

Policy Review of national youth policies and youth work frameworks in the partner countries of Erasmus+ in the Western Balkans

This Annex represents a summary report of the policy review conducted in the context of the regional strategic analysis that was implemented by the SALTO SEE Resource Centre, in 2019. The report provides a short overview of the strategic priorities of the national youth policy and youth work frameworks in the 5 Erasmus+ partner countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia¹), from a comparative perspective, and reflects on the relevance of priorities of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action Programme (E+:YiA) and the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) for youth policy and youth work in these countries.

1. Review of the national youth policy and legal frameworks in the Western Balkan Partner Countries (WB5)

The respective governments of the WB5 countries developed youth policies and legislation and established governmental authorities responsible for youth in the past few years based on the conviction that the capacities of youth are crucial for building more stable and cohesive societies, and under the influence of different national and international stakeholders.

Although official reports on the harmonisation of the national youth strategies with common European objectives in the youth field are very scarce, the national youth strategic and legal frameworks in the WB5 Partner countries have been developed in line with the European standards (i.e. the [EU Youth strategy 2010-2018](#) and the [Agenda 2020](#)) in the context of the countries' accession process to the EU.

In the period 2014 - 2018, a majority of these frameworks has been renewed, including:

- The [National Youth Action Plan 2015-2020](#) in Albania;
- The [National Youth Strategy 2015-2025](#) in Serbia;
- The Draft Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina Youth Strategy (2015) adopted by the Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- The [Youth Policy of Republika Srpska for 2016-2020](#) in the Republika Srpska / Serb Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- The [Law on Youth](#) and the [Law on Volunteering](#) in Brčko District, Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- The [Strategy on Youth 2017 - 2021](#) and the [Law on Youth \(2019\)](#) in Montenegro.
- The new National Youth Strategy 2018-2023 and the Youth Action Plan 2018-2021 are under construction in Kosovo, while Albania has not been developed its law on youth yet.

¹ Serbia joined the Erasmus+ programme as full member in 2018, but remained a partner country in the European Solidarity Corps in 2019. The specific situation of Serbia during the period considered (2014 – 2018) is explained in more detail in the study report.

The strategic and legal documents that were in place before 2014 include:

- The [Law on Youth](#) (2011) in Serbia;
- The [Law on Volunteering](#), and the [Law on Youth Organisation](#) of the Republika Srpska (2012); The [Youth Law of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) (2010) and the [Law on Volunteering](#) of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- [Youth Strategy 2013-2017 and Action Plan 2013-2015 \(KSYAP\)](#) and the [Law on Empowerment and Participation of Youth](#) (2009) in Kosovo.

Despite the diverse dynamics and approaches to youth policy development in the WB5 countries, there are **common tendencies**, which can be summarised as follows:

- The overall perception of youth, as a social group, is slightly changing and, therefore, youth policy has become a part of the state development agenda in most of the WB5 countries (in line with EU, Council of Europe and SEE standards and trends).
- There is a shift of paradigm in youth policy development in the WB5 countries, reflected in the fact that the renewed strategies are more ‘resource’ (vs ‘problem’) oriented, proactive, pragmatic and outcome-oriented, striving to achieve better impact.
- Transversal and holistic approaches to youth policy are adopted and promoted throughout the region (although not really visible in practice).
- The renewed strategies are based on a shared values and principles (e.g. participation, inclusion, equity, information), and participatory and evidence-based approaches applying wide consultation processes with young people.
- A cross-sectoral approach to youth policy in the WB5 is mainly based on horizontal, inter-ministerial or interdepartmental collaboration across various policy domains, aiming at maximising the potential of youth policy. Pursuing the principles and goals of cross-sectoral youth policy should positively influence the entire governance system of a country, not only youth policy.

2. Review of the strategic priorities of national youth strategies in the WB5 countries from a comparative perspective

Despite the fact that the development of youth policy and legal frameworks in the WB region is **not standardised**, a comparative review tells us that the overall strategic priority areas in the youth field (in the WB5 countries) are complementary and developed in line with the youth policy domains - priority areas of the EYS 2010-2018. However, the different policy domains are not equally prioritised, defined, and operationalised (through objectives and measures) across the region.

The following three thematic areas are highly prioritised in all WB5 countries, and they refer to a wide range of goals and objectives, as illustrated below:

- **Employment and entrepreneurship (WB5)** refers to ‘youth employment promotion through effective labour market policy’; ‘youth employability’, ‘employment and entrepreneurship’ and achievement of economic and social security through improved access to labour market and employment for youth.

