



Policy
Paper

Enhancing Cooperation among National Youth Councils in the Western Balkans

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POLICY PAPER

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1 INTRODUCTION

The policy paper “Enhancing Cooperation among National Youth Councils in the Western Balkans”, offers a comprehensive analysis of National Youth Councils (NYCs) in the region. It examines the current state of youth policy development and participation, contributing to broader efforts to foster more inclusive and accountable policymaking processes. Building on prior research and analysis by the NYCs in the Western Balkans Six (WB6), the paper provides an in-depth overview of their structures, functions, and interactions with governments and other stakeholders. Based on this analysis, it presents key findings and country-specific recommendations aimed at improving the cooperation and effectiveness of NYCs in the WB6. The conclusions highlight the strategic role of NYCs as essential players in the youth policy landscape, advocating for stronger institutional frameworks, increased support, and enhanced collaboration to ensure meaningful youth engagement and policy development.

2 METHODOLOGY

This policy paper draws on desk research and analysis of different youth policy documents, complemented by insights from the Youth Wiki - Europe's Encyclopedia of National Youth Policies. Each National Youth Council, partner of Connecting Youth (the National Youth Congress of Albania, Youth Council of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovar Youth Council, Youth Network of Montenegro, National Youth Council of Macedonia and National Youth Council of Serbia) contributed with their own data, information sources and input, providing valuable perspectives on the topics covered by this paper. The Youth Councils are responsible for the data accuracy and the validity of conclusions in this paper.

3 OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCILS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

National Youth Congress of Albania (*Kongresi Rinor Kombëtar - KRK*)

Starting from Albania, the National Youth Congress of Albania¹ (Kongresi Rinor Kombëtar KRK) was established in March 2013 in Tirana. Initiated with the support of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and Olof Palme International foundations, in the presence of over 30 organizations, KRK has grown into the biggest youth network in Albania representing 140 youth and for-youth entities at national level.

Its activities are diverse, ranging from promoting youth employment and social inclusion to advocating for youth perspectives in regional cooperation and the European dimension. KRK's proactive approach in these areas has solidified its position as a key institution for youth advocacy in Albania.

Youth Council of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Vijeće mladih Federacije Bosne i Hercegovine - VMFBiH*)

The Youth Council of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina² (Vijeće mladih Federacije Bosne i Hercegovine) was formed in 2015 as the umbrella organisation for youth in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina established by six cantonal youth councils based on the Law of Youth of the Federation of BiH, to unify the youth representation across the region. The Council's work is primarily focused on advocating with government institutions to improve the implementation of the Law on Youth, thereby enhancing the societal position of young people. By strengthening youth structures and fostering cooperation with European and other international youth bodies, the Council plays a crucial role in shaping youth policy and ensuring that the voices of young people are heard at all levels of governance.

Kosovar Youth Council (*Këshilli Rinor i Kosovës - KYC*)

Although there is no formal Kosovar National Youth Council, the Kosovar Youth Council (KYC)³ has effectively filled this gap through its longstanding engagement with youth. Established in 1999 amidst the turmoil of refugee camps in Albania, KYC has since evolved into a significant youth organisation. In June 2021, KYC entered into an informal cooperation agreement with the central government, marking a recognition of its importance in

¹ Home - Kongresi Rinor Kombetar | KRK. (n.d.-b). Kongresi Rinor Kombetar | KRK. <https://krk.al/>

² Početna - Vijeće mladih FBiH. (2024, March 19). Vijeće Mladih FBiH. <https://www.vijecemladih.ba/>

³ Kosovar Youth Council | Enabling an environment where youth thrive. (n.d.). <https://kyc-ks.org/>

representing youth voices. This agreement underscores KYC's crucial role in amplifying youth voices and holding public agencies accountable for positive outcomes in the lives of young people.

Youth Network of Montenegro (*Mreža za mlade Crne Gore*)

The Youth Network of Montenegro⁴ (*Mreža za mlade Crne Gore*) was established on September 15, 2020. It represents a relatively new but dynamic addition to the youth policy landscape in the Western Balkans. Founded by a coalition of 35 youth organisations, the Council is dedicated to fostering activism and creativity among young people in Montenegro. Through its activities, the Council seeks to mobilise youth participation in decision-making processes, ensuring that young people's voices are not only heard but also acted upon at various levels of governance.

National Youth Council of Macedonia (Национален младински совет на Македонија)

National Youth Council of Macedonia⁵ (Национален младински совет на Македонија - NYCM) was established on June 29, 2013, by a union of 55 founding organizations. From the day it was established, the NYCM serves as a cornerstone for youth representation in North Macedonia. NYCM's mission is to bridge the gap between young people and decision-makers, ensuring that youth are actively involved in the process of governance. The Council's activities are designed to promote the involvement of youth in all aspects of decision-making, thereby fostering a more inclusive and democratic society.

⁴ *Mreža za mlade Crne Gore - Zvanična stranica*. (n.d.). MMCG. <https://www.mmcg.me/>

⁵ *Почетна - Национален младински совет на Македонија*. (2024, June 24). Национален Младински Совет На Македонија. <https://nms.org.mk/>



National Youth Council of Serbia (*Krovna organizacija mladih Srbije*)

National Youth Council of Serbia⁶ (*Krovna organizacija mladih Srbije*), was established on March 12, 2011, and it has been instrumental in strengthening the position of youth in relation to state policies. The Council's efforts focus on improving mechanisms for youth participation in decision-making, enhancing the equal representation of youth, and ensuring that young people and youth organisations are well-informed and empowered to contribute to the socio-political discourse. Through these initiatives, the Council has established itself as a vital advocate for Serbian youth on both national and international stages.

