

*Supporting the Western Balkan's collective leadership on reconciliation: building capacity and momentum for the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO)*

*Steering Committee Meeting  
Summary report of the meeting\**

## Opening Remarks

The first Project Steering Committee (PSC) meeting of the “Supporting the Western Balkan's collective leadership on reconciliation: building capacity and momentum for the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) project convened on 16 April 2019 at 10.00 a.m. The meeting was co-chaired by Mr. Brian J. Williams UN Resident Coordinator in Albania, Mr. Đuro Blanusa, RYCO Secretary General, Mrs. Lorena Haxhiu, Deputy Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth, and Mrs. Limya Eltayeb, UNDP Resident Representative

In the opening remarks *Brian J. Williams* acknowledged that peacebuilding process is challenging, starting a new program is always a challenge and doing multi-country and multi-agency programming is extremely challenging. Particularly in a region with unresolved issues where there are still conflicts, dynamics and issues of trust that require positioning and negotiation. He further appreciated RYCO for their patience, persistence and willingness, outlining some other excellent initiatives across the subregion that we could take advantage. He praised the joint efforts of UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA representatives in Albania and the region countries to facilitate this process and keeping things moving quickly, inclusively and with supportive maturity.

*Mr. Đuro Blanuša* stated that the drafting process of the project, in partnership with the UN should be seen as an example of collective ownership, possible synergies and of setting good communication channels and capacity building. He stressed the importance of establishing an efficient and transparent communication, as a prerequisite for conducting satisfactory projects and noted the hard work and efforts of all partners in bringing this initiative to life. He further emphasized the support and leadership of the six contracting governments parties and the importance in building a solid background and consistent support for the project. The Governing Board meeting did fail, however governmental institutions reassured us of their full support, hence the situation should be approached with optimism.

*Mrs. Lorena Haxhiu* outlined that this RYCO-UN project is in line with the youth and pre-university education strategy, as well as with the efforts to improve quality of teaching and make it inclusive of

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\* The Agenda is included as Annex 1

promotion of tolerance and conflict resolution. She further highlighted that RYCO came as a product of the Berlin process for the Western Balkans, which the Albanian Government fully supports, alongside with the main pillars of the project like promotion of the inter-cultural dialogue among schools, youth exchanges, strengthening of RYCO capacities, reaching out to the most vulnerable youth, strengthening of the grants scheme for schools and youth organisations which the ministry fully supports and encourages. She acknowledged and appreciated the role of UN and RYCO in the development and implementation of this project, as well as the increased opportunity for a regional dialogue affirming that RYCO is considered as an efficient mechanism to overcome regional challenges. Lastly, she assured on the commitment of the ministry to continue its support and collaboration in making this innovative initiative a success.

### Presentation of overall project and major activities - Discussions with other WB6 representatives and other interventions on peacebuilding in WB6 (DFF)

*Mr. Eno Ngjela* presented the work plan and proposed activities until December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019. The presentation of the foreseen activities for 2019 in Albania continued with a detailed introduction of the fourth component (survey) following the technical meeting discussions.

**Project outcome:** Social cohesion and reconciliation enhanced across the WB, project duration: 18 months, project cost: 2,1 million euros. UNDP is mandated to strengthen RYCOs institutional capacities to design, monitor and evaluate the sub grants, UNFPA is contributing in increasing the number of grassroots school youth organisations, and UNICEF in developing tools in intercultural learning, exchange and peace in education for RYCO to use in the future.

**Output 1: Schools (UNICEF)** – UNICEF is supporting youth empowerment, increase of dialogue and works on the capacity building of schools.

**Output 2: Youth groups and grassroots organisations (UNFPA)** - UNFPA is supporting RYCO in increasing their reach out to grassroots, with a focus on young girls' empowerment and promotion of tolerance and understanding within marginalised groups.

**Output 3: RYCO capacities strengthened (UNDP)** - UNDP is reinforcing RYCO institutional capacity to enhance a sustainable regional cooperation, peacebuilding and reconciliation process, and will participate in strengthening and operationalizing RYCO small grant facility, consolidating it with additional revenues and design monitoring and evaluation.

**Output 4: Survey on Youth perceptions on priorities for sustainable peace in the WB and youth-led advocacy for peacebuilding** - the outcome for this output is the creation of a platform for diversity of youth voices, and more consolidated and effective and new ways to build peace.

Foreseen Activities:

-Regional youth perceptions study: youth led, designed and rolled out collectively with and targeting youth, with a look on gender roles in conflict and young people's aspirations and visions for the region. The study is also designed to increase agency and sustainable peace.

