

BOOSTING YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

Regional Report

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WEB4YES

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¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

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Executive Summary

The Regional Report on Boosting Youth Employability offers a comparative overview of key policy challenges regarding career guidance, traineeships and training on improvement of youth employability skills in the Western Balkan countries. It also covers cross-cutting issues in all three areas of youth employability – involvement of civil society organizations, participation of young people from remote and rural areas and regional cooperation.

The report is based on the desk research carried out in each of the countries, followed by consultations with relevant stakeholders both individually and within the National Fora on Youth Employment established under this project in each of the countries as platforms for structural dialogue among key stakeholders in the field. The data was also discussed within the Regional Forum on Youth Employment by representatives of public institutions, business sector and civil society organizations from the region dealing with employability issues.

Although there are differences among the countries, the results show that there are some common policy challenges in this area. Regarding career guidance, the results indicate a lack of quality career-related information relevant for young people to make informed career choices. Furthermore, the career guidance services are still not sufficiently developed. What is more, even when they are developed, their quality is generally not guaranteed. At the same time, young people cannot identify easily which career guidance services are available to them, since there is a lack of coordination and cooperation among the key stakeholders in this field.

Concerning traineeships, in particular traineeship programmes which are not intermediated by university or public employment services, there is no precise data regarding the number of young people who undertake them on their own initiative or regarding their quality. However, the available data shows a worryingly low quality of traineeships in general. One way of ensuring the quality of traineeships, besides promoting quality dimensions, is by adopting legislation or issuing guidelines to regulate the content and implementation of traineeships. However, none of the Western Balkan countries has a regulatory framework of traineeships which could also include the traineeships organized in an open market.

One of the challenges of training on improving employability skills carried out by civil society organizations working with youth is that it is insufficiently available due to the way it is funded. Another issue is related to the quality of training, in particular its effectiveness, which is not always monitored, although monitoring would be useful for determining whether policy should be upscaled. It would also be useful to young people who are to decide which training to take up. Finally, there is a question of accessibility of this type of training to all groups of young people.

The civil society organizations that work with young people in the Western Balkan region are often involved in the area of youth employability as service providers - delivering career guidance services and employability skills training and mediating between employers and young people in organizing traineeships. Apart from providing services, civil society organizations can provide significant input in decision and policy-making processes. The experience of civil society organizations in working directly with young people should be recognized and used to feed into policy documents. Based on the conducted analysis, the areas of potential cooperation of civil society organizations and public institutions in the Western Balkan region at the national and the regional level are mapped.

About the project/Introduction

Employability of young people largely depends on the skills they possess and the way they use and present them.² The fact that new labour market entrants are not equipped with the skills employers need is one of the key evidence-based messages regarding youth unemployment in the Western Balkans,³ whereas the question how to support young people to develop relevant skills has become high on the agenda of each country.

The Regional Report on Boosting Youth Employability will address three topics relevant for youth employability: career guidance, traineeships and training on improvement of youth employability skills. They have been chosen taking into account the importance of these topics outlined in the relevant strategic documents (including New Skills Agenda, Council Resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies and Council Recommendation on a Quality Framework for Traineeships) and previous research studies⁵ which indicate that they could be effective in improving skills of young people. Moreover, the previous analysis⁶ identified that these activities have been undertaken by civil society organizations which work with young people in the Western Balkan region.

This Report is produced within the project **WeB4YES – Western Balkan Civil Society Organisations for Youth Employment Support**, supported within the *Civil Society Facility and Media Programme 2016–2017 Consolidating Regional Thematic Networks of Civil Society Organisations* by the European Commission. The Project represents a regional-scale initiative designed to deliver innovative approaches and offer young people in the Western Balkan region opportunities for employability enhancement and employment. Apart from the report on Boosting Youth Employability, three more reports will be developed within the project: Active Labour Market Measures for Youth, Entrepreneurial Learning and Enabling Environment for Youth Entrepreneurship.

The report on Boosting Youth Employability in the Western Balkans will review **key policy challenges regarding career guidance, traineeships and training on improvement of youth employability skills**, as well as cross-cutting issues in all three areas of youth employability– involvement of civil society organizations, participation of young people from remote and rural areas and finally, regional cooperation.

2 Hillage, J., & Pollard, E. (1998). *Employability: developing a framework for policy analysis*. London: DfEE.

3 World Bank Group. (2016). *Ten Messages about Youth Employment in South East Europe*. South East Europe regular economic report, no. 9 S: World Bank, Washington, DC.

4 In this report youth is identified as the age group 15–29/30.

5 E.g. Hooley, T. (2014). *The evidence base on lifelong guidance: A guide to key findings for effective policy and practice*. University of Derby, UK: ELGPN; Broeki, S., Hogarth, T., Baltina, L. & Lombardi (Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini) Skills development and employment: Apprenticeships, internships and volunteering; Souto-Otero, M., Ulicna, D., Schaepkens, L., & Bognar, V. (2013). *Study on the impact of Non-Formal Education in youth organisations on young people's employability*. In Brussels: European Youth Forum.

6 Batelić, J., Cvetkovska, E., Dedić, A., Đurović, A., Jevtović, B., Josifovska, M., Knežević, M., Nasufi, I., Pešić, S., Topalli, I. (2017). (Ed.). *The Regional Youth Employability Skills Portfolio*. Belgrade: Belgrade Open School, http://www.bos.rs/rs/uploaded/Portfolio%2025_7.pdf

Methodology (approach to data collection and analysis)

A desk research was conducted in the process of data collection using the predetermined template data collection form filled out by CSO informants/researchers from all Western Balkan countries (Appendix 1). The form consisted of a set of questions related to different aspects of youth employability policies in each of the countries and ensured the consistency and comprehensiveness of country reports as well as comparability of data. The research team did not undertake original surveys or research for the purpose of this report, hence, in some cases information is unavailable because it is not collected or because it is not obtainable due to low transparency issues, which is emphasized in the report.

In addition to desk research, the researchers who conducted the analysis also **consulted relevant stakeholders** individually and within the National Fora on Youth Employment which have been established within this project as platforms for structural dialogue among key stakeholders in the field in each of the countries. The stakeholders consulted included representatives of key public institutions, civil society organizations and the business sector.

The findings presented in a draft Report were further discussed with the representatives of the Regional Forum on Youth Employment organized in Skopje from 20 to 21 June 2018. The Forum gathered more than 70 representatives of public institutions, business sector and civil society organizations dealing with employability issues and youth employment from the Western Balkans, who discussed the findings and recommendations of this report.

The approach used in the analysis was to examine the legislative and institutional framework in each of the countries regarding youth employability, i.e. **career guidance, traineeships and training on improvement of employability skills**, as well as to examine cross-cutting issues for all three areas of youth employability- **the role of civil society organizations, participation of young people from rural and remote areas and regional cooperation**. These issues were analysed in the context of youth employability policies of the European Union.

Throughout the analysis, the **examples of good practise** as regards the effective responses to policy issues from the Western Balkan countries have been identified and analysed. Moreover, the **areas with the largest potential for regional cooperation** in the area of youth employability have been identified. On the basis of the conducted analysis, the general **framework recommendations** have been defined. The recommendations are defined at the regional level, while the specific national policy recommendations will be developed in the scope of the National Fora on Youth Employment.

Innovative Approaches and Examples of Good Practice from the Western Balkans – A review

The need for improvement of employability of young people is clearly recognized in each of the Western Balkan countries. National policy documents aim at improving career guidance. There is a wide network of institutions and organizations which are involved in the area. There is also a significant number of training providers in the area of improvement of employability skills and traineeships. However, there are specific critical issues concerning each of these areas, which could negatively affect the effectiveness of existing policies and practices.

Career guidance for young people in Western Balkans

Young people need skills which will enable them to cope with various challenges throughout their lives, including more frequent career changes.⁷ They need to gather information regarding their capacities, competences, and interests, to determine their education pathways and occupations and to analyse and organise that information in order to make decisions and manage transitions throughout their lives.⁸ These skills are called **career management skills** and they are recognized to be increasingly relevant given the changes in the world of work. The way of providing support to the development of these skills is **career guidance**, which encompasses the following services: career education, career information and career counselling. Unlike professional orientation, where the goal is to assist individuals in making decisions at a particular point in time, career guidance is designed to support the lifelong process of career development.

The commonly cited definition of career guidance as a "continuous process that enables citizens at any age and **at any point in their lives** to identify their characteristics, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings"⁹ is also commonly used in the Western Balkan countries, although sometimes referred to as "career guidance" and sometimes as "career orientation". There is evidence of demand for career guidance in the Western Balkan countries,¹⁰ and in line with that, almost all countries in the region have adopted **strategic documents dedicated only to career guidance** in the last ten years and some have had even more than one strategy on career guidance. For instance, the Strategy of Career Guidance and Counselling in the Republic of Serbia was adopted in 2010, together with the Action Plan (2010-2014). However, it was not followed by any strategic document in this area. On the other hand, the current strategy of career orientation in Montenegro is a continuation of the strategy for the period 2011-2015. All countries at this moment have policy measures related to career guidance included in the strategic documents in the area of education, employment and youth (Table 1).