⁶ News - *Krovna organizacija mladih Srbije*. (2024, May 15). Krovna Organizacija Mladih Srbije. <https://koms.rs/news/>

4 NYC'S SUSTAINABILITY: A WORK IN PROGRESS

National Youth Councils (NYCs) have an important role in representing youth interests and influencing policy across the Western Balkans. While the effectiveness of these councils varies, they remain crucial in advocating for youth issues, showing the positive impact they can have in shaping youth policies.

Government collaboration with NYCs is often inconsistent. In some cases, project-based support limits long-term impact. However, there are successful examples where structured partnerships and proactive engagement have led to meaningful outcomes for youth, highlighting the potential for improved collaboration.

Many NYCs face challenges related to lack of formal legal recognition, which can weaken their influence. Despite this, there are efforts underway to address these issues and improve recognition, demonstrating progress in empowering youth councils.

NYCs across the region face challenges with fragmented and project-based funding. However, there is a growing recognition of the need for more stable and strategically aligned financial mechanisms to ensure long-term sustainability,

Efforts to enhance financial management and fundraising capacities within NYCs are ongoing. These improvements are crucial for reducing reliance on external donors and ensuring more consistent support for youth initiatives.

Although budget allocation for youth-related activities can be fragmented, some governments are working to streamline and increase funding for youth policies. This reflects a positive trend towards better financial support for youth councils.

Many countries in the region have recently developed or updated their youth strategies, such as the National Youth Strategy 2022-2029 in Albania and the Kosovo Youth Strategy and Action Plan 2024-2032. These strategies represent a commitment to addressing youth issues through comprehensive planning.

There is a growing emphasis on improving youth participation and engagement in policy-making, supported by various donor-funded projects and initiatives.

Recent institutional changes, such as the new Ministry of Social Policy, Demography, and Youth in North Macedonia, indicate a shift towards more focused and effective management of youth policies. These changes are expected to enhance support and investment in youth issues.

5 GOVERNMENT - NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCILS' COLLABORATION

5.1 ALBANIA

The partnership between the National Youth Council of Albania (NYCA) and the Albanian government plays a critical role in executing the National Youth Strategy 2022-2029. This collaboration is designed to boost youth involvement in democratic processes, expand job opportunities, and address issues in health and the environment.

In November 2019, Albania's Parliament enacted its first law dedicated specifically to youth, establishing a framework for a youth system and creating specialised youth structures with legal responsibilities at both national and local levels. The law also introduces a foundation for two consultative bodies: the National Youth Council (NYC) and the Local Youth Council (LYC).

According to the Law on Youth, the National Youth Council serves as an advisory body under the minister responsible for youth. Chaired by the youth minister, the council consists of 14 to 16 members, with at least half representing youth and youth organisations. These members are appointed by the minister's order, while the selection criteria, organisational structure, and operational guidelines are defined by the Council of Ministers.

The NYCA collaborates closely with the Albanian government, particularly through joint policies and initiatives that align with the National Youth Strategy 2022-2029. This framework seeks to enhance young people's engagement in democratic life, support employment opportunities, and foster health and environmental awareness among youth.

NYC is also officially part of the inter-institutional and technical Youth Guarantee working group, established by the Prime Minister's order nr.28, date 24 February 2022 "*Establishment of the inter-institutional working group and the technical working group for the drafting, implementation and monitoring of the national youth guarantee plan, as well as the appointment of the national coordinator*". NYC has actively participated at the working group meetings and contributed to the drafting of the National Youth Guarantee Action Plan, approved as part of the National Strategy of Employment and Skills 2023-2030. NYC is contributing by raising awareness about YG scheme and mobilize young people to take advantage of these opportunities.

5.2 BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Understanding youth governance in Bosnia and Herzegovina, requires recognizing the country's three-tiered political system: the Republika Srpska, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Brčko District. As per that, each level has its own youth council: the Youth Council of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (VMFBiH), the Youth Council of Republika Srpska (OSRS), and the Youth Council of the Brčko District (VSMBD), and these councils are crucial for integrating youth perspectives into policy-making.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is home to three primary youth councils, each serving a distinct administrative region: The Youth Council of Republika Srpska, established in 2004, coordinates youth policies within the entity and includes government ministers and representatives from the Youth Council and the National Assembly's Committee for Youth Affairs. In the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Youth Council was formed in 2015 following the creation of six Cantonal Youth Councils. The Youth Council of Brčko District, created in 2018, represents the youth of this autonomous district. Together, these councils help shape and implement youth policies across the country's complex administrative structure.⁷ Noteworthy to mention is that Bosnia and Herzegovina doesn't have a national youth representation body beside the Commission for Coordination of Youth Issues in Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁸

The Youth Council of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter VMFBiH) has an important role in shaping youth policies through the Youth Law of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁹ This law mandates public consultations with youth councils when adopting policies affecting youth. The VMFBiH is involved in legislative processes by contributing to the Commission for Youth Issues in the House of Representatives.

The VMFBiH engages in the legislative process by participating in the Commission for Youth Issues of the House of Representatives of the Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and through this engagement, the VMFBiH contributes to the development of conclusions and recommendations that pertain to youth issues, ensuring that the perspectives and needs of young people are incorporated into legislative outcomes.

⁷ *Contribution to Youth Wiki on Erasmus+ partner countries.* (2024b, April 23). Youth Partnership. <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/contribution-eu-youth-wiki>

⁸ *Contribution to Youth Wiki on Erasmus+ partner countries.* (Chapter V: Participation) (2024c, April 23). Youth Partnership. <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/contribution-eu-youth-wiki>

⁹ *Zakon Vlade Federacije BiH za 2010.* (n.d.). <https://www.fbihvlada.gov.ba/bosanski/zakoni/2010/zakoni/22hrv.html>

5.3 Kosovo

In Kosovo, youth participation is organised through both local and central mechanisms. At the local level, engagement is facilitated by Local Youth Action Councils (LYACs) and Youth Assemblies, which are NGOs dedicated to youth involvement. At the central level, the Central Youth Action Council (CYAC) and the Kosovo Youth Council, along with the Kosovo Youth Assembly, function as national NGOs to advocate for youth interests and ensure their involvement in broader national issues. Despite these structures, Kosovo currently lacks a fully functional national youth council.

