

WB6 Youth Policy Recommendations

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Ahead of the upcoming Western Balkans (WB) Summit in Sofia, we the civil society actors from the WB region would like to commend the progress made so far by the WB6 governments' within the Berlin Process toward empowering the youth and for pledging to undertake complementary measures to address youth unemployment, migration, and 'brain drain' in the Region. However, the absence of legally binding provisions within the Berlin Process, make it challenging to ensure follow-up action and hold governments accountable for not fulfilling their pledges. In addition, the WB6 governments' efforts fall short in developing informed policies which would address inequality and benefit young people of all backgrounds in the Region. Such a goal could be achieved through giving youth a top priority in the Summit's agenda, and through the development of Youth Policies to both alleviate the socio-economic impact of the pandemic and advance the progress in empowering youth in the Region.

1. Increasing WB6 governments' investment in youth as a way of mitigating the impact of the pandemic in the most vulnerable sections of the societies in the Region. [Research](#) by the Civil Society Platform for Democracy and Human Rights (CSP) highlights that the outbreak of the pandemic exposed a Region which was completely vulnerable and unable to support its citizens. It also revealed the WB6 governments' failure to invest in their biggest asset, human capital and particular youth. The World Bank Group fall report emphasizes that the Western Balkans are enduring severe recessions in 2020. This will continue to have massive impact in the most vulnerable sections of the societies in the Region. However, the CSP report also reveals that the role of youth and the civil society in the WB6 has been essential in the management of the crisis. There have been many stories of individual or collective initiatives, often self-organised, which have covered institutional and technical gaps through self-invented, yet effective, solutions. Such examples include the use of social media in creative ways to spread information, dissolve scaremongering and fake news, provide help to vulnerable groups, and facilitate cooperation among the business sector and local authorities.

2. Addressing the needs of Bi-ethnic and Diaspora Youth. In the 21st century, many high-potential young people that have roots in the WB6 live in other countries, or have multiple citizenships. Working on programs designed to make the WB6 attractive as a place to study, live, or work (e.g., work subsidy programs, diaspora-hiring campaigns, etc.) is beneficial to the economic integration of the Region. Furthermore, such policies ensure that youth with ties to the Region feel that they are connected economically, culturally, and career-wise, not just through their ethnicity.

3. Addressing the needs of disabled and non-traditional youth. More policy work ought to be done to allow disabled youth to be integrated, and to ensure that youth focusing on non-traditional career pathways are supported in their endeavours. The cultural sector (e.g., Arts, philosophy, etc.) must be supported. This could include connecting young people with fewer opportunities in the Region with for example local Interreg IPA programmes and also harnessing the potential of the Interreg Volunteer Youth framework (IVY).

4. Having a unified effort on the linguistic education of WB6 youth. There needs to be a harmonized language policy that establishes a vision to ensure that WB6 youth are properly educated in international and local languages. This is likely to open up more opportunities for the young people, and encourage them to seek for education and employment opportunities within the Region.

5. Ensure that an intersectional lens is considered in all future policy work. Ensuring that policy gets created and reviewed from an intersectional lens allows for specified fixes to problems. Youth are not a monolith: Everyone is an individual and everyone is affected by policy differently due to their unique characteristics (e.g., personality, race, ethnicity, language, gender, sex, sexuality, et cetera). A youth policy should be divided into many sub-policies for different groups.

6. Support the creation of programmes which aim to unite universities across borders - such examples include Euroculture consortium, the Epicur alliance, or the Eucor campus. This would enhance cross-border contacts among youth, and such alliances may become attractive internationally.

Finally, of a paramount importance is for the governments' **to improve their public consultation** with young people and to **strengthen youth participation** in local and national policy and decision-making processes.

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