

# Policy Paper



## Youth Guarantee Deployment in the WB6

*Second Edition*



# Youth Guarantee Deployment in the WB6

*Second Edition*

Policy paper

November 2023

*Disclaimer: This Policy paper has been prepared within the 2023 Plan of the Connecting Youth platform by the Connecting Youth's six Partners in the WB6 and the Cooperation and Development Institute. The Connecting Youth platform is supported by the Hanns Seidel Foundation.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	5
2. ADVANCING YOUTH GUARANTEE IN THE WESTERN BALKANS	6
2.1 Albania	6
2.2 Bosnia and Herzegovina	7
2.3 Kosovo	8
2.4 Montenegro	9
2.5 North Macedonia	11
2.6 Serbia	12
3. CHALLENGES AND PROGRESS: NAVIGATING YOUTH GUARANTEE IMPLEMENTATION ACROSS THE WESTERN BALKANS	13
4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCING YOUTH GUARANTEE IMPLEMENTATION	14
5. CONCLUSIONS	15

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Addressing the pressing issue of youth unemployment is a common concern amid the dynamic landscape of the Western Balkan (WB6) countries. This paper delves further into the intricate realm of Youth Guarantee initiatives within the region. Building upon the groundwork laid in the inaugural edition, titled "Youth Guarantee Deployment in the WB6 - Institutional Set-up and a Perspective from Youth Organizations," released in May 2022, this subsequent edition offers a fresh perspective on the strides taken in implementing the Youth Guarantee across the WB6.

The Youth Guarantee stands as a pivotal policy instrument crafted to combat youth unemployment and foster social engagement in the WB6 countries. This initiative strives to establish accessible pathways for young individuals, ensuring their integration into the workforce. Its execution follows a logical framework that recognizes the transformative impact of investing in youth. The Youth Guarantee aims to be a catalyst for social cohesion, economic advancement, and overall enhancement of these countries by aligning policy objectives with human capital development.

This second edition of the policy document is part of the 2023 Activity Plan of the Connecting Youth platform. Shaped by insights from all six of Connecting Youth's partners in the WB6, the primary aim of this paper is to assess the progress of the Youth Guarantee in the region.

At its core, the paper has two primary objectives. Firstly, it aims to scrutinize the latest developments in the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in the WB6 countries. Through a comparative analysis, the report unveils advancements made and identifies shared challenges faced by these countries. Secondly, it serves as a guiding beacon by presenting a comprehensive set of carefully selected suggestions to enhance the efficacy of Youth Guarantee implementation. These proposals suggest strategic approaches to improve youth employment outcomes and foster social inclusion.

Amid the intricate landscape of Youth Guarantee initiatives in the WB6 countries, this policy paper acts as a reminder of our collective commitment to empowering the youth. Recognizing, nurturing, and harnessing the potential of each young individual through collaborative efforts, dedication, and informed governance can pave the way for a brighter future and the collective prosperity of our countries.

## 2. ADVANCING YOUTH GUARANTEE IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

### 2.1 ALBANIA

In late April 2023, the Albanian government endorsed the implementation of the Youth Guarantee<sup>1</sup>. The Operational Program for the Youth Guarantee 2024-2027 has been drawn up.

The overarching objective is to facilitate the comprehensive integration of a new workforce that is capable and adaptable to the demands of the labor market. The program specifically targets individuals aged 15-29 who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET).

The Operational Program is structured into two areas of support:

- Support Area 1: Youth Employment
- Support Area 2: Youth Education and Training

Additionally, technical assistance is provided, encompassing activities related to supporting the Managing Authority, implementation, and alignment with the acquis. The program entails vocational training courses lasting 3 to 6 months, followed by employment for at least an additional 6 months, funded by both the state budget and European Union funds. The goal is to pave the way for the long-term employment of participating youth.

Preliminary data from the operational plan suggests that civil society organizations will play a role in the pilot phase, particularly in outreach activities, as they are more accessible to young people. During this phase, these organizations will be involved in projects aimed at locating and identifying young individuals near employment offices across the territory through a grant scheme dedicated to CSOs.