The CYAC, established in 2011 under the Law on Youth, was designed to act as the primary advisory body representing youth organisations at the national level. However, due to its current limitations, the Ministry of Youth, Culture, and Sports (MCYS) entered into an informal cooperation agreement with the Kosovar Youth Council (KYC) in June 2021. This agreement temporarily recognizes KYC's role in representing youth interests, serving as an interim solution until new CYAC elections are held, reflecting the government's acknowledgment of the need for effective youth representation.

Kosovar Youth Council relationship with the government is characterised by informal collaboration. While the KYC does not directly participate in decision-making, it engages in various governmental committees and working groups on youth issues, contributing to initiatives like the National Action Plan for Youth Guarantee. However, KYC's influence on public policy is inconsistent, often depending on the political climate and the specific issues at hand, requiring advocacy for placement in these groups rather than automatic allocation.

Over the past few years, KYC's engagement with public institutions has experienced both progress and setbacks. Initial collaboration with the government showed promise, but recent challenges, such as inconsistent support, bureaucratic delays, and occasional political interference, have hindered KYC's effectiveness in youth policy advocacy. Despite these obstacles, KYC continues to play a crucial role in representing youth interests, particularly in informal settings and joint initiatives.

5.4 MONTENEGRO

The current relationship between the National Youth Council (NYC) and the state is deemed adequate, particularly regarding communication with the relevant Ministry of Sports and Youth, as well as with the Prime Minister's Office, which has a special advisor for youth issues. The partnership between the Ministry of Sports and Youth and the National Youth Council is evident through the implementation of activities aimed at youth. However, support for projects initiated by the National Youth Council has been increasing.

Since its establishment, the National Youth Council's relationship with the state has progressed, with formal recognition in the Youth Law outlining clear representativeness criteria. However, stable state funding is lacking, aside from individual project support. The Youth Network of Montenegro participates in all key youth-related working bodies, including those drafting the Youth Strategy and revising the Youth Law, giving them substantial influence over youth policies. Their collaboration with the Ministry of Sports and Youth's Directorate for Youth is strong, supporting effective policy coordination.

In September 2024, the National Council for Youth was established, representing a crucial step in strengthening cooperation between the state and the National Youth Council. This Council allows the National Youth Council to have two of its representatives, enabling direct youth participation in shaping policies that concern their interests and needs. The establishment of the National Council for Youth represents a significant advancement in creating a system that ensures the voices of young people are heard and considered in policy-making. This new structure contributes to strengthening cooperation among various institutions and allows for more effective addressing of the needs of youth through collaborative actions and strategies.

5.5 NORTH MACEDONIA

The Agency of Youth and Sport (AYS) is the main governmental body for youth issues in North Macedonia, responsible for leading youth policy and coordinating actions across ministries. The Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies¹⁰, adopted in January 2020, provides a framework for youth organisation, representation, and participation, including the establishment of local youth councils and youth services.

¹⁰ *Public-call*. (n.d.). <https://ams.gov.mk/legislation/zakon-za-mladinsko-uchestvo-i-mladinski-politiki-2019>

Despite this comprehensive framework, the National Youth Council of Macedonia (NYCM) is not officially recognized by state authorities or mentioned in the Law. Nevertheless, the NYCM has been active for over a decade and has forged significant partnerships with AYS. Two memorandums of cooperation, signed in 2017 and 2021, have formalised the collaboration. The first ¹¹ memorandum acknowledged the NYCM as the largest representative body of youth organisations and committed both parties to joint activities such as research, training, and events whereas the second¹² memorandum furthered this partnership by focusing on promoting youth policies and enhancing youth representation in national and international bodies.

Additionally, the NYCM has collaborated with the Office of the President to establish MladiHub¹³, a resource centre designed to support youth civil society organisations and provide developmental information to young people. This initiative highlights the NYCM's proactive approach in addressing youth needs despite its lack of official recognition.

While the NYCM is not formally recognized in the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, it has effectively established a strong working relationship with AYS and other state institutions. Through formal agreements and additional collaborations like MladiHub, the NYCM continues to play a vital role in advancing youth policies and representation in North Macedonia.

5.6 SERBIA

The relationship between the National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS) and the government is multifaceted. On one hand, there is structured collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism and Youth, including participation in working groups and significant contributions to youth policy development. However, support has been inconsistent, often limited to specific

¹¹ Admin, P. (2017, August 15). *Меѓународниот ден на младите одбележан со меморандум за соработка помеѓу НМС и АМС* - <https://pogled.mk/post20892/>

¹² Nmsm. (2021, March 3). *ПОТПИШАН НОВ МЕМОРАНДУМ ЗА СОРАБОТКА ПОМЕЃУ НМСМ И АМС - Национален младински совет на Македонија*. Национален Младински Совет На Македонија. <https://nms.org.mk/%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%BF%D0%B8%D1%88%D1%83%D0%B2%D0%B0%D1%9A%D0%B5-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%BC%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B4%D1%83%D0%BC-%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D1%81%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B1%D0%BE%D1%82/>

¹³ *MladiHub*. (n.d.-b). <https://mladihub.mk/habd/2>

projects rather than a long-term, strategic commitment. Delays in project calls further complicate effective implementation.

Despite achieving some level of mutual understanding and formal agreements, actual progress on youth policies has been hindered by broader societal challenges and a lack of resources within the Ministry, which is currently understaffed. This situation has strained KOMS's capacity to fully utilise its opportunities.

