

YOUTH CULTURAL PARTICIPATION

Policy recommendations

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

-  *Culture and youth cultural participation should be recognized as important means of building social cohesion at the local, national and regional level. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to provide the grounds for an increased level of youth cultural participation, intercultural dialogue and education for the culture of dialogue both at local, national and regional level.*
-  *Promoting knowledge and a deeper understanding of the richness of culture and cultural heritage of the region to young people, both through formal and non-formal education, is essential.*
-  *Widening the scope of opportunities for youth cultural participation requires urgent measures by local public authorities, in particular in a way to ensure adequate infrastructure and facilities where young people can develop their creativity and interests.*

- ✚ *Cultural development strategies at the local level and decentralization of culture are of utmost importance for the young people living in geographically marginalized towns and municipalities all across the region.*
- ✚ *Young people have the potential to become recognizable actors of the cultural and creative sectors and socio-economic development in their own communities; Therefore, cultural sector needs to be further promoted to young people as the sector that provides employment opportunities while encouraging their innovative approaches, talent and entrepreneurial skills development.*
- ✚ *Multi-stakeholder approach, co-operation and partnerships connecting cultural sector and creative industry need to be fostered at local, national and regional level in the Balkans involving both formal and informal youth organisations and associations, youth workers and trainers.*
- ✚ *Youth regional co-operation initiatives and cultural exchange need to be further encouraged in support to their more effective participation in reconciliation process, intercultural dialogue and local community development;*
- ✚ *Regional youth information service needs to be developed to promote and inform young people in youth friendly manner on diverse training opportunities, exchange programmes, cultural heritage in neighbourhood area, with a database and calendar of cultural events, cultural innovative practices so as to encourage youth interaction, exchange, information share and cultural participation;*
- ✚ *Balkan Network for Local Democracy welcomes the establishment of the Regional Youth Co-operation Office, Western Balkan Fund and Balkan Youth Council as the three pillars of regional co-operation paving the way to increased youth participation and contribution to the regional ownership of reform process towards the EU integration.*

Balkan Network for Local Democracy

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