7 Sultana, R.G. (2012). Flexicurity. Implications for lifelong career guidance. ELGPN Concept Note No.1. ELGPN University of Jyväskylä, Finland. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.elgpn.eu/publications/elgpn-concept-note-flexicurity>

8 Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (2012). Lifelong Guidance Policy Development: A European Resource Kit. European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network. Jyväskylä: ELGPN. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.elgpn.eu/publications/elgpn-tools-no1-resource-kit>

9 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2004). Career Guidance and Public Policy: Bridging the Gap. Paris: OECD.

10 Zelloth, H. (2009). In demand: Career guidance in EU neighbouring countries. Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

Table 1: Policy documents which include measures concerning career guidance in the Western Balkan countries

	Policy documents related to career guidance in the Western Balkan countries
ALBANIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → The National Youth Action Plan (2015-2020) → The Employment and Skills Strategy (2014-2020) → Strategy Document for Development of Pre-University Education 2014-2020.
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → The strategy for development of career orientation in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2015-2020) → The Strategy for Strengthening the Mediation Function in Public Employment in the FBiH (2014). → The Strategy for Development of Higher Education in Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2012 – 2022) → The Youth Policy of the Republic of Srpska 2016-2020 → The Strategy for Education of Republic of Srpska (2016-2021)
KOSOVO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Action Plan: Increasing Youth Employment 2018-2020
FYR MACEDONIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → The Programme for Employment and Social Policy 2020 → The National Employment Strategy of the Republic of Macedonia 2016-2020 → The Action Plan for Employment of Young People 2016-2020 → The Operational Plan for Active Programmes and Measures for Employment and Services in the Labour Market for 2018
MONTENEGRO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → The Strategy of Lifelong Career Orientation in Montenegro (2016-2020) → Employment and Social Reform Programme (2015-2020)
SERBIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → The National Youth Strategy 2015-2025 → Employment and Social Reform Programme (2015-2020)

Moreover, in each of the Western Balkan countries, there are specific **institutions in charge of youth career guidance**. In all countries, they include the ministry in charge of education and the ministry in charge of employment, while in some countries certain responsibilities in this area are undertaken by institutions in charge of youth and educational institutions (such as Centre for Vocational Education in Montenegro and Centre for Vocational and Adult Education and Institute for Advancement of Education in Serbia). Also, in some cases local institutions and youth offices also take part (e.g. in two cities in Serbia local councils for career guidance and counselling have been established). In order to promote the European dimension in guidance and to provide quality information on lifelong guidance and mobility for learning purposes, the Euroguidance centres have been established in Serbia, Montenegro and the FYR Macedonia. Furthermore, in most countries, there are international organizations involved in career guidance by providing support for its development, such as GIZ, USAID and the Education Development Center. Civil society organizations are also in some cases (e.g. in Serbia) engaged in developing guidance policies as members of working groups and in implementing them through projects.

Are strategic documents related to career guidance a good basis for the career guidance system?

An important prerequisite for translating policy measures outlined in the strategic documents into practice is by introducing **realistic and well-developed action plans**, which has not always been the case with the strategic documents outlined above. For instance, the draft Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy for Development of the Career Orientation in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina has been created. Cantonal ministries are to draft their own action plans for the implementation of the Strategy accordingly. However, there is no information that these have been drafted so far. Similarly, it is assessed that the Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy for education of the Republic of Srpska is not precise enough when it comes to career guidance measures.¹¹ Also, some action plans were assessed by external reviewers as too ambitious (e.g. in the case of Serbia¹² and Kosovo¹³), and it was pointed out that in order to achieve the ambitious policy goals set out in the plans, the resource allocation needs to be realistic and that sufficient funding needs to be raised.

Are there effective mechanisms for coordination and cooperation among the key stakeholders in lifelong guidance provision?

Even though there are various institutions involved in career guidance provision, there are no **established and functioning mechanisms for coordination and communication** among them. They are crucial both from the perspective of policy – to avoid policy fragmentation and duplication of effort, and from the perspective of young people – to easily identify what is available to them.¹⁴ Furthermore, coordination and cooperation are said to be particularly where a coordinated response from multiple providers is required. This is, for instance, the case in the guidance to unemployed people or people who have left the education system. Given their importance, establishing mechanisms for coordination has been put as one of the priorities¹⁵ in establishing the system of lifelong guidance, which inspired comparative country reviews in order to determine the best way to achieve this.¹⁶

In some countries, such mechanisms have been envisaged in the policy documents, but have not been established. For instance, in Serbia¹⁷ **the national resource centre for career counselling and guidance**, whose one of the functions should be to ensure the overall coordination and development of the system of career guidance and counselling and to represent the permanent connection between the fields of education and employment

11 Sistem karijernog vođenja – put ka efikasnijem obrazovanju i zapošljavanju mladih, Omladinski Komunikativni Centar.

12 Zelloth, H. (2011). Career Guidance Development Trends in Serbia. ETF, Working Paper, Brussels.

13 Zelloth, H. (2008). Career guidance policy and practice in Kosovo. Review of progress and feasibility of future intervention.

14 Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (2015). Guidelines for Policies and Systems Development for Lifelong Guidance: A Reference Framework for the EU and for the Commission. European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network. Jyväskylä: ELGPN. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.elgpn.eu/publications/browse-by-language/english/elgpn-tools-no-6-guidelines-for-policies-and-systems-development-for-lifelong-guidance/>

15 European Council (2008) Resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies.

16 CEDEFOP (2008). Establishing and Developing National Guidance Forums: a Manual for Policy-Makers and Stakeholders. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities; LGPN (2012) Lifelong Guidance Policy Development: A European Resource Kit. ELGPN Tool No. 1

17 The Strategy of Career Guidance and Counselling in the Republic of Serbia and its Action Plan (2010-2014)

in this regard, has been foreseen but not established. Moreover, the action plan for the implementation of the Strategy for career guidance and counselling provides for **protocols on cooperation between key actors** in the development of the system of career guidance and counselling, which was not achieved.¹⁸ Signing of the protocols is also a measure in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina¹⁹ in order to improve the cooperation among different sectors which deal with career orientation, but there is no information available whether this has been achieved.

The Policy Forum for Career Education and Guidance was established in Kosovo in 2006 within the project as a mechanism of policy coordination in career guidance, based on a 'Memorandum of Understanding' signed by the three ministries in charge of education, labour and youth. Even though this was an excellent idea, in practice, the forum did not succeed to include all stakeholders in the area of career guidance in the country.²⁰ It was project-led so the mechanism was impossible to maintain upon the finalisation of the project. The **establishment of the National Guidance Forum** was foreseen in Montenegro²¹ and according to the report in 2016 a coordination body was set up, consisting of the representatives of ministries of education and labour, public employment service, Chamber of Commerce, Association of Employers, the U and schools, with the main role to monitor the implementation of the action plan. In this case, civil society organizations have not been involved yet, and there is a question of sustainability of the coordination body after the Action Plan has expired, given that the similar national coordination body was envisaged and set up during the previous career guidance strategy. In Serbia, the working group which was established for monitoring the Action Plan (2010-2014) and which was recommended²² to undertake the coordination role as a permanent body, does not exist anymore.

An example of good practice from the EU:²³

In Finland, the government has been establishing working groups for stakeholders in guidance since the 1980s. As career guidance services are provided mainly within the public school system and by public labour administration, these working groups involve representatives of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour, as well as representatives of regional authorities, students' organisations, school principals' organisation, etc. The ministries have taken turns in convening working groups and have issued letters of appointment, with the main tasks outlined. All direct costs in connection with their work have been covered by the ministry in charge.

These working groups are entrusted with specific tasks, such as discussion of key policy issues. For instance, the Cooperation Group for Educational Guidance and Counselling and Employment Services has discussed topics such as the role of municipalities and regions in implementing and evaluating guidance and

18 Report on the implementation of the Strategy of career guidance and counselling in the Republic of Serbia for the period from March 2013 until December 2014.

19 The strategy for development of career orientation in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2015-2020)

20 Zelloth, H. (2008). Career guidance policy and practice in Kosovo. Review of progress and feasibility of future intervention.

21 By The Strategy of Lifelong Career Orientation in Montenegro (2011-2015) as well as The Strategy of Lifelong Career Orientation in Montenegro (2016-2020).

22 Feasibility study regarding the founding of the national resource centre for career guidance and counselling in Serbia and further development of career guidance and counselling system in Serbia, available at: <http://pyle.si/2016/05/31/feasibility-study-regarding-the-founding-of-the-national-resource-centre-for-career-guidance-and-counselling-in-serbia-and-further-development-of-career-guidance-and-counselling-system-in-serbia/>

23 As described in: CEDEFOP (2008). Establishing and Developing National Guidance Forums: a Manual for Policy-Makers and Stakeholders. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities;

counselling provision and provision of guidance services to young people not in education or employment system. Moreover, these forums have a role in identifying gaps in provision and developing policies and filling them. At the national level, the issues concerning cooperation between student counselling services for young people and employment services are dealt with by a special working group, which makes various proposals on issues concerning education, training and employment of young people.