Since its establishment in 2011, KOMS has been officially recognized as the umbrella organisation for youth interests. In 2020, it gained formal status as a representative body, proposing members for the Youth Council and contributing to the development of youth strategies. The Youth Council also includes representatives from the Scout Organization of Serbia and other civil society umbrella organisations such as NAPOR and the National Association of Local Youth Offices.

KOMS members are involved in key working bodies and have engaged in dialogues with government representatives, including the Prime Minister, but what remains as a main challenge for KOMS is the overall political climate and the lack of long-term, strategic financing solutions. KOMS advocates for operational or structural grants to ensure consistent and effective representation and advocacy for youth needs in Serbia.

6 FUNDING AND AUTONOMY OF THE NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCILS

6.1 ALBANIA

In Albania, although the Ministry of State for Youth and Children (MSHC) was established in 2021, the 2023 Budget Report does not contain any funding to the MSHC, leaving the financial sustainability of the NYCA as an ongoing concern. The budget for youth policies in Albania is somewhat fragmented. The National Youth Strategy 2022-2029¹⁴ (SKR) provides its budget of 5.6 billion lek (50.1 million USD) for eight years. Each specific policy objective of the strategy has its own detailed budget, part of which is financed by the state and part financed by donors. Because financial allocations for youth initiatives are frequently bundled into broader budgets for the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth, it becomes difficult to determine exactly how much funding is dedicated specifically to youth-related activities. Budget for the year 2024¹⁵ reflects the government's commitment to economic growth, social welfare and infrastructure development, which are critical to creating an environment where young people can thrive. However, for the National Youth Council to sustain and expand its activities, creating a strong financial foundation through strategic financial planning and diversification of resources remains essential.

There are several public financial support mechanisms for youth organisations in Albania:

- National Youth Agency (NAY): the NAY is responsible for the management of youth NGO grant funds under the Minister of State for Youth and Children.
- Ministry of Culture: The Ministry of Culture in Albania provides funding for various youth programmes and initiatives.
- Municipalities through different grant-financing schemes.
- The Agency for the Support of Civil Society: supporting: The mission of the Agency for the Support of Civil Society is to promote the sustainable development of civil society through financial assistance and to create favourable conditions for civic initiatives.
- Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA): this EU funding instrument provides financial assistance to Albania, including support for democracy and governance, education, employment and social policies and regional and territorial co-operation.
- Erasmus+: the national Erasmus+ office in Albania provides information about Erasmus+ activities that are open to the participation of their countries (including in

¹⁴ *Strategjia Kombëtare e Rinisë 22-29 – Agjencia Kombëtare e Rinisë.* (n.d.). <https://rinia.gov.al/en/strategjia-kombetare-e-rinise-22-29/>

¹⁵ *Miratohet nen për nen dhe në tërësi projekt buxheti dhe paketa fiskale e vitit 2024.* (2023). Ministria E Financave. <https://financa.gov.al/newsroom/miratohet-nen-per-nen-dhe-ne-teresi-projektbuxheti-dhe-paketa-fiskale-e-vitit-2024/>

the fields of higher education, youth and VET, where relevant), advising and assisting potential applicants.

- Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO): The RYCO has supported projects in Albania as an intergovernmental regional organisation, funded by the six governments of the region.
- Regional Cooperation Council (RCC): the RCC implemented the Western Balkans Youth Lab Project, which aims to provide opportunities for young people to participate in decision making.

6.2 BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The Youth Council of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter VMFBiH) is primarily funded through various donors and foundations, supplemented by a modest operational budget from the government. This funding structure poses both opportunities and challenges for VMFBiH's operations. While diverse funding sources offer financial flexibility and support for specific initiatives, reliance on external donors can introduce uncertainties and limitations in long-term planning. Beyond the initial funding periods, VMFBiH strives to ensure financial sustainability through proactive fundraising efforts, partnerships with private sectors, and revenue-generating activities such as events or training programs. However, the unpredictable nature of donor funding and limited government support pose significant challenges in maintaining stable financial resources. Consequently, the Council often faces resource constraints, obstructing their capacity to fully execute planned activities and initiatives. Financial dependence on external donors and limited government funding can undermine the autonomy of youth councils. The need to align with donor priorities or satisfy government expectations may compromise the youth council's ability to advocate for youth rights and interests independently. Moreover, fluctuations in funding availability can disrupt long-term planning and sustainability efforts, constraining youth council's ability to address systemic challenges facing young people effectively.

The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina's budget has one budget line dedicated for youth called "Transfer for youth", in the Federal Ministry of Culture and Sport¹⁶, as support to youth organisations and financing the Youth Council of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

¹⁶ Federal Ministry of Culture and Sports: KM 30,000 for financing the programme activities of the Youth Council of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. (n.d.). Federalno Ministarstvo Kulture I Sporta. <https://fmks.gov.ba/en/federal-ministry-of-culture-and-sports-km-30000-for-financing-the-programme-activities-of-the-youth-council-of-the-federation-of-bosnia-and-herzegovina/>

The Ministry of Family, Youth and Sports finances the youth organisations and programmes for young people including the Youth Council of the Republika Srpska. The Youth Council of Brcko District is funded by the Brcko District Government and the Department for Expert and Administrative Affairs.

6.3 Kosovo

For the past four years, the Kosovo government provided no financial support to Kosovo Youth Council (KYC), regarding their active engagement as acting National Youth Council. Currently, KYC is funded through a mix of international donor funds, and partnerships with private sector entities. The primary sources of funding are project-based, which poses challenges for long-term sustainability of the youth representation in the national and international level.