Preparations for the pilot phase commenced in the current year and are slated to continue throughout 2024. However, the actual implementation of the program is anticipated to commence post-2025.

2

Despite the initiative outlined in the National Youth Strategy 2022-2029, there remains a challenge in strengthening capacities within the administration to address the needs of young women and men through tailored policies and locally accessible services. The goal of filling one-third of public administration jobs with young people, as per the initiative, is acknowledged, yet challenges persist.

6

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://kryeministria.al/newsroom/vendime-te-miratuara-ne-mbledhjen-e-keshillit-te-ministrave-date-27-prill-2023/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://riniafemijet.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Strategjia-Kombetare-e-Rinise-2022-2029-1.pdf>

Enhancing human resources and empowering youth organizations would not only bolster the quality representation of youth in the region and beyond but also draw on positive experiences from implementing the "Tirana European Capital of Youth" program. The government's support for this program, as documented in the report on the implementation of the National Action Plan for Youth 2015-2020<sup>3</sup>, serves as a foundation for these endeavors.

As an active participant in the technical working group, the National Youth Congress has taken a proactive approach, consistently monitored the process and offering alternative avenues for involvement by civil society organizations and youth.

## 2.2 Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Youth Guarantee in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a key focus in the realm of youth-related issues addressed at the national level. Exclusive attention to competencies associated with Youth Guarantee implementation, without considering other governmental tiers, requires an understanding of Bosnia and Herzegovina's three primary levels of government: the Republic of Srpska, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Therefore, it is crucial to clarify the adoption process for the Implementation Plan for the Youth Guarantee in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The initial step involves the establishment of working groups at all three government levels within the Ministry or Department for Labor and Social Policy. These groups consist of relevant representatives from the government, private sector, and civil society. At each government level, coordinators and their deputies are designated, playing a pivotal role in monitoring and facilitating communication with relevant stakeholders in the process. Upon the completion of essential consultations and a sufficient number of meetings, coordinators and department representatives at the line ministries commence drafting the text of the Implementation Plan for the Youth Guarantee. This text undergoes potential revisions and approvals within the technical service before being submitted to the government for final adoption.

While the Republic of Srpska's line ministry and the Brčko District's department have concluded the document creation process and forwarded it for consideration to the respective governments, final decisions are pending in both cases. It is currently uncertain whether the Action Plan for the Youth Guarantee has been adopted at either of these government levels.

---

<sup>3</sup> Chapter V "Findings and Recommendations" of the "Final Evaluation Report of the National Action Plan for Youth 2015 - 2020" published in June 2020 with the support of UNFPA and the Ministry of Education and Sports.

In contrast, in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the selection of an official coordinator was eagerly anticipated and was ultimately defined more than a year later. Subsequently, in September of this year, a Working Group was established to formulate an Action Plan for the Youth Guarantee's implementation, with representation from the Youth Council of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Despite this youth umbrella body delegating its representatives to two working groups at the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina at the beginning of 2022, the slow progress at lower levels has hindered further concrete meetings.

Once the implementation plans for the Youth Guarantee in Bosnia and Herzegovina are adopted at the Federation of BiH, Republic of Srpska, and Brčko District levels, they will be forwarded to the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, specifically the Sector for Labour, Employment, Social Protection, and Pensions. This sector will consolidate the three mentioned documents and present them for adoption by the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Youth Council of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina will continue its involvement in these processes, as it has done so far.

## 2.3 Kosovo

Through the initiation of the Youth Guarantee program, Kosovo has undertaken significant efforts to mitigate youth unemployment and foster social involvement. Drawing inspiration from successful models in neighboring countries, Kosovo has actively worked towards constructing a comprehensive framework to cater to the diverse needs of its young population.