Taking into account the experiences of establishing some forms of coordination between different stakeholders at the national level in order to successfully coordinate career guidance policy in the Western Balkan countries, it seems crucial to ensure the sustainability of the coordinating body. One proposal may include the establishment of this body in the form of an intersectoral working group including all relevant stakeholders (policymakers, civil society organizations and service providers). Also, given that in each country there are several ministries responsible for career guidance, they can take turns in convening working groups. Working groups can be set up for different tasks which are of the utmost importance for the national policy, e.g. creating quality standards, involving NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) in career guidance or improving career information.

Recommendation:

In order to avoid policy fragmentation and duplication of effort, as well as to facilitate access to career guidance services to young people, governments of the Western Balkan countries should adopt a decision on establishing national Working Groups for the development of guidance policies and systems which gather both government representatives from education, employment and youth policy sectors and representatives of other stakeholders, including civil society organizations. Ministries in charge of education, employment and youth (if any) can take turns in convening working groups and covering the related expenses, depending on the task the working group is in charge of.

Do young people have access to quality career guidance services?

Many young people in the Western Balkan countries **are still not involved in career guidance services**. For example, around two-thirds of young people in Serbia report that they have not been involved in career guidance services.²⁴ The conclusion of the recent report on career guidance in Albania²⁵ is that there is “only limited and fragmented understanding of career guidance concept” and that it is neither well represented in the curriculum nor available to students of public universities.

²⁴ Ministry of Youth and Sports. (2015). The position and needs of young people in Serbia. Ministry of Youth and Sports: Belgrade.

²⁵ Ademi b. & Avxhiu, s. (2017). Review of current state of Career Guidance and counseling in Albania. Available at: <http://risialbania.al/index/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Review-of-current-state-of-Career-Guidance-and-counseling-in-Albania.pdf>

One issue that deserves special attention concerning the services which are currently provided is that in most of the Western Balkan countries there is no **established mechanism for ensuring the quality of services, particularly for ensuring that young people who receive those services actually do develop career management skills**. Quality assurance has been set as a priority in strategic documents in Montenegro, and in one of the political entities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina). Their strategic documents lay down specific steps to be undertaken to establish quality standards for all service providers. Although the absence of quality assurance has also been noted in other countries, the development of quality standards has not been put on their agenda. For instance, for some components of career guidance system in Albania²⁶ such as career guidance module which is an extracurricular activity for students in the last grade of compulsory education, it has been emphasized that no evaluation is carried out. Similarly, it has been recognized that the main mechanism for monitoring and ensuring the quality of service which is in place in the FYR Macedonia²⁷ is by counting the number of users reached whereby the overall quality framework is missing.

An example of introducing quality standards of career guidance services:

In Serbia, the quality standards have recently been developed by the Working Group comprising representatives of the Institute for Advancement of Education, ministries in charge of education, youth and employment, Council for Vocational and Adult Education, Institute for Evaluation of Education, Public Employment Service, Chamber of Commerce, Euroguidance centre, educational institutions, international and civil society organizations.

The standards refer to service providers in all sectors (education, employment and youth) and they take into account the European Quality-Assurance Framework.²⁸ The quality standards consist of the career management skills standards, standards of career practitioners' competences, organizational standards and standards of programmes. In the next period, the process of implementation and monitoring of standards is to be realized.

Recommendation:

In order for all young people to have access to quality support for enhancing their career management skills, a minimum set of standards for career guidance services should be established through the work of a working group, including all national stakeholders.

26 Ademi b. & Avxhiu, s. (2017). Review of current state of Career Guidance and counseling in Albania. Available at: <http://risialbania.al/index/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Review-of-current-state-of-Career-Guidance-and-counseling-in-Albania.pdf>

27 <https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/en/content/youthwiki/34-career-guidance-and-counselling-former-yugoslav-republic-macedonia>

28 ELGPN (2012) Lifelong Guidance Policy Development: A European Resource Kit. ELGPN Tool No. 1, Chapter Annex D: Quality-Assurance and Evidence-Base (QAE) Framework, available at: http://www.elgpn.eu/publications/browse-by-language/english/ELGPN_resource_kit_2011-12_web.pdf/.

Do young people have access to quality and reliable career-related information?²⁹

There is a substantial lack in the development of **quality career-related information**. Our desk analysis has shown that in all countries there are some web-based and print-based materials providing career information on education and training options and pathways and occupations, which are available through national employment agencies, educational institutions, the private sector, and civil society organizations. However, they are neither **comprehensive and integrated**, nor connected with self-assessment, career planning and job-search tools which hinders their potential to provide a basis for young people in making well-informed career choices. Moreover, there are no standards or voluntary guidelines for the collection, production and dissemination of career information by the public and private sectors in any of the countries. This absence leads to the state where young people and career practitioners who work with them do not have reliable and user-friendly career information and turn to other, sometimes unreliable, sources.

One of the crucial aspects of career-related information needed for young people to make informed career choices is **the labour market information**. The data which is relevant for young people includes trends in employment, information on competencies required for occupation, earning levels and trends, numbers of vacancies available in the labour market, links to vacancies and links to related education and training opportunities.³⁰

However, although in the Western Balkan countries there are difficulties concerning skills assessment and anticipation,³¹ even labour-market information that is collected is generally not transformed into user-friendly and usable learning material for career guidance. For instance, the most frequently mentioned channels for the dissemination of results³² on skill needs in the Western Balkan countries are reports and websites, and rarely is it the case that they are disseminated via social media (e.g. Facebook and Twitter) largely used by young people. Although the social media have been underused in this purpose in other European countries as well,³³ their potential for reaching out to young people should be explored. Moreover, the information obtainable through reports and websites is not presented in a youth-friendly manner. Similarly, it has been noted that in Albania,³⁴ there are difficulties in translating labour market information into user-friendly career information relevant for different youth career development stages, which is partially due to the lack of reliable and comprehensive data and partially due to not adjusting publication to be available to users.

29 Career-related information includes information on education and training options, education, pathways and occupations, as well as labour market information (such as trends in employment and information on skills in high demand in the labour market).

30 Using labour market information - Guide to anticipating and matching skills and jobs, Volume 1, http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/2215_en.pdf

31 ETF (European Training Foundation), Skills needs identification and skills matching in South Eastern Europe, ETF, Turin, 2016.

32 ETF (European Training Foundation), Skills needs identification and skills matching in South Eastern Europe, ETF, Turin, 2016.

33 OECD (2016), Getting Skills Right: Assessing and Anticipating Changing Skill Needs, Getting Skills Right, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264252073-en>, p.65

34 Ademi b. & Avxhiu, s. (2017). Review of current state of Career Guidance and counseling in Albania. Available at: <http://risialbania.al/index/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Review-of-current-state-of-Career-Guidance-and-counseling-in-Albania.pdf>

Examples of good practice:

Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in Kosovo is preparing the platform **Busulla.com**, which will be a platform that would help provide support in career planning to students in pre-university education, starting from the 8th grade. It contains self-assessment tools (assessing interests, values, abilities and preferences), information about all occupations that are in high demand in the labour market, skills that are required from the specific profession, information about traineeship possibilities and school finder (based on criteria such as occupation and location). It also has an option for live Chat and Forum. The students also have an opportunity to create an individual development plan. A Guidebook for the Implementation of a Career Guidance Information System in Kosovo schools will be developed.

BOS karijera (karijera.bos.rs) is an interactive online service for career planning developed in Serbia by civil society organization, Belgrade Open School, and it is aimed primarily at secondary school students. Having registered, a young person can complete tests for self-assessment, search the database of occupations and the database of educational institutions in higher education which correspond to occupations and create their personal career plan. Moreover, young people can write an email to a career counsellor and they can search for answers to questions previously posed to a career counsellor.

Creating national portals which contain career-related information can be a long and expensive process. Through desk analysis and consultations carried out in the process of creating this report, different institutions and organizations have been identified in each of the countries that do provide relevant career information (i.e. databases on educational options, occupations, required skills). What might be feasible is to interlink them in youth-friendly web portals. This web-portal can be developed by public employment services, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour, national resource centre for career guidance, if any, or it can be outsourced by private organizations or civil society organizations (depending on the national context). The responsibility for updating that information can be shared among various public institutions and organizations. For instance, Euroguidance centers can play a significant role in providing a database on learning opportunities and maintaining it. Young people can be involved in the process of ensuring that the website is user friendly and the youth-dedicated civil society organizations can play a large part promoting this platform and information it contains and ensuring that it is available to young people with fewer opportunities (such as young people from rural and remote areas).