When it comes to decision making, KYC has full autonomy for their actions, projects and advocating means. There is no intervention from the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport or other governmental institutions regarding the decisions taken from KYC. Due to this positive value, KYC has been able to intervene and raise concerns for several issues on the national level.

While the Central Youth Action Council (CYAC) was still active, it was primarily supported through different grants and project funding, some of them also government funds. Additionally, the government offered logistical support, including office space and resources for organising events and programs. Therefore, this support was not on a regular basis and the financial resources distributed could not support the overall strategy of the CYAC. However, in the past it was reported that the financial dependence on government and donors could sometimes limit CYAC's ability to operate fully independently.

The absence of a particular financial source or specific budget line for youth-related initiatives, such as youth centres, in numerous Kosovo municipalities can present obstacles to the efficient development and assistance of youth programs. However, a major contribution to increasing youth participation and representation in Kosovo is made by the Assembly of Kosovo Youth, an autonomous youth movement founded by a group of young people in 2009. Operating at both the central and local levels, this non-governmental group has approximately 500 members and is present in 20 out of 38 municipalities.¹⁷

¹⁷ *Contribution to Youth Wiki on Erasmus+ partner countries.* (Chapter V_Albania) (2024d, April 23). Youth Partnership. <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/contribution-eu-youth-wiki>

6.4 MONTENEGRO

The National Youth Council in Montenegro is currently funded through projects and donations, which represent the main sources of financing. However, financial stability for this council is challenging, especially considering it was established in 2020, and there is difficulty in securing continuous funding. This becomes particularly problematic given the lack of direct financial contribution from the state.

The National Youth Council has full autonomy in decision-making and functioning, and it is important to note that the lack of direct financial contribution from the state does not limit its financial autonomy. The National Youth Council retains its independence in planning and implementing activities, allowing it to respond to the needs of youth in the most efficient manner.

Although financial resources are limited, the National Youth Council successfully manages its resources and adapts its programs and initiatives to achieve its goals. Financial autonomy allows the National Youth Council to maintain independence in decision-making and prioritizing activities. Funding limitations do not affect its ability to act in the best interest of youth and continue to be the voice of youth in society.

However, to ensure the long-term sustainability of the National Youth Council and strengthen its autonomy, it is important to consider diversifying funding sources. This may include seeking new donor sources, partnerships with the private sector, or developing self-financing programs. Additionally, the National Youth Council needs to work on building capacity for financial management and fundraising strategies to ensure long-term financial sustainability and independence.

6.5 NORTH MACEDONIA

The Public financial support for the National Youth Council of Macedonia and other youth organisations comes from both domestic and international sources, with international funding usually being larger. Government departments, ministries, and municipalities provide funds, but the procedures and amounts can differ from one place to another and are not standardised across the country.

In March 2021, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia announced a call¹⁸ for providing financial support to associations and foundations. Funds were allocated for 20 projects of associations and foundations, in a total value of 20.000.000,00 MKD.¹⁹ However, as of September 2023, there has been no subsequent announcement of a similar call from the government.

In 2023, The Agency for Youth and Sport provided financial support in the total amount of 5.600.000,00 MKD for financial support of youth related projects implemented by youth organisations, organisations for youth and youth umbrella organisations. The project initiatives should focus on the following domains: Youth engagement, Youth initiatives, Youth information, Enhancing quality of life, and Employment and pre-employment assistance.

European funds are available through the National Agency for European Educational Programs and Mobility²⁰ responsible for the Erasmus plus program as well as the Delegation of the EU to the Republic of North Macedonia. Also, some foreign Embassies in North Macedonia (mainly the British Embassy in Skopje, US Embassy in North Macedonia, Netherlands Embassy in Skopje, Embassy of Switzerland in North Macedonia) are supporting Macedonian youth CSO's in youth related projects and activities.²¹

6.6 SERBIA

The Ministry of Tourism and Youth funds youth programs and projects by supporting civil society and umbrella organisations through public calls. Although the amount of funding has been increasing, its share of the Ministry's budget has decreased—from 19.06% in 2023 to 13.35% in 2024.

Overall, the Republic of Serbia allocates just 0.03% of its budget to youth, and the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina dedicates only 0.04%. Furthermore, there are concerns about how these limited funds are distributed due to several issues.

¹⁸ Anja. (2024, August 23). *CFP: Call for financial support of associations and foundations in North Macedonia (Deadline: 17 March 2021)* – BCSDN. <https://balkancsd.net/cfp-call-for-financial-support-of-associations-and-foundations-in-north-macedonia-deadline-17-march-2021/>

¹⁹ 5.6 Supporting youth organisations. (n.d.). https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/republic-of-north-macedonia/56-supporting-youth-organisations#_ftn1

²⁰ Национална агенција - Национална агенција. (n.d.). <https://www.na.org.mk/>

²¹ <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/republic-of-north-macedonia/56-supporting-youth-organisations>

Analysis²² reveals that some civil society organisations (CSOs) that received funding had been registered for less than a year prior to the open call, lacked social media presence, and were awarded amounts significantly exceeding their annual budgets. Additionally, procedural delays exacerbate the problem, as the Ministry often takes a considerable amount of time to open calls and assign funds. This protracted process leaves only a short window for project implementation, further complicating the effective use of the allocated resources.

Despite some support for KOMS projects each year, the current funding mechanism presents challenges. The lack of long-term planning and security for funding impacts the Council's work. Moving forward, it is crucial to replace this system with a more stable, transparent, and expert-led funding approach.

²² <https://koms.rs/2022/05/analiza-konkursa-ministarstva-omladine-i-sporta-2022/>

7 NYC'S INSTITUTIONAL ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTH POLICIES

7.1 ALBANIA

The Minister of State for Youth and Children is tasked with the development and oversight of youth policies in Albania. However, youth-related matters extend beyond this ministry. For instance, the Ministry of Economy, Culture and Innovation addresses cultural, employment and innovation matters; the Ministry of Health and Social Protection focuses on youth health and social inclusion; the Ministry of Education and Sport oversees education and sport related issues.