Kosovo's approach has been both collaborative and strategic, with the National Working Group for Youth Guarantee Deployment serving as the governing body. This group encompasses a diverse range of stakeholders, including businesses, organizations, the National Youth Council, the Ministry of Youth, the Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Education, local governments, the Agency for Employment, educational institutions, and more. This multi-stakeholder strategy ensures a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by Kosovo's youth, facilitating the generation of targeted solutions.

A pivotal element of Kosovo's strategy involves extensive research initiatives to delve into the unique characteristics of youth employment and the NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) category within Kosovo. This research serves as the cornerstone



for crafting tailored policies and actions, ensuring that the Youth Guarantee programs align with the specific needs of Kosovo's young population.

Kosovo is undergoing significant legislative and administrative adjustments in alignment with its dedication to the Youth Guarantee. These reforms have streamlined processes, enabling the swift adoption of Youth Guarantee policies. Noteworthy advancements include the digitalization of the Agency for Employment in Kosovo, aimed at providing accessible and user-friendly services to the country's youth. Additionally, the implementation of the "Dual Learning" program in schools marks a significant stride.

The development and release of the National Strategy for Youth Guarantee Deployment represents a crucial milestone in Kosovo's Youth Guarantee journey. This comprehensive document serves as a roadmap, outlining goals, processes, and anticipated outcomes for the country. Overseen by the Ministry of Labor, Finances, and Transfers, this plan coordinates the efforts of various partners and stakeholders to bolster youth empowerment.

To enrich opportunities for practical experience, Kosovo has introduced "SuperPuna," a dedicated web platform for internship opportunities. Facilitated by the Ministry of Labor, Finances, and Transfers, this platform acts as a bridge connecting ambitious young talent with meaningful internships, enhancing their skills and employability.

In conclusion, Kosovo's implementation of the Youth Guarantee underscores the country's commitment to supporting its youth population. Through collaborative partnerships, meticulous research, legislative reforms, digital innovation, and targeted strategies, Kosovo is cultivating an environment where its youth can thrive, acquire essential skills, and contribute meaningfully to the country's workforce.

## 2.4 Montenegro

In Montenegro, following the formation of the last Government, the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare has assumed the primary responsibility for the preparation and implementation of the Youth Guarantee. This is a departure from the previous period when the Ministry of Economic Development led the process. Notably, in the early months of 2023, efforts intensified in preparing for the implementation of the Youth Guarantee.

The introduction of an enhanced guarantee for young people in Montenegro is poised to facilitate the implementation of policy reforms and initiatives across key areas: education and training, work and employment, social protection, and youth. These serve as instrumental tools for enhancing the position of young individuals and building the capacity of key stakeholders to formulate, implement, and monitor youth employment policies.

With a focus on early intervention, the priority lies in elevating the quality of the education and training system, expanding opportunities for adult learning, enhancing early childhood education, and improving the management of the information system.

The first Youth Guarantee implementation plan in Montenegro spans the period 2023-2026, with the piloting of the YG service delivery system slated for 2025 and 2026. This timeframe aims to:

- (i) introduce necessary amendments to the legal system;
- (ii) enact essential policy reforms in the Employment and Active Measures (EAM) to oversee the YG service delivery system and establish a monitoring mechanism aligned with the European Monitoring Committee on Youth (EMCO) indicator framework;
- (iii) develop a rollout plan for the Youth Guarantee based on insights gained from the piloting phase.

The piloting of the YG service delivery system will be conducted in three areas (North, Central, and Coastal regions) selected based on findings from the Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) mapping, civil society organizations' service delivery reviews, analyses of inflow and the service delivery system of EAM, and the density of training providers and businesses.