Recommendation:

In order to ensure that career-related information is accessible to young people, a national online information system combining all available information should be set up. Individual ministries (in charge of education, employment or youth) can directly be responsible for the production of career information or they can contract out the private sector or civil society organizations for that purpose. Young people in particular should play an active role in the production of this type of information to ensure that it is in line with their needs.

The dissemination of existing career-related information should be made available to young people through multiple channels, including social media, in a manner accessible to them. This can be done in cooperation with civil society organizations working with young people or delegated to them.

Traineeships in the Western Balkans

Many young people who are trying to get a foothold in the labour market are faced with the "experience trap", in other words, they cannot obtain their first job without previous work experience. One way they can gain work experience is through traineeships that provide them with on-the-job experience. Some young people do have the opportunity to undertake traineeships during their formal education, but this is not always the case or those traineeships do not equip them with appropriate skillset sought by employers. Thus, there is a tendency to organize traineeships outside of the regular curriculum. Recently, special attention has been paid to the fact that numerous young people in Europe are taking part in **traineeship programmes which are not intermediated by university or public employment services**.

In these traineeships, often called "**traineeships in the open market**", young people largely negotiate the terms and conditions of traineeships directly with the organizations/ companies in which they are pursuing traineeship. It has been noticed that young people in this type of traineeships are in danger of being tasked to conduct only menial tasks, without any meaningful learning or training content, which has triggered response in terms of establishing regulatory frameworks or guidelines in this area to ensure that traineeships do **provide quality learning experience for young people and improve their employability**. In order to promote the traineeships which have a strong learning component and which ensure adequate working conditions for young people, the Council of the European Union adopted in 2014³⁵ a recommendation on a quality framework for traineeships which refers both to traineeships that are part of the youth employment policy and traineeships in the open market.

Since traineeships which are part of the active labour market measures are dealt with in the Regional Report on Active Labour Market Measures for Youth, in this report the discussion will be focused on the existing state of the art regarding traineeships defined³⁶ as programmes with the following characteristics:

- for the **acquisition of work experience** that involves learning and training implemented with the aim of improving employability and transition to employment;
- **short-term**, i.e. limited in duration;
- organized on **one's own initiative**, i.e. not a mandatory part of formal education and training and not prescribed by law or rulebooks as a requirement for practising a certain profession, and/or trade (which is the case with professions such as law and medicine);
- may, but **do not have to be directly related to the formal educational background** of the person attending a traineeship; and
- may include both people **who are and those who are not in the formal education system**.

■ How prevalent are traineeships in the open market?

In European countries, a surge in numbers of young people taking traineeships in general, and especially the traineeships in the open market not organized by education or labour market institutions has been noted.³⁷ How present is this type of traineeship in the Western

35 Council of the European Union, "Council recommendation on Quality Framework for Traineeships" (Brussels, 10 March 2014).

36 Djurovic, A., Velez, B. & Manić Radoičić, J. (2017). Improvement of the Legal Framework for the Regulation of Traineeships in the Republic of Serbia. Belgrade: Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit of the Government of the Republic of Serbia and Belgrade Open School. http://sociojalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Improvement_of_the_legal_framework_for_the_regulation_of_traineeships_in_the_republic_of_serbia.pdf

37 Eurobarometer 378: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_378_en.pdf

Balkans? Unfortunately, **there is no precise data regarding the number of young people who undertake traineeships in the labour market** on their own initiative in the Western Balkan countries, nor data regarding their quality. Some data for Serbia,³⁸ indicates that they are present - approximately one in five young persons in Serbia has participated in traineeship programme and in around 18% of the cases they were organized by companies themselves. During the consultations which were held in the National Fora in each of the countries, it has been noted that in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the FYR Macedonia and Montenegro there are these types of traineeships, organized by private companies or civil society organizations, but there is no data showing how widespread they actually are.

■ What is the quality of traineeships undertaken by young people?

At the EU level, there is **an accepted set of quality dimensions**,³⁹ which stipulate that traineeships should be based on a written agreement, that learning and training objectives should be clarified, that rights and working conditions of trainees should be respected in accordance with applicable law, that traineeships should have a reasonable duration, that the competences acquired should be recognized and validated and that traineeship providers should include in their vacancy notices information on the terms and conditions of the traineeship. Based on these criteria, which should be taken into account both for the traineeships in the open market and the traineeships which are part of youth employability policies, the International Labour Organization published a checklist⁴⁰ to assess the quality of traineeships, to be used also to determine the quality of traineeship offers made under Youth Guarantee (YG) implementation plans.

As there is a general lack of data on the number of traineeships and young people who pursue them in the Western Balkan countries there is **also the lack of information on the quality of those traineeships**. The issue of quality equally refers to traineeships in the open market and traineeships that are part of youth employability policies, whereby there is a greater risk that the former will not provide young people with meaningful learning experience.

The available data shows a **worryingly low quality of traineeships in general**. In Serbia, there is an annual survey that includes a set of questions on the quality of traineeship programmes. Among the total number of young people who participated in traineeship programmes in Serbia in 2017, three-quarters of them participated in at least one programme without having signed a written contract, and according to the data from 2015, 50 per cent were without mentors.⁴¹ In Montenegro, the 2014 data⁴² on the quality of the Government traineeship programmes for higher education graduates suggest that even though majority of young people reported having adequate learning and working conditions, it was not always the case (e.g. in one evaluation 33% of young people involved stated that they had not been introduced to the plan for their professional training and 10% that they had not had adequate working conditions). In both countries, certain activities were carried out in order to promote the quality of traineeships, such as publishing manuals for young people introducing them with their rights,⁴³ or celebrating International

38 Ministry of Youth and Sports. (2016). The position and needs of young people in Serbia. Ministry of Youth and Sports: Belgrade.

39 Council of the European Union, "Council recommendation on Quality Framework for Traineeships" (Brussels, 10 March 2014).

40 Rosas G., Corbanese V. (2017). Developing quality traineeships for young people. Turin: International Labour Organization. [Online]. Available at: http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_613352.pdf

41 Ministry of Youth and Sports. (2016). The position and needs of young people in Serbia. Ministry of Youth and Sports: Belgrade.

42 Association for Democratic Prosperity – Zid. (2014). The report on the assessment of the effects of policies which regulate traineeships in Montenegro.

43 Available at: https://issuu.com/adp-zid/docs/brosura_efa096b7dc6e2d, accessed 14.06.2018.

Interns' Day.⁴⁴ In other Western Balkan countries, the Consortium of the WeB4YES project in cooperation with National Forums did not find information on the quality of traineeships in which young people are involved.

Recommendation:

A regional survey to be conducted in all Western Balkan countries should include a set of questions aimed at collecting data on the involvement of young people in traineeships and the quality of those traineeships (e.g. within the Balkan Barometer). This data should further be used by public institutions and civil society organizations to identify gaps as well as to design measures aimed at increasing the offer and ensuring the quality of the traineeships offered in the open market.

■ **Is there a regulatory framework for traineeships?**

One way of ensuring the quality of traineeships, besides promoting quality dimensions, is by adopting legislation or issuing guidelines to regulate the content and the implementation of traineeships. However, none of the Western Balkan countries has **a regulatory framework of traineeships, which could also include the traineeships organized in an open market.** The opposite is the trend at the EU level. The review conducted in 2016 and presented in the *Staff Working Document on Applying the Quality Framework for Traineeships*⁴⁵ found that all 28 Member States have regulatory frameworks that cover at least some forms of traineeships outside of the regular curriculum and that eight have specific regulations on both ALMP (Active labour market policies)-type and open market traineeships.

The types of traineeships which are currently regulated are those the completion of which is mandatory in order to access a specific profession (e.g. teaching, medicine, architecture, etc.). The Labour Laws of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the FYR Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia⁴⁶ contain provisions related to traineeships based on the employment contract or some other type of contract (commonly referred to as professional training contract), whose purpose is professional on-the-job training, and which are regularly related to specific professional exams. Furthermore, all Western Balkan countries offer various traineeships as a part of youth employability policies, although their regulation differs.

Recommendation:

Public institutions should develop and/or improve the regulatory framework for traineeships in line with the quality standards outlined in the EU Recommendation on a Quality Framework for Traineeships, which would also regulate traineeships in the open market. Civil society organizations can use existing initiatives for changing labour regulations, adopting national traineeship programmes or introducing quality elements for traineeships, to advocate for establishing supporting regulatory framework for all types of traineeships, including those organized in the open market.

⁴⁴ Information available at: <http://www.internsday.org/>, accessed 14.06.2018.

⁴⁵ European Commission. 2016. Applying the Quality Framework for Traineeship, Commission Staff Working Document. COM 646. (Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52016SC0324>

⁴⁶ Available at: http://www.youseefor.me/images/manuals/montenegro/Zid_comparativeEU_study_mne.pdf, accessed 14.06.2018.

