



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMENDATIONS

Regional research “Youth mobility in the Western Balkans – the present challenges and future perspectives”

All the countries have similar legal and institutional framework for youth policy implementation including youth mobility. Overview of youth policy structures in countries can be seen in the table below.

	BiH/ FBiH	BiH/ RS	BiH/ Brčko	Kosovo*	Macedonia	Montenegro	Serbia
Ministry with Youth in the title	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
National Council for Youth	✓	✓		✓		¹	✓
Law on Youth	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
Strategy for Youth		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Action Plan for Youth		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
National Youth Council	✓			✓	✓		✓
Local Structures and Action Plans	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓

Countries in the region are putting lot of efforts into regional and EU – WB networking in the sphere of formal education, especially tertiary education, and promotion of best use of the EU programs for funding research and innovation.

Some of the countries in the region also are **signing bilateral agreements of cooperation** For example, Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of Serbia in January 2017 signed an the Agreement on Cooperation, which forms the legal framework of cooperation between the two governments in the field of education. The agreement e.g. defined encouraging cooperation between educational institutions, student and teacher mobility, exchange of experience in reforming the education system and other forms of joint activities.

However, these measures are mainly for the young people, students or professional who are highly educated, but there is an evident lack of opportunities for vulnerable youth groups.

¹ Not operational at the moment because of need for new election of the members in accordance with recently adopted Youth Law

Most of the possibilities for education, training and employment are centralized in capitals or cities that are university centres in the countries.

The characteristic of labour market in all countries is structural unemployment, i.e. structural mismatch of supply and demand, high share of women in unemployment and high share of youth among the unemployed. In addition to that, there is a significant number of those waiting for employment for over a year (long-term unemployment). It is noticeable that cross border areas and small cities has significantly higher unemployment rates than the national average, which is also one of the reasons why economic development of cross-border region is lagging behind.

Nonetheless, the situation in the education system is such that the enrolment policy is not quite consistent to the labour market demand and we have a huge percent of highly educated young people that present large share of potential labour force but is suffering because of the demand/supply mismatch on the labour market.

Formal education system in all countries involved in the research continues to generate a number of occupations which used to be demanded in the past, but that don't fit the work force demand at present, and are not developing new curricula promptly enough that will be followed by education for new professions that are modern at the moment, and more in demand in the labour market.

Some other challenges identified as essential for youth mobility are poor economic situation coupled with high unemployment, but not because of lack of qualifications, but much more because of limited number of employment opportunities in the country.

Even when employed, young people have low wages (in business sector because they are at the entry level and without experience they cannot have high salary; and in public sector because in that sector wages are anyway low.

Regional mobility should be supported with infrastructure, and it is to be mentioned that it is partly inadequate because of poor roads on certain borders (such as between Montenegro and Bosnia), and also not frequent traffic lines during the year among certain countries – only during holiday season.

Also, for young persons without external support and help is it rather complicated to know procedure for obtaining work permits even in their own country, not to mention other countries.

Yet, it is important to pay attention on the opinion of the almost one third of the young people that took part in this research that one of the biggest obstacles for the mobility of young people in Balkan are prejudices, and the consequences of the wars, and youngsters these issues as more relevant than the fact that knowledge/expertise acquired in other countries is difficult to verify upon return to the country of origin, or that there is unclear work regulations in other countries in placed. Although language in previously researches was not recognised as a significant obstacle to regional mobility it is recognized by this research that youngsters who are speaking Albanian as mother tongue, or even Macedonian (which is similar to Bosnian/Montenegrin/Serbian/Croatian) has less chances to get well paid jobs in certain areas and spheres, and vice versa. If we are talking about tourism, then English, German, Russia languages are an asset.

In the area of employment, according to the SEE 2020 Strategy Study on Labour Mobility (October 2015) **conditions for intra-regional mobility exist** due to differences in employment and unemployment rates and in wages, **but** the crisis has taken its toll on the labour market and **probably led to increased out-of regional migration rather than mobility within the region.**

At the moment, flows follow ethnic lines and inherited routes, e.g. between Montenegro and Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia, and between Bosnia and Herzegovina and both Croatia and Serbia. Growing mobility between Kosovo* and Albania is to be expected.²

Recommendation that young people and other stakeholders involved in filed research gave are similar in all the countries. It is to be noted that the mostly heard comments and recommendations were not always directly connected with the mobility, but with:

- position of youth in general, especially question of human rights and discrimination (according to age, gender, political opinion etc.),
- recognition of knowledge and skills gained during volunteering and non-formal education;
- need for better policy framework for voluntarism and creation of supporting environment for its development,
- developing framework for development of youth work,
- higher level of structural support for involving youth in decision making,
- recognising value of contribution of young people as individuals and as part of civil society in development of the region.