Operationalizing the Youth Guarantee in Montenegro will involve partnerships between the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (the YG Coordinator), the Employment Agency of Montenegro (the primary implementing partner), the Ministry of Education (overseeing the early intervention phase), the Ministry of Sports and Youth, civil society organizations (handling outreach), local government authorities (managing implementation on the ground), social partners, and other governmental institutions already implementing interventions targeting young people (e.g., Ministry of Economy).<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.zzzcg.me/predstavnici-zavoda-za-zaposljavanje-ucestvovali-na-sastanku-radnog-tima-za-uvodenje-i-implimentaciju-programa-garancija-za-mlade/>

## 2.5 North Macedonia

North Macedonia has marked a significant achievement by becoming the first non-EU country to effectively implement the Youth Guarantee policy. The reinforced Youth Guarantee in North Macedonia, drawing lessons from experiences since 2018, is set to emphasize field activities, quality offerings, enhanced partnerships, and a more robust service provision system.

In the past year, a Youth Guarantee Master Plan for the period 2023-2026 was developed, providing ample time for policy reforms to take effect and bring about transformative changes in the youth labor market. The National Youth Council of Macedonia was one of the stakeholders that actively participated in the development of this document.

As the operationalization of this process hinges on a long-term partnership involving key institutions such as the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, the Employment Agency, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Center for Adult Education, the Agency for Youth and Sports, the National Youth Council of Macedonia, youth organizations, local self-government bodies, and social partners, the NYCM will persist in its crucial role. It will continue providing services and engaging disengaged young people in the field by facilitating their registration within the Youth Guarantee's service provision system.

Drawing on the experiences of field workers and representatives from relevant institutions responsible for Youth Guarantee implementation in the previous period, several recommendations have been identified to enhance the Youth Guarantee:

- Conduct a baseline study on NEET youth as potential beneficiaries of the Youth Guarantee.
- Provide more inclusive criteria to engage youth without a high school diploma or NEET youth previously registered at the ESA.
- Allocate active measures for employment accessible exclusively to Youth Guarantee beneficiaries.
- Intensify intersectoral cooperation among field workers, institutions, and youth organizations to ensure the effective implementation of the Youth Guarantee and exchange accurate information regarding active measures for unregistered NEET youth.
- Simplify and digitize access to measures offered by the ESA to prevent youth from being deterred by complex administrative procedures.
- Support institutions in the field of education and training to increase the delivery of practical and quality courses and workshops as part of the Youth Guarantee.

To build on the achieved progress and maximize the impact of the Youth Guarantee, the

government should concentrate on fostering multi-stakeholder collaborations involving the government, educational institutions, private sector employers, and civil society organizations. Coordinated efforts among these stakeholders enable a more comprehensive approach to addressing youth unemployment.

## 2.6 Serbia

The issue of young people's status in the labor market is of utmost importance in Serbia. As per official data from the National Employment Service, the number of unemployed youths in May 2023 reached 75,526, constituting 18.43% of the overall unemployed population. Nearly one-fifth of Serbia's total unemployed individuals, aged 15 to 30 years, highlights the significance of addressing youth unemployment despite improvements in recent years. While significant improvements have been made in this area over the past few years, there is an ongoing need to bridge the gap between the employment indicators for young people and adults. Additionally, aligning these indicators with the European Union's average values is crucial and to achieve this, during 2023 multiple efforts have been made to address youth unemployment and create opportunities for its younger population.

Serbia recently concluded a public consultation process concerning proposed legislation on internships. KOMS, a part of the Work Group drafting this law, ensured the inclusion of youth perspectives throughout the public consultation, making it accessible for their voices to be considered. This legislation, poised for introduction in Parliament, is likely to pass, given the consensus achieved by the working group on its contents.

Furthermore, the Expert Group of the Coordination Body for the Implementation and Monitoring of the Youth Guarantee has crafted a Draft Implementation Plan for the Youth Guarantee in Serbia from 2023 to 2026. As a member of both the Coordination Body and the Expert Group, KOMS effectively advocates for youth-related concerns at local and national levels in employment and inclusion matters, incorporating them into the draft plan. Submitted for feedback to the European Commission on June 19th, the draft outlines comprehensive strategies and actions to enhance youth employment and opportunities in Serbia.