■ *An example of good practice:*

In Montenegro, the draft Law on Traineeship⁴⁷ was proposed by the Association for Democratic Prosperity ZID, a civil society organization, in order to respond to a need to regulate the traineeships which are part of the national youth employment policy but also the traineeships in the open market and traineeships for foreign citizens. The draft Law contains a provision related to the conditions for organizing traineeships and it is in line with the quality standards outlined in the Council Recommendation on a quality framework.⁴⁸

Training on improvement of employability skills

The International Labour Organization defines employability skills⁴⁹ as *"the skills, knowledge and competencies that enhance a worker's ability to secure and retain a job, progress at work and cope with change, secure another job if he/she so wishes or has been laid off and enter more easily into the labour market at different periods of the life cycle"*. In line with such a definition, employability skills could encompass basic and core skills not only related to the specific sector or occupational field but also those technical/vocational/professional skills and competences which typically vary from one sector of the economy or occupational field to another.⁵⁰ Taking into account the revised EU framework⁵¹ on key competences for lifelong learning which are needed for employability, it could be specified that basic skills/competences include literacy competence, languages competence and mathematical competence and competence in science, technology and engineering, whereas core skills ("transversal" or "soft" skills) include digital competence, personal, social and learning competence, civic competence, entrepreneurship competence and cultural awareness and expression competence.

In the context of the Western Balkan countries, a regional review of research studies conducted by public employment services, employers' unions, chambers of commerce and youth organizations indicates that there is a common skillset important for youth employability. They include communication skills, teamwork skills, foreign language skills, desire for learning and self-improvement, IT and computer skills, ability to adapt and flexibility, problem-solving skills, work ethics, ability to work under pressure, planning and organisational skills and entrepreneurial skills.⁵²

47 Available at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/14MqvMPblusM5x5QuUC13Daltv1L4ivit/view>, accessed 14.06.2018.

48 Council of the European Union, "Council recommendation on Quality Framework for Traineeships" (Brussels, 10 March 2014).

49 In this text, the term skills will be used throughout the text, although in some cases the term competences might be more adequate. The difference in definitions is as follows: 'skills' means the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems whereas 'competence' means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. According to: Glossary, Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council, 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning.

50 The division between basic, core and technical/vocational skills is explained in: Aleksić I. The Challenge of Delivering Skills for the Future in the Western Balkans. in: Esch V. & Remme Y. (2017). (eds). A European Future for the Western Balkans - Addressing Political and Economic Challenges. The Aspen Institute. Available at: <http://www.aspeninstitute.de/wp-content/uploads/A-European-Future-for-the-Western-Balkans.pdf>.

51 Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, <https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/recommendation-key-competences-lifelong-learning.pdf>

52 Batelić, J., Cvetkovska, E., Dedić, A., Đurović, A., Jevtović, B., Josifovska, M., Knežević, M., Nasufi, I., Pešić, S., Topalli, I. (2017). (Ed.). The Regional Youth Employability Skills Portfolio. Belgrade: Belgrade Open School, http://www.bos.rs/rs/uploaded/Portfolio%2025_7.pdf

■ Do young people see skills as a significant factor for finding a job?

One of the important issues that came into light during the consultations held in the process of preparing this report is that young people are not always motivated to engage with youth employability training programmes since they do not perceive skills as something vital in obtaining a job. Some of the previous research results (Figure 1) do imply that many young people tend to perceive acquaintances, friends and political connections as more important for finding a job than skills or expertise. Thus, it might be important to motivate young people to develop skills.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING FACTORS MATTERS MOST IN FINDING A JOB (FIRST CHOICE)

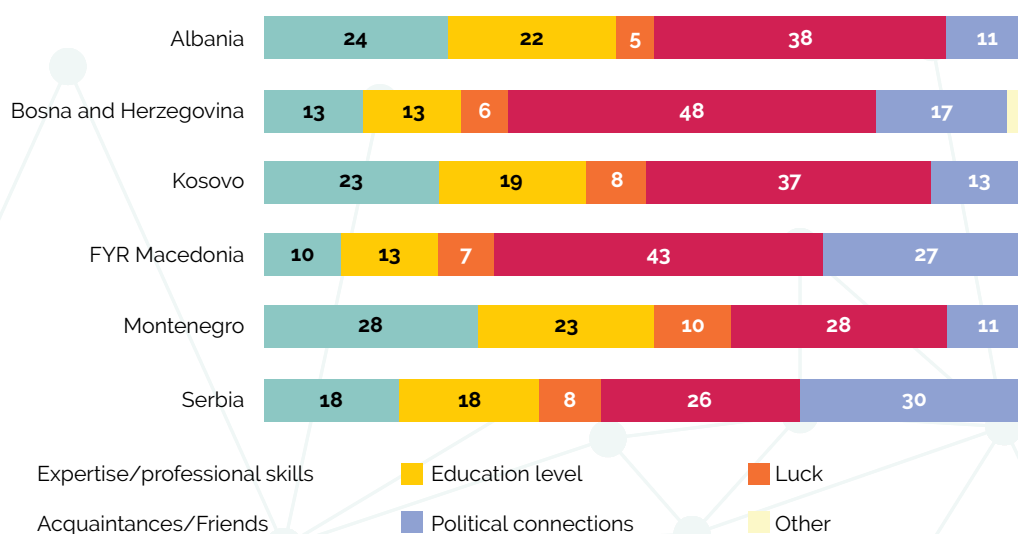


Figure 1: Which factors matters the most in finding a job, by country

Source: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Youth Survey Data (Auron, Xhangolli, Dundo, Gjokuta, Tahiri, Lena, 2012; Ćela, Kamberi, & Pici, 2013; Žiga et al., 2015; Latkovic et al., 2013; Knežević & Đukanović, 2016; Tomanović & Stanojević, 2015)⁵³

■ An example of good practice of promoting the importance of skills development⁵⁴

Under the RisiAlbania Project, the media intervention in the area of informing on the topic of youth employment was carried out. The aim was to change the way media reports on employment in a sustainable way. There was intervention on mainstream media channels (pilot radio programmes, TV programmes, print media and online

⁵³ Auron, P., Xhangolli K., Dundo, J., Gjokuta, B., Tahiri, Z. Lena O. (2012). Kosovo Youth Study: Forward Looking, Grounded in Tradition. Prishtina: IDRA Kosova, 2012; Ćela, A., T. Fshazi, A. Mazniku, G. Kamberi and J. Smaja. 2013. Albanian youth 2011: Between present hopes and future insecurities. Tirana: Friedrich Ebert Foundation and IDRA Research & Consulting; Latkovic, M.T., M. B. Popovska, E. Serafimovska and A. Cekic. 2013. Youth Study Macedonia 2013. Skopje: Friedrich Ebert Foundation; Knežević, M. & Đukanović, P. (2016). Mladi u Crnoj Gori – društveni dekor ili društveni kapital? Podgorica: Centar za građansko obrazovanje (CGO); Tomanović, S. & Stanojević, D. (2015). Young people in Serbia 2015: situation, perceptions, beliefs and aspirations. Belgrade: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Büro Belgrade, SeConS development Initiative group; Žiga, J., Turčila, L., Osmić, A., Bašić, S., Džananović Miraščija, N., Kapidžić, D., Brkić Šmigoc J. (2015). Youth study Bosnia and Herzegovina. Sarajevo: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

⁵⁴ In more detail described in the report available at: [https://www.shareweb.ch/site/EI/Documents/Projects/7F-08310/SDC%20-%20Case%20Study%20-%20Inspiring%20Influencing%20Young%20Job%20Seekers%20-%20Albania%20-%202016%20\(en\).pdf](https://www.shareweb.ch/site/EI/Documents/Projects/7F-08310/SDC%20-%20Case%20Study%20-%20Inspiring%20Influencing%20Young%20Job%20Seekers%20-%20Albania%20-%202016%20(en).pdf)

media) to develop programmes that provide accurate and updated information about the labour market using formats that appeal to young job seekers and attract their attention. It was envisaged that the improvement in getting information would influence the choices young people make about employment and tertiary and vocational education thus influencing the ability of young people to find employment. From mid-2014 to mid-2016 RisiAlbania directly supported the launch of 6 pilot media products - two TV programmes, one radio programme and one online newspaper supplement and an online portal.

The evaluation has shown that media products had a significant impact on the perceptions and behaviour of audiences as 71% of the audience stated that media products have changed their perception regarding employment. Not only were young people influenced, but also their parents and family members were, as well as employers and training service providers. One of the areas where these changes have proven to be particularly influential is the perception regarding desirability of careers and skills that employers ask for. There were changes regarding the employment of young people as well - almost one third (32%) of all the young people who watched, listened or read the programmes, reported that they had directly influenced their behaviour. Insights in the results showed that the audience had changed decisions around education and training, changed the way they looked for a job or started up their own business.

■ Do young people have opportunities to take part in quality employability skills training?

Regarding the training on improvement of employability skills of young people, apart from the programmes carried out by public employment services regarding the active labour market measures, which are discussed further in the report, there are several other training providers in the Western Balkan countries. As a result of our desk analysis, we identified training programmes delivered by the following providers:

- a. Civil society organizations (mostly aimed at improvement of communication skills, teamwork skills, leadership, organizational and entrepreneurial skills);
- b. Private non-formal education providers (such as foreign language schools or schools for IT and computer skills).