Albania has introduced the National Youth Strategy 2022-2029, but there have been no major updates to the regulatory frameworks since its adoption. Youth participation continues to be a significant area for development, with various projects supported by multiple donors aiming to improve engagement. However, to achieve meaningful youth participation effectively, there is a need for a coordinated approach to prevent fragmentation and duplication, ensuring that all efforts contribute towards a unified goal.²³

7.2 BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The process of formulating and adopting youth policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) proceeds at a notably sluggish pace, particularly evident in the considerable time lapse since the enactment of significant legislative acts pertaining to youth in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH).

The decision-making processes at national level are under the jurisdiction of the BiH Ministry of Civil Affairs and the Commission for Coordination of Youth Issues in BiH. The Parliament commission in charge of youth issues is the Joint Committee on Human Rights, Rights of Children, Youth, Immigration, Refugees, Asylum and Ethics.²⁴ The Joint Committee addresses issues in the domain of human rights, the rights of children, youth, immigration, refugees, asylum and ethics.

²³ 5.10. *Contribution to Youth Wiki on Erasmus+ partner countries*. (2024e, April 23). Youth Partnership. <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/contribution-eu-youth-wiki>

²⁴ *Zajednička komisija za ljudska prava, prava djeteta, mlade, imigraciju, izbjeglice, azil i etiku*. (n.d.). Parlamentarna Skupština Bosne i Hercegovine. <https://www.parlament.ba/committee/read/40?committeeMandate=143>

On the federation level, the governmental institution that is responsible for youth is the Ministry of Culture and Sports of FBiH. VMFBiH actively tries to communicate and engage with the Ministry, and we think that our collaboration has become much better (even though there are more steps to do). Municipal, city, and cantonal levels of government are obliged to independently ensure a minimum of measures regarding youth work and youth activities.

When it comes to the process of the FBiH Youth Strategy, the document is led by the Ministry in partnership with VMFBiH and the Institute for Youth Development KULT²⁵, which is a very big step forward. Through the Youth Strategy, all ministries and levels of government will be included because of the relevant fields that are mentioned through the document.

A key issue in the political system is that post-legislation efforts often focus more on developing new strategies than on effective implementation. Typically, the drive for these initiatives comes from the youth sector rather than from government officials. Without strong commitment from the youth sector, policy formulation is difficult to achieve. Even when policies are adopted, the youth sector often lacks the capacity to fully engage with and implement them. Additionally, the crucial evaluation phase is often overlooked. This results in policies that may meet formal requirements but fail to address real needs and challenges. Bridging the gap between policy development and implementation requires better collaboration between the youth sector and government authorities.

7.3 Kosovo

In Kosovo, youth policy formulation involves collaboration between governmental bodies, youth organisations, and international partners, with the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports (MCYS) and its Department of Youth (DoY) playing a central role. Policies are developed based on stakeholder input, including from the National Youth Council and other youth NGOs, and must be approved by the Kosovo Assembly or relevant bodies. Implementation is handled by MCYS, municipal authorities, and youth organisations.

While the framework allows for inclusive policy-making, challenges persist. There are gaps in coordination and resource allocation, and not all policies involve youth-led NGOs. Taking as an example the working group created for the new Draft Law on Youth, the KYC was not invited to be part of the working group for the creation of the draft law, although they have

²⁵ Kult, I. Z. R. M. (2023, June 2). *Institut za razvoj mladih KULT*. Institut Za Razvoj Mladih KULT - Institut Za Razvoj Mladih KULT. <https://mladi.org/en/>

been engaged in the youth representation efforts in national and international level. On the other hand, the working group consisted of other youth NGOs working in the field of youth. As a result, there is no clear standard or uniformity in the methods and criteria for the NGOs participating in policy formation working groups.

On a positive note, the Kosovo Youth Strategy and Action Plan 2024-2032 (KSYAP) represents a more organised approach to youth policy in Kosovo. Crafted with contributions from various stakeholders, KSYAP is designed to tackle major youth issues through clear strategic goals and comprehensive action plans. The Strategy focuses on cross-sectoral collaboration, social inclusion, and alignment with European standards, with the goals of encouraging active citizenship among youth, providing them with job market skills, and ensuring a healthy and safe environment.

7.4 MONTENEGRO

In recent years, youth policy in Montenegro has gained significant focus and development. After a two-year wait, the Government of Montenegro has adopted the new Youth Strategy for 2023-2027, led by the Ministry of Sports and Youth in collaboration with key partners. This strategy outlines four major goals to improve youth opportunities and create an environment conducive to their growth and participation.

1. The first goal centres on establishing a sustainable system of services that support youth in their transition to adulthood. This includes providing access to quality education, healthcare, social, and other essential services to help young people integrate into society and become self-sufficient, productive members.
2. The second goal is to create opportunities for youth to engage as active citizens in shaping and implementing public policies. This involves ensuring accessible spaces and mechanisms for meaningful youth participation in decision-making and supporting their initiatives and projects that drive social progress.
3. The third goal focuses on enhancing youth welfare through a cross-sectoral approach. By coordinating across sectors and institutions, this approach aims to address youth issues holistically, accounting for various aspects of young people's lives and needs.
4. Finally, the fourth goal seeks to strengthen the legal and institutional framework underpinning youth policy. This involves revising and improving existing laws to protect youth rights and foster a supportive environment for their development and active societal involvement.

Through actions in these four areas and through developed measures and activities, the set goals will be directly achieved. This will enable young people in Montenegro to realize their potential, become active members of society, and contribute to its progress and development.