- **Participation in civil society (WB5)** refers to empowerment of young people that are active citizens, involved, motivated, and proactive and participate in decision-making and community development processes, in the creation of policies and their implementation. It includes 'promotion of active youth participation in democratic processes and decision-making; and 'youth activism and active participation: enhanced active participation of young women and men in society' as its main objectives.
- **Health and well-being (WB5)** refers to strategic priorities such as 'improved health and well-being of young women and men'; but also to 'education, health, sport and environment' and 'healthy lifestyles, social protection and improved conditions for the development of youth safety culture'.

Furthermore, the areas of **Education and training** and **Creativity and culture** are prioritised in four countries (WB4), including Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia, and include a wide range of strategic goals:

- **Education and training** includes 'youth education'; 'non-formal education'; 'promotion of education and health'; 'access of youth to quality education'; 'education, pedagogical work with and training of youth: improved quality and opportunities for acquiring qualifications and development of competencies and innovation of young people'.
- **Creativity and culture** covers various strategic priorities including: 'social integration, voluntarism, sports, culture and recreation', but also access of youth to quality cultural content as creators and consumers and 'youth culture and creativity: enhanced cultural consumption and participation of young people in the creation of cultural programmes'.

The following two areas are prioritised in a small number of countries (WB2), and hold diverse meanings:

- **Social inclusion** (prioritised in Kosovo and Serbia): generally understood, it refers to 'social integration, voluntarism, sports, culture and recreation', while a more specific meaning relates to 'social inclusion of youth: enhanced support for the social inclusion of young people at risk of social exclusion'.
- **Voluntary activities** (prioritised in Albania and Kosovo): covers areas of 'culture and volunteerism' and 'social integration, voluntarism, sports, culture and recreation'.

Importantly, the priority area '**Youth and the world**' has **not been prioritised in any of the WB5 countries**. Only in Serbia, the seventh strategic priority area is '**Youth mobility**', which is operationalised through 'enhanced youth mobility, scope of international youth cooperation and support to young migrants'. This fact is particularly relevant for the development of mobility projects and programmes in the WB region, and should be further considered. Similarly, **youth work** has **not been prioritised in any** of the respective WB5 countries.

There are also additional specific strategic priorities identified in Serbia, Montenegro, and the Republika Srpska of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which are not directly aligned with the EYS 2010-2018:

- '**Improvement of the youth policy governance system**' at the national and local level which represents the sixth strategic priority of the [Strategy on Youth 2017 - 2021](#) in Montenegro, and

focuses on improvement of the normative and institutional framework for the implementation of youth policy.

- ‘**Youth information**’, the eighth strategic priority of the [National Youth Strategy 2015-2025](#) in Serbia, which refers to the need to inform youth by improving the system of information targeting young people and to improve young people’s overall knowledge.
- ‘**Support for development of youth excellence**’, the fourth strategic priority within the [Youth Policy of the Republika Srpska for 2016-2020](#), striving to raise awareness and assure state support for youth as a societal resource. The fifth strategic priority of the same strategy is also specific and linked to the **improvement of conditions for quality leisure time of young people** (comprising improvement of infrastructure, human resources, networking of stakeholders, active youth involvement and improvement of youth mobility).

3. Relevance of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action and European Solidarity Corps programmes

Although much wider in scope, the strategic priorities identified above are complementary to the priorities of the E+: YiA and ESC programmes, which include:

- [The Youth in Action programme](#) (2007-2013) aimed to inspire **active citizenship, solidarity and tolerance** and involve young people in shaping the future of the European Union. Youth in Action (YiA) promoted **mobility, non-formal learning, intercultural dialogue and inclusion**, primarily among people aged 13-30 and supported youth workers and civil society organisations through training and networking. Since 2014, [Erasmus+](#), the EU programme for education, training, youth and sport, has continued to offer **similar opportunities in the areas of youth and non-formal learning**.
- The [European Solidarity Corps](#) (ESC), launched in December 2016 as a new initiative, strives at creating opportunities for young people to **volunteer or work in solidarity related-projects** that **benefit communities** and people around Europe. The ESC aims to **foster solidarity** in the European society, **engaging young people and organisations** in accessible and high-quality solidarity activities. It offers young people opportunities to show solidarity, to express their **commitment** to the benefit of communities and help resolve challenging situations across Europe. At the same time, these young people (between the ages of 18 to 30) have the opportunity to **develop their skills** and get some invaluable human experience in the process.

However, there is an obvious policy gap in regards to areas such as: **youth mobility, youth work, recognition of non-formal and informal learning and solidarity** in the WB5 countries. There is also a need to additionally support and promote **youth volunteering**. Therefore, the implementation of the E+: YiA and ESC programmes can be potentially beneficial for the development of the youth policy and youth work frameworks in the WB5 countries and it is certainly worth to invest in exploring potential future synergies!