Regarding the challenges in this area, the unavailability of some programmes which are provided by private organizations has been recognized during the consultations since they are expensive for some young people. As for the programmes provided by civil society organizations, the issue that has been raised is related to sustainability, since training courses are carried out within the projects and there is no possibility of continuation upon completion of the projects.⁵⁵

What is important for ensuring sustainability of training is that its quality can be documented. The quality should be monitored on different levels - from following the satisfaction of young people involved in the training to determining how training developed their skills, if they apply them in their everyday context and whether training led to employment. Moreover, the impact evaluation can be carried out in order to determine the effects of the training on people and society.

⁵⁵ Billorou, N., Pacheco, M., & Vargas, F. (2011). Skills development impact evaluation: A practical guide. International Labour Organization.

Recommendation:

Public employment services should collaborate with civil society organizations (or delegate the training delivery) of effective training in employability skills. The prerequisite is the quality of the training being evaluated by third parties - independently from training provider organisations.

Cross-cutting issues in youth employability policies

In this section, two cross-cutting issues will be discussed – the role of CSOs in youth employability improvement and the employability of vulnerable youth groups from remote and rural areas. Even though the employability of vulnerable groups in general is an important issue, this analysis focuses on young people from rural and remote areas, as they are identified in the process of consultations within WEB4YES project as the group that needs special attention in the context of youth unemployment. The role of civil society organizations in this area was selected given the lack of cooperation among the civil society actors and public authorities in the Western Balkan countries in the policy processes and decision-making in the area of youth unemployment.

a. Employability of Vulnerable Youth from Remote and Rural Areas

The consultation held with national stakeholders in the process of preparation of this document and the review of existing policy measures related to youth employability in the Western Balkan countries rarely address measures targeted specifically to young people from rural and remote areas. Sometimes, there are some programmes for improvement of entrepreneurial skills of young people from rural areas and support for entrepreneurship of young people. What is largely missing, though, are other programmes, such as employability skills training (noted in Albania) and access to career development centres which are located only in university centres (noted in Kosovo). This lack of attention on skills training is a noticeable shortcoming of the measures since it has been noted as effective to carry out skills training and provide young people from rural areas with both technical and non-technical (soft) skills and on-the-job learning.⁵⁶

■ *An example of good practice of improving employability of youth from rural and remote areas:*

The Strategic Plan for Rural Development of Bosnia and Herzegovina includes strengthening the services for providing information, training and counselling as one of the measures. Specifically, supporting young people in rural areas is mentioned. At the same time, there are research studies conducted in 2011, such as "Attitudes and needs of young people from rural areas in the Republic of Srpska",⁵⁷ which can be used as a basis for establishing employability measures, since it examines the attitudes of young people from five rural areas about their needs and problems including the topic of youth employment. Moreover, there are projects conducted which aim to improve transversal skills of young people from rural areas.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ International Labour Association. Youth in the rural economy, <https://www.decentjobsforyouth.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Thematic-Plan-3-Youth-in-the-Rural-Economy.pdf>, p.7

⁵⁷ Dušanić, S. (2011). Stavovi i potrebe mladih iz ruralnih područja Republike Srpske –r ezultati istraživanja, <http://www.pm.rs.ba/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Stavovi-i-potrebe-mladih-u-ruralnim-podrucjima.pdf>

⁵⁸ Information available at: <http://www.uzopibih.com.ba/realizovani%20projekti.html>, accessed 14.06.2018.

Recommendation:

More research is needed to understand the specific skills development needs of youth in rural and remote areas.

Special measures to reach out to youth in rural and remote areas need to be designed.

The institution in charge of creating and monitoring the implementation of policy measures in the area of youth employability should commit to a target number of young people from rural and remote areas to reach out to. Such efforts should be monitored as well.

b. The role of CSOs in youth employability improvement

Even though the majority of Western Balkan countries⁵⁹ have national level policy documents for cooperation with civil society and institutions and mechanisms for cooperation, the CSOs continue to report problems with their involvement in decision and policy-making processes at both national and local levels.⁶⁰ Specifically, regarding the civil society participation in the EU integration process, previous analysis⁶¹ has shown that the level to which civil society is consulted is mainly formal, i.e. public participation most often only takes the form of consultation and dialogue in the policy drafting phase.

The conclusions regarding the involvement of CSOs in the region in policy making in general applies to the youth employability policies as well. The recommendation of the recent analysis of the activities of youth dedicated CSOs⁶² has been that it is necessary to enable their participation in all the stages of policy-cycle and not only during the consultation and to improve the monitoring and evaluation system of youth employment-related policies.

What is specific for the involvement of CSOs in the area of youth employability is that apart from their involvement related to policies, they are significant service providers. Namely, they provide career guidance services and training on employability skills and also intermediate in traineeship programmes. This role of civil society organizations and their experience in working directly with young people should be recognized. Through their work they can develop and evaluate different youth employability measures which then can be used to feed into policy documents.

An example of good practice of involvement of civil society organizations:

In April 2018, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy together with the Employment Agency of the FRY Macedonia, Ministry of Education and Science, Adult Education

59 In FYR Macedonia, a new Strategy of the Government for cooperation with the Civil Society Organizations is in the process of drafting.

60 Monitoring matrix on enabling environment for civil society development: regional report 2016. - Skopje: Balkan civil society development network, 2017.

61 Novakovic, A., Bozovic, D., Brankovic, T., Dolapcev, V., Denti, D., Ghobert, C. & Lita, L. Regional policy study - Out of the EU waiting room: Civil society participation in the light of the „new approach“ to enlargement to the Western Balkans, 2015.

62 Foundation "Albania in the Berlin process". A mapping and comparative assessment of youth organizations in the Western Balkans: an insight to youth organizations and youth policy in Albania, Montenegro and Serbia / Foundation Albania in the Berlin process. - Tirane : A & D, 2016

Center, Center for Vocational Education and Training and the National Youth Council of Macedonia (NYCM), started with the implementation of the pilot phase of the Youth Guarantee, which makes it the first Western Balkan country to start with the implementation of this European Union's labour market policy.

The Youth Guarantee⁶³ is a commitment by the Member States to guarantee that all young people under the age of 25 receive, within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education, a good quality job offer to match their skills and experience or the chance to continue their studies or undertake an apprenticeship or professional traineeship. The Youth Guarantee is a response to the high youth unemployment rates and the high percentage of young people who are neither employed nor in the processes of education or training, to address the detrimental long-lasting consequences of long-term unemployment. Empirical evidence from countries with a long experience on the implementation of youth guarantees suggests that these interventions are an effective way of responding to youth unemployment, provided that they are designed and implemented properly, as they can produce significant effects at a modest cost.⁶⁴

The process of preparation and implementation of Youth Guarantee Scheme in the FYR Macedonia started in August 2017. *The National Coordination Body for Implementation of Youth Guarantee* was established, governed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, but also including several other ministries and agencies that work on the field of youth and the National Youth Council of Macedonia. The implementation of Youth Guarantee is funded by the Government of Macedonia and several international organizations/donors that operate in the country. The process started with drafting the *Master plan for implementation of Youth Guarantee*. The plan includes a broader understanding of the challenges with youth unemployment and roles and responsibilities of all partners. The master plan is divided into two phases: phase I lasts from 2019 to 2020. It is the pilot phase where the system for implementation of Youth Guarantee is being established. Phase II lasts from 2020 to 2022 where educational and other policies will be reformed and the services that will be provided under Youth Guarantee will be further developed.

The participation of youth organization in the team for preparation and implementation of Youth Guarantee has been based on the European practice of partnership with youth organizations. The role of the National Youth Council of Macedonia is to identify and map young people that are not in education, employment and training (NEET) and to ease their enrolment and registration in Youth Guarantee. For this purposes, NYCM established a team that consists of coordinators and field workers that work on a daily basis in the respective municipalities. Additionally, NYCM adopted a strategy for identification and mapping of NEET (young people not in education, employment or training) that is used in order to establish communication with the potential beneficiaries. Besides, the Association for Career Counselling (CSO) is also included in this project in the delivery of the capacity building training for the field workers included in the project.

63 Council. 2013. Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee, 2013/C 120/01, April (Brussels).

64 Escudero, V., & Mourelo, E. L. (2015). The Youth Guarantee programme in Europe: Features, implementation and challenges. ILO; Escudero, V., & López Mourelo, E. (2017). The European Youth Guarantee a systematic review of its implementation across countries (No. 994963592802676). International Labour Organization.

Regional cooperation related to youth employability

Young people in the region of the Western Balkans have expressed a need for accessible programmes that would support their mobility.⁶⁵ Each of the aspects reviewed in the previous part of the document – career guidance, traineeships and training on improvement of employability skills are areas with the potential for regional cooperation.

