatives, Superschools project continued achieving impressive engagement and visibility on RYCO's platforms throughout 2024. Communication campaign successfully reached around 70.000 people, ensuring strong awareness and interaction with the audience. Posts shared regularly throughout the year, showed that engagement remained strong across different formats, including photos, stories, and reels. Moreover, around 100 media reports from regional media outlets were recorded in 2024, featuring "Meet the Superschools" events and other project activities.

The Western Balkans Youth Cultural Fund (WBYCF) project achieved outstanding visibility and engagement on social media platforms throughout 2024. Campaign focused on promotion of 2nd and 3rd Open Call reached a total of 507,200 people, making it a well-recognized and impactful initiative within the region. Moreover, project activities communicated in media recorded around 30 mentioning in regional media outlets. 5th Anniversary celebration, along with Demo Days along with RISE Expedition promotion, successfully engaged around 40.000 people, demonstrating strong engagement and awareness-building efforts when it comes to RISE project, particularly through storytelling and milestone celebrations.

In 2024, RYCO launched 6th Open Call "RYCONNECTING YOUTH". The promotion resulted in numerous impressions and shares on social media, reaching a total of 15,172 people, effectively promoting the initiative and engaging both followers and non-followers. Earlier in 2024, RYCO Communication Team conducted Instagram campaign focused on promotion of OC grantees, featuring supporting projects' promotion and success stories, contributing to overall campaign awareness.

In addition, in 2024 RYCO's Communication team promoted numerous local activities along with RYCO's 8th Anniversary, promotion of MIRAI program, Youth Talk branding, and organization of competition for best student's story published on Hajde platform.

6. Organizational development in 2024

6.1 Institutional Reforms



In 2024, significant institutional developments were achieved, particularly in streamlining operations, enhancing governance, and improving financial transparency. A major milestone was the refinement of recommendations from various institutional assessments, which were categorized into five key areas: programs, human resources, managerial, finance, and operations. This effort resulted in a reduction of 183 initial recommendations to 34 actionable priorities, ensuring a focused and effective reform process.

Additionally, the successful registration of Local Branch Offices (LBOs) in most contracting parties provided a legal framework that strengthened RYCO's operational legitimacy and staff employment conditions.

Managerial and financial reforms played a crucial role in institutional strengthening. The engagement of the Governing Board was solidified through structured exchanges, reducing political interference in operational decisions. The implementation of a digitalized ERP platform for human resources, finance, and procurement further enhanced transparency and efficiency. Financial regulations were updated, an independent internal audit process was established, and grant-giving procedures were streamlined, ensuring a more accountable and youth-friendly funding environment. Finally, RYCO developed different policies to create a safe and productive working space, to mention some: the Data Protection Policy, Archiving Policy, IT Security Policy. These reforms have reinforced RYCO's credibility, institutional sustainability, and effectiveness in fostering regional cooperation.

6.2 Capacity Building

In 2024, RYCO continued its development through enabling and strengthening two main pillars for the capacity building of its staff:

• Internal Capacity Building

An internal Knowledge Hub was established following a short study made to understand and identify the needs and available capacities of RYCO's staff. Accordingly, a training plan was drafted enabling RYCO staff to transfer the knowledge to their colleagues.

• External Capacity Building

RYCO continued to support its staff to attend training and capacity building opportunities offered by externals. In addition, a capacity building plan for all RYCO staff was developed together with the GIZ covering all departments and topics such as managerial skills, peace and conflict, finance and communications. This plan will continue during 2025 as well.

6.3 Updated systems

As part of its institutional development during 2024, RYCO continued to develop its management system (ERP) and granting system (OGMS).

The RYCO ERP software is available at the link <https://rycoerp.org>.

The OGMS software is available at the link <https://rycogms.org/donor/>

ERP (Enterprise resource planning) System contains 4 modules:

- Accounting Module (cost unit, balance sheet, cash flow etc)
- Procurement Module (matrix of approval, initial process)
- Human Resource Module (employees profile, annual days, timesheets)
- Project Cycle Management (activities, coordination, narrative report, budget)

OGMS (Online grant management) System contains steps of grant management .

- Grant creation and Registration module (4 calls are administrated through it)
- Application module
- Development of Evaluation and Review module (evaluation grids)
- Development of Reporting module (admin check, technical assessment, monitoring & reporting stage)

The systems were developed as part of the project implementation Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme jointly co-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) GmbH together with the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO).

6.4 Procurement

In 2024 RYCO Procurement activity was conducted based on the newly adopted Rules and Operational Guidelines on Procurement Procedures. This document establishes the regulatory framework to be observed in the procurement cycle, serving as well as a manual for RYCO staff involved in procurement procedures so that they are in position to perform efficient, economic, and effective purchases.

The extent of the procurement throughout the region gave RYCO the opportunity to cooperate in the most advantageous way possible with the Economic Operators operating in the region benefiting from the best value for money.

In addition, the continuity of the application of the framework agreements based on the new rules and operational guidelines enabled the identification of framework contracts that provide an efficient, cost effective and flexible means to procure services that were required repeatedly over 2024 such as travel, accommodation etc.

