



Regional Youth Cooperation Office

Call for Project Proposals 2018

*“A Better Region Starts with Youth”*

**Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis and Description of the Selection Process of the Second RYCO Open Call for Project Proposals**

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## **Introduction**

This document presents an overview of the received applications for the second RYCO Open Call for Project Proposals and includes a qualitative and quantitative analysis as well as a description of the selection process conducted within the Open Call. It also presents the Preliminary List.

The first section gives an overview of the received applications, outlining the number of received applications, types of entities which applied and partnered with the applicants, their origins, as well as the division of the received applications as per LOTs and Specific Objectives of the Call. It also analyzes the changes that occurred compared to the first RYCO Open Call for Project Proposals. Finally, it summarizes the findings.

The second section gives an overview of the assessment and selection process by explaining the administrative and eligibility check processes and their results, how the external technical assessment of project proposals by assessors proceeded and what was the RYCO's role in it. Moreover, it explains the strategic assessment of the shortlisted projects by the Selection Committee and presents its findings.

Finally, the document offers the RYCO's envisaged 2019 grant portfolio and presents qualitative analysis of the Preliminary List.

## Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis of the Received Applications

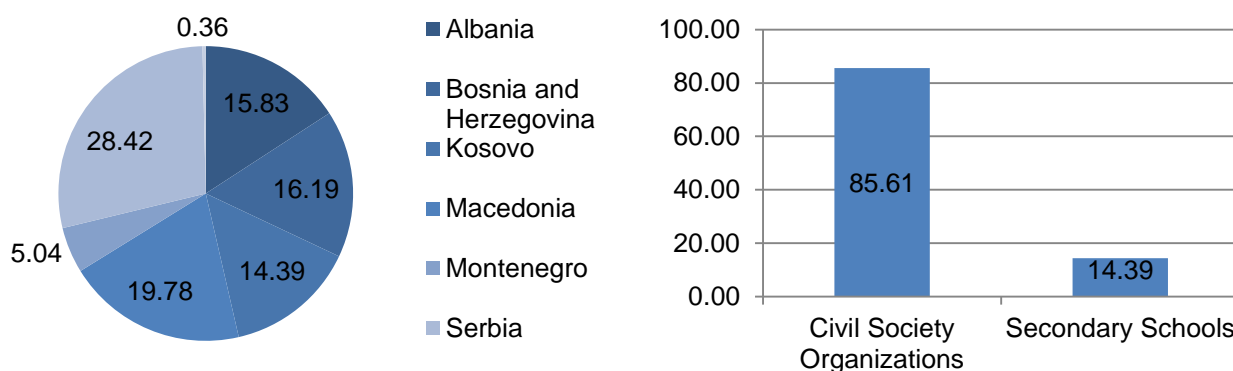
The second RYCO Open Call for Project Proposals was open on 3 December 2018 while the deadline for submission of the applications was 25 January 2019. During the 54-day period, the **total number of submitted applications was 278**. As one of the key criteria for applying was creating partnerships, i.e. an applicant was obliged to have at least one partner from a RYCO Contracting Party different from its own. The **total number of partners was 597**. Overall, **the total number of entities involved in the submitted project proposals (applicants plus partners) was 875** which further indicates that an average number of partners per application was 2.15.

Divided by the RYCO Contracting Party, the origin of the applicants was as following:

- Albania – 44 applicants (15.83%)
- Bosnia and Herzegovina – 45 applicants (16.19%)
- Kosovo\* – 40 applicants (14.39%)
- Macedonia – 55 applicants (19.78%)
- Montenegro – 14 applicants (5.04%)
- Serbia – 79 applicants (28.42%)
- *Outside the WB6 – 1 applicant (0.36%)*

The applications were submitted by the following entities:

- Civil Society Organizations – 238 applications (85.61%), out of which 16 applied on behalf of secondary schools
- Secondary Schools (both public and private) – 40 applications (14.39%)



*Distributions of the received applications among the RYCO Contracting Parties (left) and between the entities acting as the lead applicants (right), both in percentage (%)*