■ Regional information system on career-related information

In the context of increasing regional mobility, particularly the mobility of labour force, it is important to ensure that relevant information is available to interested job seekers. Namely, one of the recognized obstacles for regional mobility is limited publically available information on job vacancies and the needed profiles. Key recommendations for improving the situation are the exchange of information about the skills required and the establishment of a regional web-portal for announcing available jobs.⁶⁶ As in the case of national systems for providing career information, an important prerequisite that is emphasized is the collection of sound and harmonized data on local and regional skill needs.⁶⁷

The development of a regional web-based career information system⁶⁸ is also relevant for young people and for increasing youth mobility. One of the recommendations presented in the recent report in the context of the preparation of a Regional Economic Area Action Plan is to provide career guidance to young people in order to maximize the benefits of economic integration in the region.⁶⁹ As in the case of the development of national systems for providing quality and reliable career information, it is important that this regional system contains comprehensive and integrated information.

Recommendation:

A regional web-platform that would gather information on mobility (labour market information, conditions for youth labour mobility across the Western Balkan countries, resources in each of the Western Balkan countries intended for career development) should be established. A regional network of civil society organizations and public institutions working in this area can undertake this task.

65 ALDA - European Association for Local Democracy. (2016). Youth mobility in the Western Balkans – the present challenges and future perspectives, available at: http://www.alda-europe.eu/public/doc/Youth_Mobility_in_the_Western_Balkans.pdf

66 Shani, N., & Vidovic, H. (2015). Labour Mobility as a Factor of Development in South-East Europe: Regional Overview. T. Dedovic (Ed.). Regional Cooperation Council.

67 World Bank. 2017. Western Balkans: Regional economic integration issues notes (English). Washington, DC: World Bank. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/521241498836042507/Western-Balkans-Regional-economic-integration-issues-notes>

68 Within the WeB4YES project (more information can be found at <http://www.web4yes.eu/about.html>), this type of Web platform will be developed as an e-service for unemployed young citizens from the region. This way young unemployed citizens can get information about the labour market in their own country as well as in other Western Balkan countries, about the preconditions for young workers mobility between the WB countries, to learn more on steps in career development and to inform themselves on the relevant resources in each of the Western Balkan countries. Upon the initial development and testing, the e-Service will be continually updated with the information on newest trends on the national job markets, policy and legislation changes, regulations toward workers, etc. The platform will be available at web4jobs.info.

69 World Bank. 2017. Western Balkans: Regional economic integration issues notes (English). Washington, DC: World Bank. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/521241498836042507/Western-Balkans-Regional-economic-integration-issues-notes>

■ Regional mobility schemes for trainees

Participation in transnational traineeships could bring about additional benefits to young people in addition to the ones associated with regular traineeships. Currently, there are opportunities for exchange of trainees from the Western Balkans supported by the EU. The EU Erasmus+ programme offers a support for traineeships abroad to higher education and VET students, apprentices and recent graduates. From the summer of 2018 onwards, traineeships between the so-called Programme and Partner countries⁷⁰ have been available as a part of new mobility agreements⁷¹, which implies opportunities for Western Balkan countries as well.

Furthermore, opportunities for mobility of trainees should be available with the support of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO). The objective of the RYCO⁷² is to support youth projects that aim at and contribute to increasing regional mobility and social inclusion and promoting employability of young people among other things. Specifically, the RYCO will cover up to 100% of total project costs for individual exchanges.⁷³ As explained in the draft document in the process of establishing the RYCO⁷⁴ the supported individual exchanges will include exchanges such as internships, fellowships, trainings and apprenticeships.

Are there any obstacles to the organization of these types of traineeships? Although national stakeholders have not yet identified any obstacles to the organization of these types of programmes, the same legal, administrative and other obstacles recognized in the case of other types of mobility schemes could represent obstacles in the case of transnational traineeships as well. For instance, the partly inadequate infrastructure (poor roads and not frequent traffic lines between some countries) and lengthy procedure in order to obtain a residence permit could represent obstacles.⁷⁵ Specifically regarding youth mobility, according to the results of the survey that included young people from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, the FYR Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia which was conducted in 2016, one significant obstacle for the mobility of young people in the Western Balkans could be the lack of finances.⁷⁶

Laws on Foreigners in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia have specific articles related to residence permit given to the people undertaking traineeships, specialization, work practice and similar programmes. However, the absence of a regulatory framework and quality assurance regarding the traineeships in general could also represent an obstacle in the case of transnational traineeships.

70 The Programme countries can fully take part in all the Actions of the Erasmus+ Programme, whereas the Partner countries can take part in certain Actions of the Programme, subject to specific criteria or conditions. Out of six Western Balkan countries, currently the FYR Macedonia is a Partner Country, whereas other countries are Programme Countries. (https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/programme-guide/part-a/who-can-participate/eligible-countries_en, accessed 14.06.2018)

71 https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/opportunities/organisations/learning-mobility/higher-education_en, accessed 14.06.2018

72 Article 7 of the Statute of the Regional Cooperation Office, accessible at http://www.rycowsb.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/ryco-statute_final.pdf

73 Article 50 of the Statute of the Regional Cooperation Office, accessible at http://www.rycowsb.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/ryco-statute_final.pdf

74 Available at: <http://www.roadtoryco.com/>, accessed 14.06.2018.

75 Shani, N., & Vidovic, H. (2015). Labour Mobility as a Factor of Development in South-East Europe: Regional Overview. T. Dedovic (Ed.). Regional Cooperation Council.

76 ALDA - European Association for Local Democracy. (2016). Youth mobility in the Western Balkans – the present challenges and future perspectives, available at: http://www.alda-europe.eu/public/doc/Youth_Mobility_in_the_Western_Balkans.pdf

■ Training on improvement of employability skills at the regional level

At the regional level, there are programmes which support the development of employability skills among other things, supported by the Erasmus+ Programme. Namely, one of the specific objectives pursued by the Erasmus+ Programme⁷⁷ in the field of youth is to improve the level of key competences and skills of young people, including those with fewer opportunities, through non-formal learning. The opportunities for support within the programme are divided into three key actions and two of them are relevant for support for youth employability skills.

Key Action 1 'Mobility of individuals' is dedicated especially to the international learning mobility of individuals or groups, where the main purpose of cooperation is to enable and enhance learning of participants. These mobility activities include youth exchanges and volunteering activities, and upon completion of these activities, young people receive a certificate, the Youth Pass, an individualised description of activities undertaken and learning outcomes.

Key Action 2 The aim of 'Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices' is strategic and long-term cooperation. The key Action 2 and its sub-action *Capacity Building in the Field of Youth* offer a special programme and budget line, open exclusively to foster and improve cooperation with organizations and institutions from the Western Balkan countries, entitled *Western Balkans Youth Window*.

⁷⁷ Available at: <https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3327/Salto%20brochure%20web%202018%20feb%20final.pdf>, accessed 27.08.2018.

Conclusions and recommendations

Youth employment is a pressing issue in the Western Balkan countries and the immense importance of improving youth employability, particularly the skills they possess, has been recognized. Namely, specific policy measures for career guidance and various training providers have been designed and implemented for the purpose of improving youth employability and traineeships. Moreover, there are multiple examples of good practices in the area of youth employability, which provide a good basis for mutual cooperation.

However, there are some encountered challenges that pose obstacles to successful implementation of youth employability policies. In the area of career guidance, they are related to insufficient cooperation and coordination among institutions involved in providing career guidance and the mechanism for ensuring the quality of the provided services. Moreover, there is a substantial lack of valuable career information that is crucial for young people to make well-informed decisions. Regarding traineeships, there is no precise data regarding the number of young people who undertake traineeships in the labour market on their own initiative in the Western Balkan countries, or data regarding their quality, thus, there is currently insufficient information to identify gaps and design measures aimed at increasing the number of quality traineeships. An additional obstacle is the inadequate regulatory framework for traineeships in general. Finally, training for improving employability skills of young people is not fully utilized as there are issues regarding the availability, the quality and the accessibility of this measure.

In all of these areas, two cross-cutting issues were identified as important. One of them is related to accessibility of measures for improvement of employability for young people in rural and remote areas, and in this regard, our analysis suggests that there are insufficient measures directed specifically to them. The second issue discussed is involvement of civil society organizations. The different aspects of their participation were identified – they represent a significant service provider in this area but they are also actively involved in the process of creating and implementing policies, and their role should be further strengthened.

As there are common policy aims across all Western Balkan countries in the area of youth employability and various examples of effective practices, there are multiple opportunities for regional cooperation. All three aspects of cooperation that were examined (career information system, mobility schemes for trainees and training on improvement of employability skills) have immense potential for further advancement of youth employability in the Western Balkans and may as well contribute to the improvement of youth mobility in the region.

Based on the identified policy issues, a broad set of **recommendations** which address them can be proposed.