7.5 NORTH MACEDONIA

The responsibility for youth policy in North Macedonia has recently shifted. Previously, the Agency for Youth and Sport handled youth-related matters, but as of June 2024, the new Ministry of Social Policy, Demography, and Youth (MSPDM) has taken over these duties. This ministry, formerly known as the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, will now lead the development and implementation of youth policies tailored to the needs and interests of young people in North Macedonia. Its competencies include labor relations, social policy, and youth.

Youth organisations have welcomed this change, viewing the new ministry as a positive step towards enhancing the focus on youth within the government structure. Historically, the Agency had a limited budget and faced challenges due to inadequate resources, which affected its ability to effectively support youth initiatives. With the new ministry's establishment, there is hope for improved support and more substantial investments in youth policy, benefiting young people across the country.

Historically, the Agency for Youth and Sport was the main institution responsible for youth issues in North Macedonia. Before the recent elections, the youth sector fell under the Agency's jurisdiction. Despite this, the Agency operated with a limited budget, allocating only about 5% of its total budget to the youth sector, which significantly constrained its effectiveness.

The Agency briefly held ministerial status from 1998 to 2000 but was subsequently restructured into an agency. Following this change, there were proposals to integrate its functions into other ministries, such as the Ministry of Education and Science, due to limited human resources and capacity.

7.6 SERBIA

Youth policy in Serbia is guided by three main documents: the Law on Youth, the Youth Strategy, and the Action Plan for the Youth Strategy. The Ministry of Tourism and Youth, previously known as the Ministry of Youth and Sports until October 2022, is responsible for all youth policies.

The Law on Youth, adopted in 2011, aims to provide systematic support for youth, promote equality of opportunities, and enhance youth participation in societal processes. However, this support is not mandatory for local decision-makers, and there are no enforcement mechanisms to ensure its practical implementation. Although a Working Group was established to update the Law by the end of 2023, this revision has been delayed due to elections and ongoing political challenges. The new version of the Law is expected to introduce Youth Guarantees, raising the stakes for its adoption.

The Strategy for Youth in Serbia (2023-2030) focuses on improving the quality of life for young people through five specific goals, each with clearly defined indicators. These goals include:

Standardising and continuously implementing youth work within non-formal education; Enhancing spatial capacities and services for youth policy at the local level; Encouraging active youth participation in all societal levels and promoting their social and economic independence; and Creating conditions for a healthy, safe environment and ensuring the social well-being of young people.

The Ministry of Tourism and Youth leads both the development and implementation of youth policies. The National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS) has its role in monitoring and improving these processes, advocating for increased transparency, public debate, and effective implementation. Key issues include the lack of transparency, insufficient public debate, and inadequate attention to implementation mechanisms.

8 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The relationship between National Youth Councils in the Western Balkans (NYCs) and their respective governments in the Western Balkans presents a mixed picture, characterised by varying degrees of collaboration, institutionalisation, and effectiveness. While some countries have established more structured and productive partnerships, others face challenges such as inconsistent support, lack of formal recognition, or insufficient resources.

In **Albania**, the partnership between the National Youth Congress and the government is integral to implementing the National Youth Strategy 2022-2029, emphasising youth engagement, employment, and environmental issues. This collaboration is formalised through frameworks that institutionalise youth perspectives in policy-making, although the effectiveness of these efforts depends on sustained government commitment.

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina** each region has its own youth council, which plays a significant role in shaping youth policies. However, the absence of a national youth representation body limits the overall coordination and impact of youth policy across the country. due to insufficient evaluation and a disconnect between policy development and execution.

Kosovo shows promise with the Kosovo Youth Strategy and Action Plan 2024-2032 but encounters challenges in coordination and inclusivity, particularly in involving all relevant youth organisations. Furthermore, faces challenges in youth representation, with a lack of a fully functional national youth council. While informal collaborations between the Kosovar Youth Council and the government exist, these efforts are hindered by inconsistent support and bureaucratic challenges, affecting the council's ability to influence public policy effectively.

In **Montenegro**, the collaboration between the state and the National Youth Council has evolved significantly, particularly with recent developments like the establishment of the National Council for Youth and the new Youth Strategy for 2023-2027. Key goals include fostering active citizenship, improving cross-sectoral support, and enhancing youth policy frameworks, supported by a promising institutional framework. However, a clear funding mechanism remains a priority to ensure the council's long-term sustainability and active role in youth policy-making. Strengthening financial support and maintaining autonomy will enable the National Youth Council to effectively advocate for and address youth needs in Montenegro.

In **North Macedonia**, the National Youth Council has established significant partnerships with key governmental bodies despite lacking formal recognition in the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies. Recently, the country has transitioned youth policy responsibilities to the new Ministry of Social Policy, Demography, and Youth, aiming to

enhance focus and investment in youth issues. This shift is seen as a positive development, though past constraints from the Agency for Youth and Sports limited budget remain a raised concern.

Serbia's National Youth Council has achieved formal recognition and contributes to youth policy development through structured collaboration with the government. However, inconsistent support, broader societal challenges, and a lack of long-term financial solutions hinder the council's effectiveness in fully advocating for youth needs. However, in regard to the youth policy framework, guided by the Law on Youth and the Youth Strategy, demonstrates a structured approach but suffers from delays in legal revisions and insufficient enforcement mechanisms, which undermine effective implementation.

The financial sustainability and effectiveness of National Youth Councils in the Western Balkans are hindered by inconsistent governmental support and heavy reliance on external donors. Funding is often fragmented and project-based, lacking long-term planning, which undermines the councils' ability to operate independently, and address youth needs effectively. Additionally, the lack of legal and institutional recognition in some countries limits their influence and advocacy capacity. To improve this situation, it is essential to secure robust, long-term funding and strengthen legal recognition for National Youth Councils. This will empower these councils to lead with authority, drive impactful youth policies, and ensure that the voices of young people are heard and acted upon with the urgency and respect young people deserve.