The second RYCO Open Call for Project Proposals had three LOTs aiming to allow a fair competition between the actors of various capacities. The **LOT 1** was open exclusively to the **secondary schools** (both private and public) from the Western Balkans but also civil society organizations willing to apply on behalf of school when schools are facing administrative barriers to apply for the Call. The **LOT 2** was dedicated to the **civil society organizations** with the total turnover of the last three years of less than 50.000€. The **LOT 3** was available for civil society

\* 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

organizations *en général*, including those eligible for the LOT 2. Distribution of the received applications per LOT is as the following:

- LOT 1 – 55 applications (19.78%)
- LOT 2 – 44 applications (15.83%)
- LOT 3 – 172 applications (61.87%)
- LOT not specified in the Application Form (other) – 7 applications (2.52%)

RYCO intends to support and empower civil society organizations and secondary schools to implement activities in two Priority Areas divided in five Specific Objectives (SOs). The applicants selected the following Specific Objectives in the two Priority Areas:

**Priority Area 1: Regional Youth Cooperation, Mobility and Exchange (68.71%)**

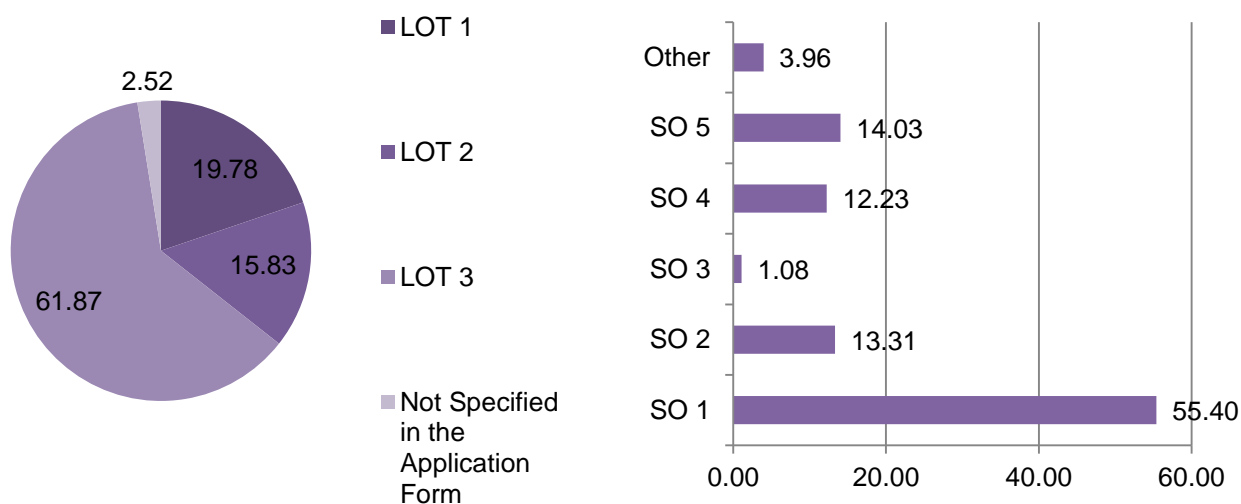
- Specific Objective 1: Intercultural Learning and Dialogue – 154 applications (55.40%)
- Specific Objective 2: Dealing with the Past – 37 applications (13.31%)

**Priority Area 2: Enabling Environment for Regional Youth Cooperation (27.34%)**

- Specific Objective 3: Policy Influencing – 3 applications (1.08%)
- Specific Objective 4: Youth Participation – 34 applications (12.23%)
- Specific Objective 5: Strengthening Capacities – 39 applications (14.03%)

Eleven (11) applicants selected more than one Specific Objective (3.96%).

Overall, it should be underlined that the biggest interest shown by this year’s applicants from all the RYCO Contracting Parties was for the topics related to the intercultural learning and dialogue, which shows the need in the region for learning more about each other’s cultures, meeting peers and establishing long lasting relationships. However, this could also mean that additional capacities are required in order to organize capacity building activities of youth workers, teachers etc. Moreover, this could indicate that additional expertise is needed in order to implement projects that focus on dealing with the past. However, the projects received under the Specific Objective 2 were generally of a very high quality. Finally, the interest shown for the LOT 3 indicates that these projects require considerable funding for a successful implementation which is clear from the fact that a number of organizations eligible for the LOT 2 still applied for the LOT 3.