-Capacity-building and networking: again, led by youth actors and activists, youth organisations with local researchers and institutions are invited to jointly develop the methodology and run the survey,

to create a methodology that can be used in the future, with a representative regional team and the support of RYCO and DFF efforts in strengthening youth organisations.

-Advocacy for policy and programming impact: baseline and conflict analysis for future programming for UN agencies, tailored youth-led advocacy, with campaigns in each country and at regional level to create platforms, networks and tools to strengthen youth actors and their organisational capacity, and generate a global impact and influencing global policy.

Currently, the Output 4 of the project is at its finalisation stage and will soon enter its submission and inception workshop phase, which is foreseen to happen early in the summer 2019. The discussions held during the technical meeting revolved mainly around methodologies, synergies with DFF and the regional survey.

Other topics raised during this session were the importance of the information sharing, the differences in technologies i.e “hackathons” vs RYCO shared platform for teachers, primary vs high schools etc, the importance of national statistics as regards the survey etc. Since the first six months from the signing date - October 2018 - of the 18 months programme implementation have already passed the issue of the project extension was raised by the members of the PSC.

### Discussions and comments

*Mrs. Limya Eltayeb*, highlighted the importance of reviewing the discussed topics and the possible regional inputs. She further stressed the need to address matters on how to create a thread throughout the components regarding the chosen partners, i.e working with the same partners who'll be benefiting from more than 1 component would ensure more sustainability stated Ms. Eltayeb. She outlined that the link between the survey and how youth group are supporting the survey could also be concerned by that survey. Regarding the extension, she suggested that it ought to be asked further in the path of the project, after pushing for implementation and completing a few activities.

*Mrs. Aynabat Annamuhamedova*, stated that the question of how to communicate better our work should be addressed to help RYCO and UN agencies to work better together, but also to reach out to partners, which would be a valuable instrument for monitoring the project.

*Mr. Roberto de Bernardi*, added that UNICEF's comments about the regional survey proposed by the Istanbul Hub have been shared. Hence, regarding the extension, he supported Ms. Eltayeb's idea on waiting a bit more before asking it and pushing further in speeding up the project implementation meanwhile.

*Mrs. Manuela Bello*, raised issues related to the timeframe of the survey and particularly with the data inputs. She further expressed some concerns about the feasibility study and involvement of relevant institutions to ensure the quality of data.

*Mrs. Susanna Dakash*, stated that some delays are faced but they can be overcome, even though an extension would of course be beneficial for completing the survey. The hub is aiming to establish a methodology that could be used to monitor the project and the study and results would formulate tools for advocacy and networks that would carry on work beyond the project. As regards the timeline, a long inception phase and training is required but the mapping out of RYCO, DFF partners and other

relevant institutions within the region is planned to start before the inception workshop. The feedback received from UNICEF will be also integrated.

*Mr. Đjuro Blanusa*, recognized that there is a certain need for analysis and such survey perfectly fits with what RYCO is trying to achieve, so the survey has to get introduced as soon as possible.

*Mr. Brian Williams*, elaborated further regarding the survey adding that the first discussion happened in September 2018 along with a conversation with UNPBF on the need to be anchored in an on-going regional work on capacity building. RYCO was then viewed as the perfect candidate for “turning the train into a TGV (high-speed train)”. The idea of the survey itself was born with RYCO in mind, at time. When it comes to the cost extension, he supported the other head of agencies, to wait before asking for it, however the notes from this meeting should reflect the difficulties and challenges of the project implementation and could contain a paragraph on the Governing Board meeting failure in Prishtina.

*Mrs. Fiona McCluney*, raised a question regarding the institutional capacity building of RYCO and how comes down to different country offices – i.e what can be expected in Montenegro.

*Mr. Eno Ngjela*: Firstly, the project has envisaged hiring a programme manager and assistant as part of the support provided by UN, one person in each contracting party with an additional one for Serbia, secondly, when the rolling out of the monitoring and evaluation methodology will take place, there will be a need to rethink.

*Mrs. Bojana Bulatović*, added further that other strategic priorities and possible activities for joint work will be identified and developed in the next two months.

*Mrs. Afrodita Shalja*, stressed that the idea of a joint project is for UN agencies to work collectively, and the project activities, although different should transfer knowledge, so there is a need for horizontal communication and overall consolidation of RYCO capacity building.

*Mrs. Limya Eltayeb* sought for more précised information on how the different countries are aware and on board.