The main achievements regarding procurement in 2024 were:

Successful implementation of the newly adopted regulatory frame and alignment with donors' rules.

Increase efficiency and effectiveness in procurement proceedings by consolidating procurement for same services or goods.

Encouragement of participation and competition between economic operators on a regional level.

As regards major expenditures deriving from procurement procedures, framework agreements for travel, accommodation and other related services in Head Office as well as in the Local Branch Offices are ranked in first place, followed by the a) Purchase of vehicles for LBO Montenegro and Head Office, b) Production and supply of branded visibility materials for RYCO, c) Implementation of Strategic Planning Process and development of RYCO Strategic Plan 2025 – 2027, d) Maintenance of ERP and OGMS SYSTEM, up to the common yearly services, consultancy services and supplies such as Audit services, Health Insurance services for RYCO international staff in Head Office, Cleaning services and stationery.

Referring to the procurement method applied the figures regarding procurement procedures are as follows:

Type of Procedure	No
Open Procedure	6
Simplified Procedure	15
Direct Contracting procedure	37
Single Tender	2
Negotiated Procedure	1



6.5 Legal

For RYCO's Legal Unit, 2024 has been a highly active and dynamic year. The expansion of organizational activities naturally resulted in an increase in administrative responsibilities, including the drafting of contracts, issuance of legal opinions, preparation of official decisions, and other legal tasks.

In March 2024, the current Legal Expert joined RYCO, filling the vacancy created for this position. The unit operates within RYCO's Head Office premises in Tirana, serving not only the diverse requests and legal matters of colleagues at the Head Office and the Tirana Local Branch, but also extending his legal support to the five other Local Branches in their respective Contracting Parties.

In addition, the legal unit provided legal guidance for various RYCO projects, including but not limited to the Superschools Project, WB Youth Culture Fund, RISE, Jean des Deux Rives, RYCOgnized, and other related initiatives. Beyond the drafting and execution of contracts and agreements between parties, the unit has focused on ensuring the compliance of these documents with RYCO's standards, policies, procedures, internal regulations, and Statute, while safeguarding the organization's spirit and reputation. The legal unit also supported the organization's participation in two external audit inspections in 2024 by ensuring the timely provision of relevant documents, offering clarifications on various legal matters, and delivering other necessary assistance.

The main activities of the Legal Unit throughout 2024:

Drafting and reviewing employment contracts for core and project staff, as well as service provider agreements, Official Decisions by SG, legal opinions, and providing day-to-day legal guidance, in line with RYCO's Statute, Host Contracting Party Agreement, and internal policies, all while navigating the complexities posed by operating under six distinct legal systems.

The Legal Unit faced ongoing and demanding tasks typical of a Regional Organization, including drafting and amending various contracts, reviewing other key legal documents such as Memorandum of Understanding, Partnership and Donation Agreements etc.

As RYCO continues to expand its initiatives, the Legal Department will remain essential in navigating legal complexities and supporting the organization's mission through sound legal guidance.