Recommendations for cooperation between public institutions and civil society organizations at the national level:

- (1) In order to avoid policy fragmentation and duplication of effort, as well as to facilitate young people's access to career guidance services, **governments of the Western Balkan countries should adopt a decision on establishing national Working Groups** for the development of guidance policies and systems which gather **both government representatives from education, employment and youth policy sectors and representatives of other stakeholders**, including civil society organizations. Ministries in charge of education, employment and youth (if any) can take turns in convening working groups and covering related expenses, depending on the task that the working group is in charge of.

- (2) In order for all young people to have access to quality support in enhancing their career management skills, **a minimum set of standards for career guidance services should be developed through the work of working groups**, including all national stakeholders.
- (3) In order to ensure that career-related information is accessible to young people, **a national online information system combining all available information should be set up**. Individual ministries (in charge of education, employment or youth) can directly be responsible for the production of career information or they can contract out the private sector or civil society organizations for that purpose. Young people in particular should have an active role in the production of this type of information to ensure that it is in line with their needs.

The dissemination of existing career-related information should be made available to young people through multiple channels, including social media, in a manner accessible to them. This can be done in cooperation with civil society organizations working with young people or delegated to them.

- (4) **Public institutions should develop and/or improve the regulatory framework for traineeships in line with the quality standards** outlined in the EU Recommendation on a Quality Framework for Traineeships, which would also regulate traineeships in the open market. **Civil society organizations** can use existing initiatives for changing labour regulations, adopting national traineeship programmes or introducing quality elements for traineeships, **to advocate for establishing supporting regulatory framework for all types of traineeships**, including those organized in the open market.
- (5) More research is needed to understand the specific skills development needs of youth in rural and remote areas. **Special measures to reach out to youth in rural and remote areas** need to be introduced. The institution in charge of creating and monitoring implementation of policy measures in the area of youth employability should commit to a target number of young people from rural and remote areas to reach out to. Such efforts should be monitored as well.
- (6) Public employment services should collaborate with civil society organizations (or delegate the training delivery) of **effective training in employability skills**. The prerequisite is the quality of the training being evaluated by third parties - independently from training provider organisations.

Recommendations for cooperation between public institutions and civil society organizations at the regional level:

- (1) A regional survey to be conducted **in all Western Balkan countries should include a set of questions aimed at collecting data on the involvement of young people in traineeships and the quality of those traineeships** (e.g. within the Balkan Barometer). This data should further be used by public institutions and civil society organizations to identify gaps and design measures aimed at increasing the offer as well as ensuring quality of the traineeships offered in the open market.
- (2) A **regional web-platform that would gather information on mobility** (labour market information, conditions for youth labour mobility across the Western Balkan countries, resources in each of the Western Balkan countries intended for career development) should be established. A regional network of civil society organizations and public institutions working in this area can undertake this task.

Appendix 1: The Form for Country Reports on Youth Employability

1. Overview of youth employability policies

Here we would like to get a brief overview of youth employability policies (arrangements for career guidance services, traineeships outside of formal education system and programmes for improvement of employability skills) in your country.

- 1.1. Please provide a **brief (no more than one page) overview of national arrangements for career guidance services, traineeships outside of formal education system for young people and programmes for improvement of youth employability skills** in your country. In answering this, please describe the **principal service providers**. Indicate how responsibility both for managing and for funding services is divided: among different ministries (for example Education and Labour); among different levels of government; and between governments and other providers including civil society organizations. *(for instance, explain how ministries in charge of education, youth and labour are responsible for managing and funding career guidance services for youth, how responsibility is divided between national and local providers and how the services provided by youth organizations complement the services provided by public institutions).*
- 1.2. Please describe the main **perceived shortcomings and problems** regarding the national arrangements for career guidance services, traineeships outside of formal education system for young people and programmes for improvement of youth employability skills in your country.
- 1.3. Please briefly **describe the main legislation (national strategies, action plans, laws, bylaws)** that directly affect career guidance services, traineeships outside of formal education system and programmes for improvement of youth employability skills. If there are any other types of documents which significantly affect these services, such as quality standards, please describe them as well.
- 1.4. Please describe **ways in which policies encourage civil society organizations to play a role in youth employability policies**, especially in career guidance programmes, traineeships outside of formal education system and programmes for improvement of youth employability skills *(for example through roles that are expressed in legislation; through policies to contract service provision to non-government organizations; through membership of advisory bodies; through government supported grant schemes).*
- 1.5. Please provide information of whether there are policy measures in the area of youth employability (career guidance services, traineeships outside of formal education system and programmes for improvement of youth employability skills), different from the active labour market measures, which are specifically targeted at young people from vulnerable groups - **young people from rural areas**.

2. Alignment of policies for traineeships outside of formal education system for youth with the Quality Framework for Traineeships

PLEASE DO NOT PROVIDE INFORMATION ABOUT THE TRAINEESHIPS WHICH ARE PART OF THE ACTIVE LABOUR MARKET MEASURES

- 2.1. Please provide the data on **the approximate number of traineeships organized outside of education system and the number of young people they include**. If you do not have data which directly answer this question, please tell us some indicative numbers which show whether these types of traineeships exist in your country.

- 2.2. Please provide the information on how your country **complies with key quality criteria** set within the [Quality Framework for traineeships](#) (please refer to this document if you need more clarification regarding any of the quality standards):

Are there any regulations stating that 1) traineeships should be **based on a written agreement**, and/or 2) **learning and training objectives** should be clarified in the written agreement between the trainee and the traineeship provider, and/or 3) rights and **working conditions of trainees** should be respected with regard to applicable law, and/or 4) traineeships should have a **reasonable duration**, and/or 5) the knowledge, skills and competences acquired during traineeships should be **recognized and validated**, and/or 6) traineeship providers should include in their vacancy notices **information on the terms and conditions of the traineeship**?

Are there any available **research findings** that indicate 1) whether traineeships in your country are **based on a written agreement**, and/or 2) that **learning and training objectives** are clarified in the written agreement between the trainee and the traineeship provider, and/or 3) that rights and **working conditions of trainees** are respected with regard to applicable law, and/or 4) that traineeships have a **reasonable duration**, and/or 5) that the knowledge, skills and competences acquired during traineeships are **recognized and validated** and/or 6) that traineeship providers include in their vacancy notices **information on the terms and conditions of the traineeship**?

- 2.3. Please specify whether there are **challenges regarding the cross-border mobility of trainees** (mobility of trainees in Western Balkans and the EU), especially in terms of administrative and legal obstacles. For instance, note if there is a law that restricts the number of months that can be spent in a country, which impacts the possibility to host trainees from other Western Balkans countries and the EU.

3. **Alignment of policies for career guidance programmes for youth with the Key Features of Lifelong Guidance System**

Please provide the information on how your country complies with key quality criteria set within the document [Lifelong Guidance Policy Development: A European Resource Kit](#) and [Guidelines for Policies and Systems Development for Lifelong Guidance](#). In providing the information you can address your national Euroguidance centers if existent for assisting with the data, or consult the mentioned ELGPN studies.

- 3.1. **Career management skills:** Please provide information whether there are programmes offered to all young people as part of compulsory schooling to develop career management skills and whether the continued development of these career management skills is the focus of the entire subsequent guidance provision. Are there any problems recognized regarding this aspect?
- 3.2. **Access to lifelong guidance systems:** Please specify whether specific attention is paid to groups of young people at risk of social exclusion, such as: young people who have not completed compulsory schooling or have left school without qualifications; members of linguistic and other minority groups; young persons with disabilities. Please describe the major gaps, if any, in the provision of career guidance services. Are there any groups of young people whose needs appear to be met less effectively than others'?
- 3.3. **Assuring the quality of lifelong guidance provision:** Describe whether policy-making is informed by evidence and whether research is undertaken to support evidence-based policy and systems development in the area of lifelong guidance for youth.
- 3.4. Please describe whether there are policies and systems in place for providing quality and reliable **career information** (including information about occupations,

educational programmes and labour market information). Moreover, please specify whether there is available information on local, national and regional (WB region) education and labour market opportunities.

4. **Availability and implementation of programmes for improvement of youth employability skills**

PLEASE DO NOT PROVIDE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROGRAMMES FOR IMPROVEMENT OF YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS WHICH ARE PART OF THE ACTIVE LABOUR MARKET MEASURES

- 4.1. Please provide information **for which employability skills there are available programmes** (*communication skills, teamwork skills, foreign language skills, desire for learning and self-improvement, IT and computer skills, ability to adapt and flexibility, problem-solving skills, work ethics, ability to work under pressure, planning and organizational skills and entrepreneurial skills*) and specify the key providers and the target groups. Please describe any challenges or obstacles related to the organization of these programmes.
 - 4.2. Please **provide information on the programmes for improvement of employability skills at the level of WB region** if they are available. Are there any obstacles for carrying out regional employability skills programmes?
-

5. **Framework Recommendations**

Please provide draft recommendations on how to address the issues regarding the employability boosting in your country as well as at the level of the WB region (particularly in relation to career guidance programmes for youth, traineeships outside of formal education and employability skills programmes). The recommendations should propose the action on national or WB level that addresses the problems and assigns responsibilities for implementation.