Most common recommendations of young people and other stakeholders included in this research are:

- To recognize youth as a valuable part of the society;
- Local, regional, and in national level of government need to invest more in the development of human potential;
- To improve policy framework in the area of mobility;
- To invest in national and regional programs supporting mobility;
- To make information on regional and international mobility opportunities more accessible to youth;
- To recognize importance of youth sector working on non-formal education, mobility and employability of youth, and providing jobs for youth - and invest in it;
- To reform the education system so as to enable young people to gain more practical skills;
- To adapt the education system better to labor market in order to create jobs where gained knowledge and skills can be applied;
- To support professional mobility within the country through some incentives, for example to get a flat for moving to a remote place for job;
- To improve the quality of higher education;
- To better define criteria for state scholarships and also make them more inclusive (to be applicable to more and diverse young people);
- A larger number of young people to be given the opportunity to work in local and national government bodies, to bring freshness and could sustain a quality programs and encourage youth mobility and the "awakening" in the social and business sense;

² BALKAN BAROMETER 2015 (Public Opinion Survey, RCC SEE. Available at: <http://bit.ly/2lfbXBO>)

- All stakeholders to insist on ethical approach and education on responsible and plan-goal oriented internships; and create better system of support, supervision and monitoring of such programmes and legal entities which deliver internships;
- To implement organized, transparent, programmed and responsible financial scheme/policy/strategy for mobility on local and national levels;
- To change existing and developed new functional Law on voluntarism that will protect youth rights;
- To allocated resources for implementation of existing and developed new strategies for volunteer experience recognition and quality standards in consultative process;
- To define effective protection measures for young people in volunteering and stop misusing volunteers as replacement for paid workers working 8 hours per day;
- To fight corruption in labour market, and create more jobs for young people;
- To provide useful opportunities to young people of our countries to meet and cooperate;
- AND TO MAKE THIS CHANGE HAPPEN NOW! YOUNG PEOPLE DON'T WANT TO BE THE FUTURE, THEY WANT TO BE THE PRESENT OF SOCIETY!

Balkan Regional Platform for Youth Participation and Dialogue

The European Association for Local Democracy – ALDA with its Balkan Network of Local Democracy Agencies has launched a large scale co-operation programme: Towards the culture of regional dialogue and youth participation in the Balkans. This partnership strategy aims to strengthen the capacities of local CSOs and youth groups for creating a regional co-operation platform promoting active citizenship, participation and democratic governance principles. Balkan Network for Local Democracy aims to improve awareness of public authorities and policy/decision makers in the Western Balkan countries on social, educational and economic needs of youth, thus paving the way towards their more effective contribution to public policy-making and enhanced transparency of the reform process on the way to EU integration. Our extensive educational and research work, local information, public consultation and advocacy campaigns organized across the region in 2016, have resulted with the following:

Recommendations for youth regional advocacy actions:

Western Balkan societies share both the common legacy of the recent past and even more the common EU integration perspective. The present social and economic reform agenda as well as the commitment to accession negotiation process clearly show their common aspiration towards the full membership in the EU. However, the young generation living under prolonged transformation of societies, caught between the past and the future, between backward looking and forward looking perspectives is facing numerous obstacles, both administrative and mental barriers. Leaving the Balkans has become the only future alternative for many as the recent surveys show, while over the past couple of years all the countries in the region are facing a historic level of the brain-drain – of young educated people. The Balkan countries have not yet been able to adequately address such an emigration and depopulation, while the institutional incentives to encourage young people to stay and contribute to social and economic development in their countries or local communities are still sporadic. In this sense, a wide range of regional co-operation initiatives by the countries themselves (and not only supported externally) have become crucial requiring immediate and effective measures to ensure preconditions for increased youth mobility and thus help further educational, employment and cultural co-operation opportunities in the Balkans. Therefore the members of the Balkan Regional Platform for Youth Participation and Dialogue adopt the following policy recommendations for policy and decision makers:

- The research results show that there is an evident need for increasing the number of regional co-operation programmes financed by the national/regional and local governments in support to initiatives to enhance , educational, labour market (and apprenticeship), cultural and tourist youth mobility;
- It is necessary to create conditions for and/or enforcement of the regulations public transportation vehicles for youth with disability that would increase availability of educational, cultural, labour and tourist mobility;
- To further develop and effectively translate into practice the local, national regional strategic plans on ways of intensifying exchanges aimed at the increased mobility of pupils, students and youth outside of the formal education system and NEET youth;
- To establish adequate funding by the governments for the provision of scholarships for regional youth exchanges in area of culture, education, work and tourism;
- To improve the normative and strategic framework in line with SEE2020 recommendations and to overcome the obstacles in youth employment in other countries in the region, that are related to different national legislations regulating employment, labor and migrations in general;
- To develop projects in support to overcoming the obstacles in cross-border employment opportunities for youth and establishment of youth friendly mobility support services – centres, that would provide information for youngsters that want to enrich their professional experience with usage of international and regional mobility schemes – for internships or jobs.
- To call for the national governments to create more conducive environment for youth employment and apprenticeship opportunities in the region. Understanding of concept and preparation for being fully functional in the area of common EU labour market has to go in line with understanding and creating of the common Balkan labour market.
- To help stimulate synergies between formal and non-formal education and in this way maximize the benefits for youth regional co-operation and mobility processes.
- Enhance capacity building of the youth sector in order to improve the knowledge, information and competences needed to enhance youth mobility and the exchanges across the region.
- To encourage more innovative policy framework for virtual/online mobility (educational - formal and non-formal education; for apprenticeship and labour force mobility) and improving the system for recognition of the skills and knowledge gained in this way. Also, establishing or improving regulations that will enable working practice and financial management of online programs and projects relevant for young people, including start-ups, entrepreneurial skills development and similar initiatives. The appropriate use of internet in areas such as online news, online forums, online counselling, etc. could help promote self-reliance, psychological empowerment, lifelong learning and a better quality of life of young generation across the region.



Balkan Regional Platform for Youth Participation and Dialogue

<http://www.ald-balkan-youth.eu/>