In response to that *Mr. Brian Williams*, highlighted that a joint information letter was written a month ago jointly with RYCO to all countries and agencies, however we need to keep an eye on the coordination among UN agencies in different countries, and they should be reminded that meetings are to take place between the three UN agencies and the Local Officer in each country. Overall, RYCO should communicate but each UN agency should be mindful about maintaining a continuous coordination.

*Mr. Roberto de Bernardi*: Regarding the communication and sharing of information, regular conferences are being organised with other UNICEF representants in the WB (three have been held since October 2018).

*Mrs. Bojana Bulatović*, added further that field visits are envisaged with the core project coordination team and relevant agencies’ visits in different countries are foreseen. So far, the only one has been held in Prishtina, however others still need to happen. The implementation of the activities is made by the specific agencies in the specific countries, but there is an evident need for a communication strategy to be jointly developed and supervised by UNDP Albania in communication with RYCO.

*Mrs. Limya Eltayeb*, stated that having a look at the workplan and budget at country level would help the PSC members to identify what should be done in each country and come back with suggestion of partners. Such a document would be requested and made available to then adjust activities accordingly.

*Mr. Shpend Qamili*, confirmed that in Kosovo as well, a UNICEF-led group meeting, attended also by the RC is convening regularly.

*Mrs. Limya Eltayeb*: Coming back to rolling out and implementation, as a PSC member, sought to see the plan for each country as soon as possible.

*Mrs. Mirlinda Bushati*, elaborated further that this is an innovative project, because of the regional aspect and RYCO involvement. The entire project is in support of building the capacities of RYCO, and even though there are different activities in each country and national inputs, the beneficiary is RYCO and the entire planning process was drafted jointly with RYCO in consultation with Local Officers. She stressed the fact that there is already an action plan in place with clear and budgeted activities that has started.

*Mrs. Limya Eltayeb*: A meeting should still happen between the three agencies of each country and a more detailed plan and sharing of partners i.e schools and NGOs would be good. Some activities could also be shared among countries as they single them out, such as common trainings, even if it is agreed that the starting point is RYCO, which should be informed of everything.

*Mrs. Bojana Bulatović*: The technical meeting within countries was discussed, notably for UNFPA, RYCO that are organizing some national trainings but most of its activities are regional. They are planned and designed at regional level, not per country. Therefore, there is no need for an action planning between RYCO LBOs and UN agencies, different LBOs will learn and collaborate with UN agencies. The need for joint work is acknowledged, but the project overall is regional.

*Mr. Brian Williams*, indicated that *Limya's* idea is also to introduce more communication, so it might not consist of a detailed action plan but the main milestones envisaged in each country, as a way to get a better overview of what is happening in each country, hence the importance of coordination meetings.

*Mr. Eno Ngjela*, mentioned that the project will reach out and share information and the team is open for feedback. There will be points of coordination, but in order not to get stuck in coordination, physical meetings are not necessary all the time. A good use of available applications and technology and establishment of group discussions to share information on activities would contribute. I side with everyone on the need for coordination meetings - especially in Belgrade - to clarify things, but also drawing the physical line to that.

*Mrs. Aynabat Annamuhamedova*: The kick off meetings are indeed important, UNFPA as the main push in Bosnia for instance is informed but there is still a lack of clarity for others.

*Mrs. Alma Mirvić*, took floor to add that synergies between RYCO and DFF were discussed also during the technical meeting and opportunities for complementarity were clearly seen. Clarity was received on RYCO and UN's engagement for schools and it was also agreed to share information and adjust

timelines. She further, underlined the importance of sequencing and making sure there is no overlap in the activities, particularly regarding the open calls.

*Mrs. Bojana Bulatović*, thanked *Mrs. Mirvić* for singling out room for complementarity. Regarding the sub granting launched last year the list of contracted grantees will be available this summer and provided to the SC shortly. When it comes to the shared list and methodology, there is no room for overlapping because RYCO and DFF calls will have different timelines. She announced another RYCO call to be launched by the end of the year, however not in the frame of this project.

*Mrs. Alma Mirvić* announced that DFF expects to launch the call this fall.

*Mr. Nikola Ristić*, stated that regarding DFF and RYCO complementarities, among other things shared outreach and results promotion were discussed and it was agreed that it would be beneficial to both. RYCO is working in six contracting parties and DFF is already having a strong communication in three of them, hence coordination on a common strategy alongside activities in these three countries should be envisaged.

*Mrs. Limya Eltayeb* ended that the project seems complicated but is particularly timely, with the fragility of WB, with tensions arising easily from not dealing with past, a threat that donors and experts outside the WB don't necessarily realise. That is why there is a necessity to implement such a program, and UNDP recommends extending the partnership with RYCO, whose role is crucial to fight fragility beyond just citizens.

## Concluding remarks

*Mr. Đuro Blanuša* stated that there are some main prerequisites to establish communication patterns to continue further on, and we must now find a way to shift from too much communication to communication on really important aspects only. This goes beyond the project as it will feed the activities and overall work of RYCO and the long-term strategic investment in RYCO will serve its long-term objectives. The Governing Board meeting in Pristina failed but the doors remain open, there is room for compromise as a meeting is foreseen in early June. RYCO is eager to move forward, and in a still fragile region there is a clear opportunity to put the topics of youth cooperation and reconciliation ahead and invest in human capacities. Finally, we should try and shift the discussion from political and bilateral dispute to concrete actions of RYCO and bring tangible results to the Governing Board.

*Mr. Brian Williams* fully supported the comments made on democracy and strengthening resilience of institutions in the region, and took the opportunity to thank *Mrs. Mirvić* for the DFF coordination, RYCO for its strength and faith in collaboration. With such complex projects, further collaboration and clarity among stakeholders is needed. Finally, he ended with an encouraging note: following a discussion with UNPBF (which has a 18 month limit window for their supported projects), I realised that there is a peacebuilding and recovery facility (PRF) that allows a longer term action, and, even though regions have never been declared eligible contrary to country, it would be an intriguing possibility to open some space for all of us to engage in a longer term in these important issues.

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**Steering Committee (SC) Meeting**

**16<sup>th</sup> April 2019, Prince Adriatic Resort, Shëngjin, Albania**

Time	Agenda Item	
09.30 – 10.00	Arrival of participants & coffee	
10:00 – 10:30	Opening remarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mr. Brian J. Williams, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Albania</li> <li>Mr. Đuro Blanuša, RYCO Secretary General</li> <li>Special guest - Ms. Lorena Haxhiu, Deputy Minister of Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth, Republic of Albania</li> </ul>
10:30 – 11:00	Presentation of overall project and major activities till 31 <sup>st</sup> December 2019	Mr. Eno Ngjela/UN Albania project team Ms. Bojana Bulatović, RYCO Programme Officer Ms. Susanna Dakash, Youth Specialist in the Governance and Peacebuilding Team at UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub
11:00 – 12:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discussions /interventions other WB6 representatives from the project</li> <li>Other interventions on peace-building in WB6 (DFF)</li> <li>Next steps</li> </ul>	Moderated by Mrs. Limya Eltayeb, UNDP Resident Representative
12.30 – 12.45	Concluding remarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mr. Brian J. Williams, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Albania</li> <li>Mr. Đuro Blanuša, RYCO Secretary General</li> </ul>
13.00-14.00	Lunch	Fish Restaurant Detari, Shengjin

## List of participants

1. Mr. Brian J. Williams | UN Resident Coordinator in Albania
2. Mr. Đuro Blanusa | RYCO Secretary General
3. Mrs. Lorena Haxhiu | Deputy Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth
4. Mrs. Limya Eltayeb | UNDP Resident Representative
5. Mrs. Aynabat Annamuhamedova | Acting UNFPA Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Country Director for Serbia, North Macedonia, and Director for Kosovo<sup>†</sup>
6. Mr. Roberto de Bernardi | UNICEF Representative in Albania
7. Mrs. Manuela Bello | UNFPA Assistant Representative in Albania
8. Mrs. Fiona McCluney | UN Resident Coordinator in Montenegro
9. Mrs. Susanna Dakash | Youth Specialist Governance and Peacebuilding Team UNDP IRH
10. Mrs. Afrodita Shalja | UNFPA in North Macedonia
11. Mr. Shpend Qamili | UNRCO in Kosovo
12. Mrs. Alma Mirvić | Joint UN Regional Program Coordinator a.i., Project Manager Dialogue for the Future
13. Mrs. Bojana Bulatović | RYCO Program Officer
14. Mr. Nikola Ristić | Communication Officer RYCO
15. Mr. Eno Ngjela | Programme Specialist UNDP Albania
16. Mrs. Mirlinda Bushati | Early Learning Education Specialist UNICEF Albania
17. Mrs. Elida Nuri | Communications Specialist UNFPA Albania
18. Mrs. Eni Kristo | Programme Associate UNDP Albania
19. Mrs. Edi Bregu | Project Assistant UNDP Albania

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<sup>†</sup> 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