The commitment to improving young people's prospects in the labor market is underscored by allocated financial resources. Funding, sourced from the Republic of Serbia's budget and the IPA 2020 program, includes Direct Grants to the National Employment Service and Technical Assistance Projects for the Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veterans, and Social Affairs and the National Employment Service. The total funding amounts to 5.5 million EURO, with a co-financing contribution of EUR 1.5 million

from the national budget. A significant portion will be directed to three selected branches of the National Employment Service in Niš, Kruševac, and Sremska Mitrovica. These regions are strategically chosen to address distinct employment challenges and ensure equitable distribution of opportunities across the country. A portion of the funds will be dedicated to supporting long-term unemployed individuals and those facing multiple employment barriers.

### **3. CHALLENGES AND PROGRESS: NAVIGATING YOUTH GUARANTEE IMPLEMENTATION ACROSS THE WESTERN BALKANS**

A collective commitment to combat youth unemployment through the implementation of the Youth Guarantee has led to significant advancements and notable challenges across the Western Balkans (WB6) countries. A shared recognition exists that youth unemployment is a pressing issue. Albania has endorsed the Operational Program for Youth Guarantee 2024-2027, concentrating on vocational training courses and subsequent employment opportunities for individuals aged 15 to 29. Similarly, the National Working Group for Youth Guarantee Deployment in Kosovo has drawn inspiration from successful models in neighboring countries, emphasizing tailored solutions for their young population. The reinforced Youth Guarantee in North Macedonia, developed in collaboration with key institutions and youth organizations, has set the groundwork for an impactful transformation of the labor market landscape. In Montenegro, the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare's enhanced guarantee for young people incorporates policy improvements in education, work, social protection, and youth, with the aim of enhancing the overall position of young Montenegrins in the labor market.

However, various systemic issues persist across the region, hindering the successful implementation of the Youth Guarantee. One significant obstacle is the bureaucratic complexity of the political systems in these countries, leading to frequent delays in policy adoption and implementation. Bosnia and Herzegovina's multi-tiered government structure, for instance, exemplifies the intricate decision-making processes that can impede projects. Additionally, as is common in many WB6 countries, a misalignment between education institutions and industry expectations poses a substantial barrier. Aligning school curricula with job-market skills is crucial, but it remains a shared challenge.

Moreover, insufficient resources and budgetary constraints hinder the Youth Guarantee from reaching its full potential. Despite financial support from national budgets and international programs such as in Serbia, available funds often fall short of addressing the breadth of youth unemployment concerns.

This financial gap is most evident when attempting to reach remote or economically disadvantaged communities, limiting equal opportunity and exacerbating regional disparities in employment rates. Additionally, while commendable efforts are made to involve civil society organizations, youth councils, and other non-governmental entities, ensuring their meaningful engagement in policy development and implementation remains challenging. A comprehensive and inclusive Youth Guarantee effort necessitates that their voices be heard, and their perspectives incorporated into decision-making.

In conclusion, while WB6 have made strides towards reducing youth unemployment through the Youth Guarantee, structural barriers, policy gaps, and financial constraints pose challenges to its successful implementation. Addressing these obstacles collectively remains a key priority for all involved stakeholders.

## **4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCING YOUTH GUARANTEE IMPLEMENTATION**

### **Streamlining Administrative Procedures**

A key recommendation for improving Youth Guarantee programs in the Western Balkans is the streamlining of administrative processes. Establishing dedicated task teams at municipal, regional, and national levels, akin to initiatives in North Macedonia and Serbia, can expedite decision-making procedures. These task forces act as agile groups capable of promptly responding to the evolving needs of young job seekers, facilitating swift policy interventions.

### **Enhancing Educational-Business Partnerships**

Developing robust connections between educational institutions and business stakeholders is crucial for closing the education-employment gap. A model resembling Montenegro's, where schools, vocational training institutes, and businesses collaborate closely, aligns educational curricula with market demands. Moreover, involving private sector companies directly in curriculum development and training programs ensures that education remains pertinent to current job requirements.

### **Budgetary resources**

While financial investments are crucial, strategic allocation is key to optimizing impact. Following Serbia's example, allocating funds to specific areas with higher youth unemployment and economic inequity ensures equal opportunity. Effective direction of national finances and foreign contributions, such as in Serbia, toward areas of greatest need can significantly impact Youth Guarantee initiatives.

### **Expanding Access to Information and Guidance**

Accessible information and guidance are vital for maximizing the effects of the Youth Guarantee. Initiatives like Kosovo's "SuperPuna," providing user-friendly online platforms, enable easy access to employment opportunities and training programs. Funding for career counseling services in schools and employment offices, inspired by best practices, offers personalized assistance to young individuals, fostering informed decision-making. Additionally, harnessing digital innovation, as seen in Kosovo's digitalization initiatives, is critical. Establishing a central online platform like "SuperPuna" ensures easy access to resources. Incorporating artificial intelligence and data analytics, as demonstrated in Albania's Operational Program, enables targeted interventions that successfully align customer requests with individual needs. This comprehensive strategy ensures that no eligible individual remains uninformed, enhancing the overall effectiveness of Youth Guarantee programs.

The Western Balkan countries can significantly enhance the effectiveness of their Youth Guarantee initiatives by implementing these well-structured recommendations based on a partnership and inclusiveness principle. These countries can develop more adaptable, inclusive, and successful programs through streamlined bureaucracy, strengthened educational-business relationships, digital innovation, active civil society engagement, and targeted financial allocations. In addition to addressing urgent youth issues, this systematic approach will contribute to the long-term stability of the region's economy.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

The Western Balkans (WB6) countries face a shared challenge in addressing youth unemployment, and the Youth Guarantee emerges as a pivotal policy instrument to combat this issue. This policy paper, a sequel to the inaugural edition, assesses the progress made in implementing the Youth Guarantee across the region and provides valuable insights into each country's unique approach and challenges.

Albania, in endorsing the Youth Guarantee, has structured its Operational Program for 2024-2027, focusing on both youth employment and education. The involvement of civil society organizations during the pilot phase underscores the importance of community engagement. However, challenges persist in strengthening capacities within the administration to address the diverse needs of young men and women.

Bosnia and Herzegovina faces the intricacies of multi-tiered government structures, impacting the adoption of the Youth Guarantee at various levels. Delays in decision-making processes and slow progress hinder concrete outcomes, emphasizing the need for streamlined procedures.

Kosovo's collaborative and strategic approach stands out, with a National Working Group driving the initiative. Extensive research initiatives and legislative reforms demonstrate a commitment to tailoring policies to the unique needs of Kosovo's youth. The release of the National Strategy for Youth Guarantee Deployment marks a significant milestone.

Montenegro, with a focus on early intervention, is working on an enhanced guarantee for young people, aligning policies in education, work, social protection, and youth. The piloting of the service delivery system and strategic financial allocations showcase the government's commitment to addressing youth unemployment comprehensively.

North Macedonia stands as a trailblazer, effectively implementing the Youth Guarantee policy and emphasizing field activities, quality offerings, and enhanced partnerships. The Youth Guarantee Master Plan for 2023-2026 lays the foundation for transformative changes in the youth labor market, reflecting a collaborative effort involving key institutions and youth organizations.

In Serbia, where youth unemployment remains a significant concern, recent efforts include public consultations on proposed internship legislation and the crafting of a Draft Implementation Plan for the Youth Guarantee. Financial commitments, supported by the national budget and international programs, highlight the importance of resource allocation.

Despite these advancements, systemic challenges persist across the region. Bureaucratic complexities, misalignments between education and business expectations, insufficient resources, and limited engagement of civil society organizations remain hurdles in fully realizing the potential of the Youth Guarantee.

To address these challenges and optimize the impact of Youth Guarantee initiatives, the paper concludes with a set of comprehensive recommendations.



By implementing these recommendations, the Western Balkan countries can create more adaptable, inclusive, and successful Youth Guarantee programs, contributing to both immediate youth issues and the long-term stability of the region's economy.



[connecting-youth.org](http://connecting-youth.org)