9 COUNTRY SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 ALBANIA

1. Develop formal cooperation agreements between the National Youth Councils and other stakeholders - Joint initiatives that could focus on regional issues such as environmental sustainability and education. Aligning advocacy efforts and working together on EU-funded projects will help both councils address cross-border challenges and amplify their impact on youth policy at the regional and EU levels.
2. Establish a network among the National Youth Councils (NYCs) in the Adriatic-Ionian region. This network would provide a platform for young people to discuss and address common challenges, such as youth unemployment and social inclusion. Regular meetings and collaborative projects should be organised to enhance mutual understanding and coordinate efforts effectively across countries.
3. Launch and support projects that involve youth from multiple countries within the EUSAIR region. These projects could focus on areas like environmental protection, cultural exchange, and entrepreneurship. Exchange programs should be developed to provide young people with opportunities to gain diverse experiences and foster regional cooperation. This will not only address common issues but also promote greater regional integration and mutual understanding.

9.2 BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

1. We recommend that the operational budget for the Youth Council of FBiH change from 30000 BAM to 100000 BAM. This boost is essential for expanding the Council's activities, improving its ability to represent youth interests, and implementing more impactful youth programs across the region.
2. We call on the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina to propose to the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina the Decision on the establishment of the Commission for Youth Affairs Coordination in Bosnia and Herzegovina for approval, thereby enabling its work and activities in the coming period.
3. We invite the Ministry of Civil Affairs to implement the Action Plan created in the "Shaping Youth Policies" program. This plan outlines key steps to improve youth participation, education, employment, and overall well-being, and its implementation is vital for advancing youth development in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

9.3 Kosovo

1. Establish and Formalise the Central Youth Council (CYC): Reinststate and formalise the CYC as mandated by the Law on Youth, ensuring it functions as an advisory body for youth issues. This can be achieved through a structured recruitment process, transparent election of members, and provision of necessary resources and support from the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports (MCYS). Additionally, create clear guidelines and criteria for engagement and participation of youth representatives in the CYC.
2. Enhance Financial and Logistical Support for CYC: Develop a sustainable funding model specifically for the CYC to ensure consistent financial and logistical support. This includes establishing a dedicated budget line within the MCYS, providing office space, and offering technical and administrative assistance to support the council's activities and initiatives.
3. Strengthen Cross-Sectoral Collaboration and Policy Implementation: Foster stronger collaboration between governmental bodies, youth organisations, and international partners to ensure effective implementation of the Kosovo Youth Strategy and Action Plan 2024-2032 (KSYAP). This includes regular consultations, joint planning sessions, and coordinated actions across different sectors.

9.4 MONTENEGRO

1. Funding for the Umbrella Representative Association: The Youth Network of Montenegro, which also serves as the National Youth Council, as the umbrella organisation representing the interests of youth, should be adequately funded to effectively carry out its programs and activities. This support would allow the National Youth Council to strengthen its capacities, organise educational programs, promote youth involvement in social processes, and advocate for policies that will improve the position of youth in Montenegro.
2. Formation of an Intersectoral Body: To effectively coordinate and implement youth policy, it is necessary to form an intersectoral body that includes all relevant ministries and institutions. This body would serve as an "extended arm" of the Youth Council, enabling the coordination of activities and resources across different sectors. Through joint work and collaboration, this body could effectively address youth challenges and implement strategies to resolve them, ensuring optimal use of resources and achieving desired outcomes.
3. Completion of the Process of Amending and Supplementing the Youth Law: It is imperative to finalise the ongoing process of amending the Youth Law to ensure that it

adequately reflects the current needs and rights of young people. This amendment process should prioritise the establishment of a clear funding mechanism for youth services, recognizing the importance of sustainable financial support for youth organisations, including the National Youth Council. Also, such a legal provision should be designed to effectively recognize and enhance the value of youth work. The amendments should also address gaps in the existing legal framework, providing comprehensive protections for youth rights and promoting inclusivity in all areas of youth policy.

9.5 NORTH MACEDONIA

1. Institutional Reform for Youth Support: We recommend that decision-makers undertake substantial reforms within the institutional framework for youth. This should include developing a comprehensive program for the new ministry, ensuring adequate budgeting, and enhancing the ministry's human resources to effectively address youth needs.
2. Consistent Policy Implementation: We strongly recommend the consistent implementation of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, the National Youth Strategy (2023-2027), the National Youth Mental Health Strategy (2024-2026), and all other relevant youth policies at both local and national levels.
3. Strengthened Intersectoral Partnerships: We recommend establishing a robust partnership with the line ministry to support the implementation of a comprehensive intersectoral youth support system. This collaboration should particularly involve the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Health, and other relevant stakeholders to ensure cohesive and effective youth support services.

9.6 SERBIA

1. Update Law on Youth: Revise the Law on Youth, initially introduced in 2011, to address contemporary challenges and needs of the youth sector. This update should reflect the current context and incorporate modern solutions, measures, and practices to better support and engage young people in 2024 and onwards.
2. Implement Transparent and Adequate Funding Plan: Adopt a transparent funding model based on clear criteria and program quality. This approach should ensure that financial resources are allocated to effective and deserving programs, enhancing overall impact and accountability, but also take in consideration specific position of



NYCs and the need for operational, long-term budget and support, such exists today in Spain, for example.

3. Strengthen Institutional Capacity: Fill essential positions and enhance the capacity of the Ministry of Tourism and Youth in order to effectively manage and oversee youth-related programs. Building a well-resourced and skilled team will improve the implementation of youth policies and ensure better support for the youth sector.



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