7. Financial report for 2024

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

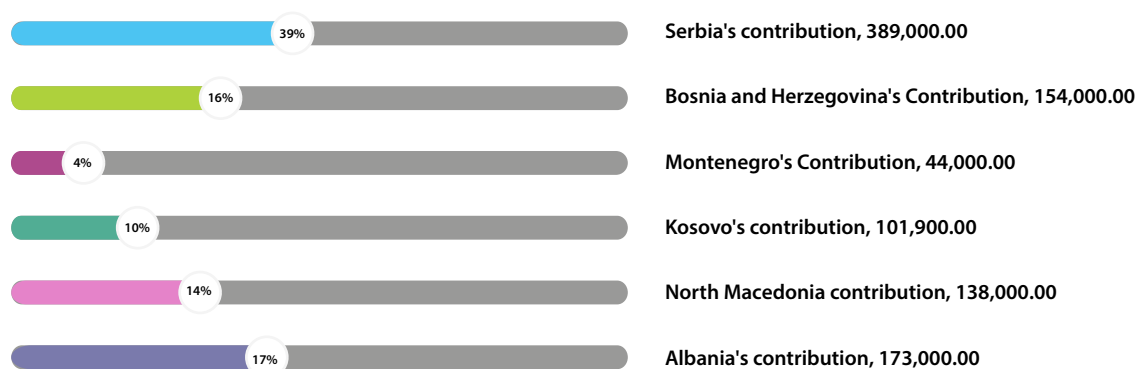
- Local Branch Offices expenditures

- Total revenue overview

- Total expenditures

Actual CPs Annual Financial Contributions to Core Budget

TOTAL CONTRACTING PARTIES ANNUAL FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO CORE BUDGET - 999,900.00 EUR

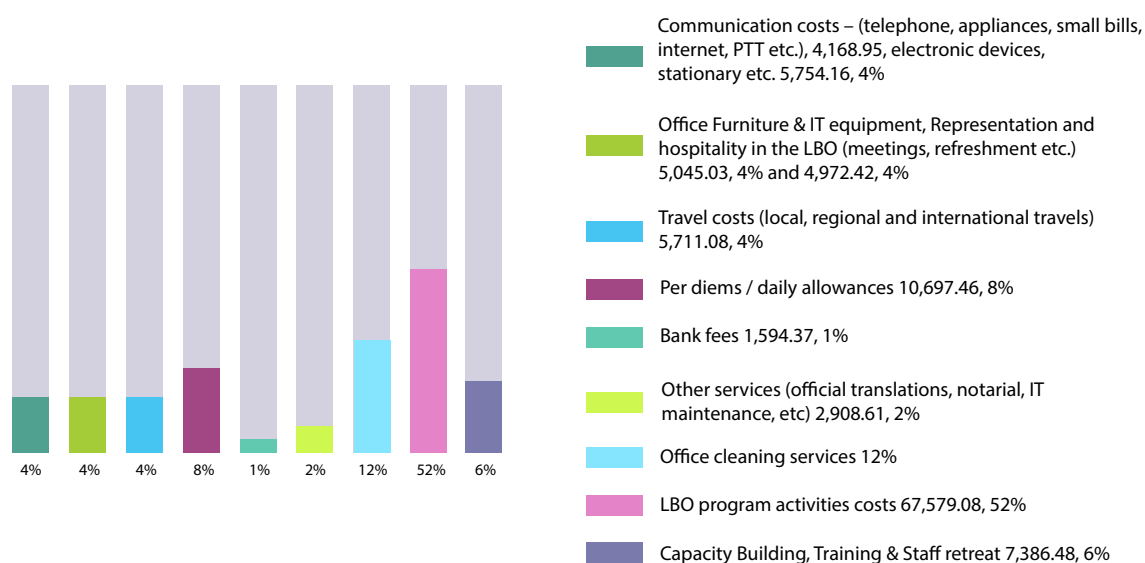


Core Budget Expenditures

TOTAL CORE BUDGET EXPENDITURES 2024 - 991,404.68 EUR



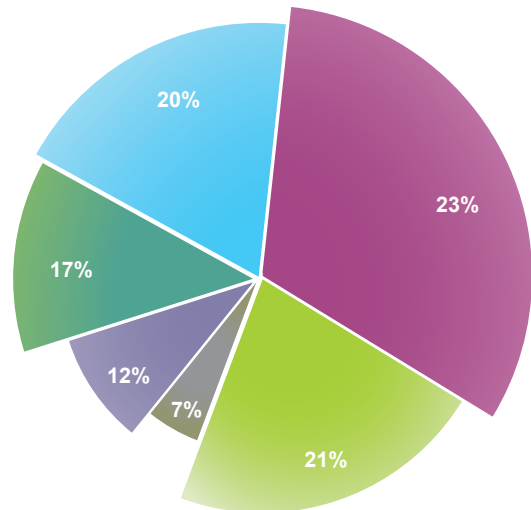
CORE BUDGET LBOs EXPENDITURES 2024-141,528.00 EUR



LBOs Core Budget Expenditures¹

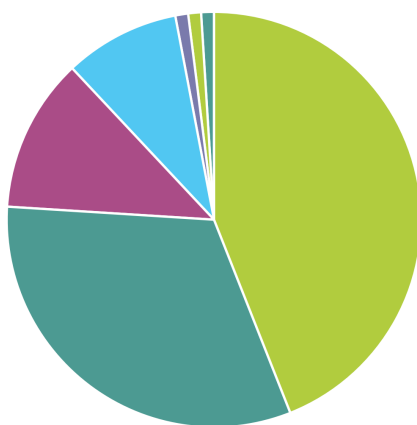
CORE BUDGET LBOs EXPENDITURES FOR LBOS-382,946.03 EUR

LBO Albania	47,682.71	12%
LBO BiH	26,100.40	7%
LBO Kosovo	66,341.10	17%
LBO Montenegro	78,403.01	21%
LBO N. Macedonia	76,674.03	20%
LBO Serbia	87,744.78	23%



RYCO 2024 Total Revenue Overview

TOTAL REVENUES 2024 - 3,153,923.26 EUR



GMFA Berlin Logo 2024	EUR 21,904.00	1%
Austrian Donation 2024	EUR 29,935.03	1%
CNSL - J2R 2024	EUR 35,667.00	1%
GMFA RYCOGNIZED 2.0	EUR 299,760.00	9%
GMFA - WBYCF 2024	EUR 391,290.00	12%
WB6 Contributions 2024	EUR 999,900.00	32%
GIZ Superschools 2024	EUR 1,375,467.23	44%

RYCO 2024 Total Expenditures Overview

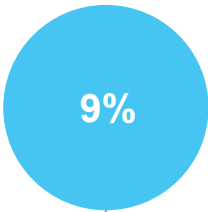
RYCO 2024 TOTAAL EXPENDITURES OVERVIEW - 2,787,176.96EUR



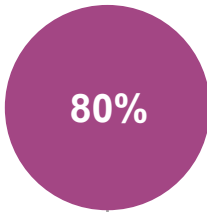
Fixed Assets,
49,061.09



Staff Costs,
254,447.99



Operational Costs,
263,485.78



Program Costs,
2,220,182.10

RYCO PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS