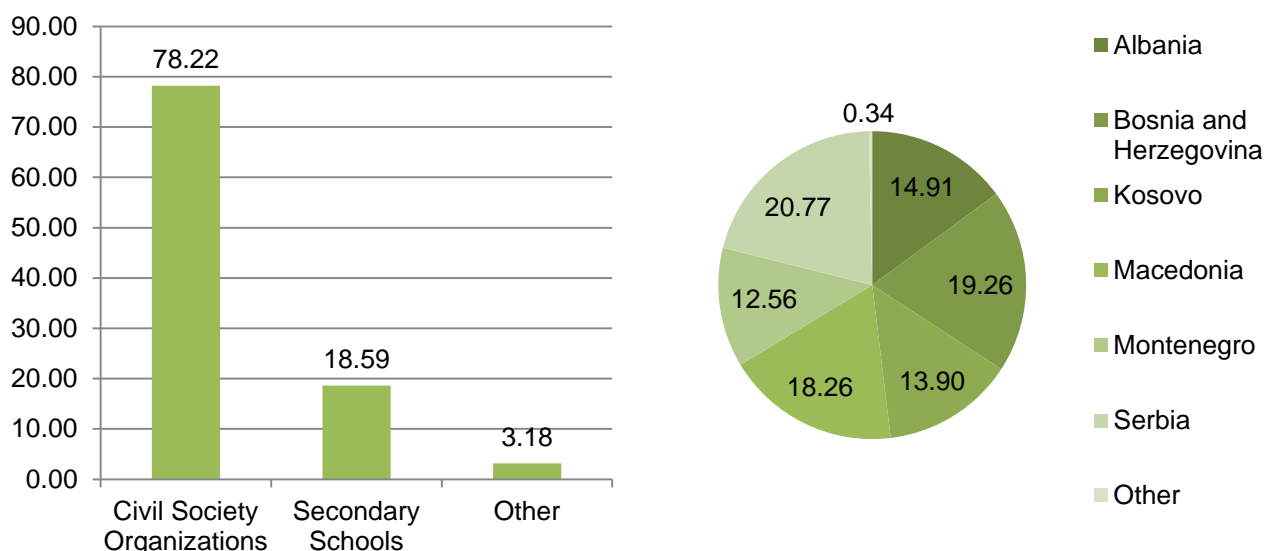
Distribution of the received applications per LOT (left) and per Specific Objectives (right), both in percentage (%)

The applicants were obliged to have at least one partner from a RYCO Contracting Party different from their own. The total number of 597 partners can be divided in three groups:

- Civil Society Organizations – 467 partners (78.22%)
- Secondary Schools – 111 partners (18.59%)
- Other entities (cultural, educational, sports institutions/associations) – 19 partners (3.18%)

Distribution of the partners by their origin is as following:

- Albania – 89 partners (14.91%)
- Bosnia and Herzegovina – 115 partners (19.26%)
- Kosovo – 83 partners (13.90%)
- Macedonia – 109 partners (18.26%)
- Montenegro – 75 partners (12.56%)
- Serbia – 124 partners (20.77%)
- *Outside the WB6* – 2 partners (0.34%)



*Distributions of entities acting as partners (left) and their origin (right), both in percentage (%)*

We also compared the size of population<sup>1</sup> of each of the six RYCO Contracting Parties with the number of applicants and partners registered in the respective Contracting Party. Compared to the results from the first RYCO Open Call, the percentage of the applicants and partners from **Albania** increased reaching almost a perfect proportion. The discrepancy between the size of population and the percentage of the applicants and partners from **Bosnia and Herzegovina** became smaller than in the first Open Call. Trends in **Kosovo** were the same as in the first Open Call, giving a bigger percentage of the applicants and partners when compared to the size of population, but a smaller difference compared to the first Open Call. The case is the same for **Macedonia** with a differential: even bigger percentage of applicants and partners than in the first Open Call. **Montenegro** recorded a decline in the percentage of the applicants, but increased the percentage of partners. Finally, the percentage of the applicants and partners from **Serbia** declined compared to the first Open Call.

<sup>1</sup> The data on population in the RYCO Contracting Parties were taken from the CIA Factbook which is available online - <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/> (accessed: 20 May 2019)

The following factors may have influenced the changes in the percentages. In the case of **Albania**, the fact that the RYCO Head Office is based in Tirana probably contributed to a higher visibility of RYCO in the Contracting Party, but also a proactive involvement of the Local Branch Officer in Albania in local events. Moreover, active promotion of opportunities for secondary schools from Albania contributed to a considerable increase of applications from these institutions.

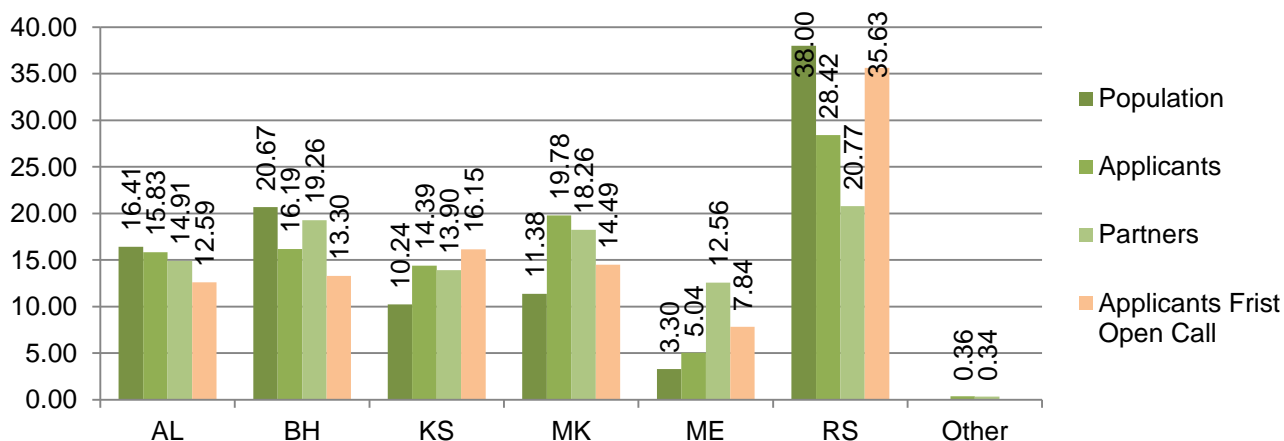
During the first Open Call, the fact that the Local Branch Officer in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** was not hired caused inability of RYCO to properly promote the Call across the Contracting Party. After the Local Branch Officer was employed and was proactively involved in the local activities, the increase of the percentage was expected as it happened.

The decline of the percentage of the applicants from **Kosovo** should not be considered alarming since it differs from the first Call for less than 2 percent.

As in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the presence of the Local Branch Officer in **Macedonia** and his active involvement in local activities caused an increase of the percentage of the applicants and partners from the Contracting Party.

The limitation of the RYCO budget probably caused the percentage of the applicants from **Montenegro** to decline since the Contracting Party's contribution to the RYCO budget is not sufficient to support more than two-three projects. On the other hand, this probably caused the fact that the organizations/schools from Montenegro decided to become partners rather than applicants (the percentage of partners is almost three times bigger than the percentage of the applicants).

**Serbia** recorded a decline in the percentage of applicants compared to the first Call. This can be explained by a high competition and the rejection of a number of high quality projects by RYCO due to the budget limitations but also limited human resources deployment by RYCO compared to the size of the Contracting Party (over ten times bigger in population than Montenegro, Serbia has one LBO, the same as Montenegro).



Relation between the RYCO Contracting Parties' population, the origin of the applicants and partners, in percentage (%)

The routes of partnering also give valuable information on how the Western Balkans network. Some slight changes happened compared to the first Open Call.

The applicants from **Albania** mostly partnered with the organizations/institutions from Macedonia (27). This is a novelty since within the first Call, the Albanian applicants mostly networked with partners from Kosovo and Serbia, while Macedonia was on the third place for choosing partners.

**Bosnia and Herzegovina** kept the same routes for partnering as within the first Call, having Serbia as the Contracting Party where most of the partners are coming from (33). This year, an increase in partnership with organizations/institutions from Kosovo should be underlined. Additionally, an interesting point is that several applicants from Bosnia and Herzegovina had partners from different entities – Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina/Republika Srpska, which was an added value and should be further encouraged in other Contracting Parties.

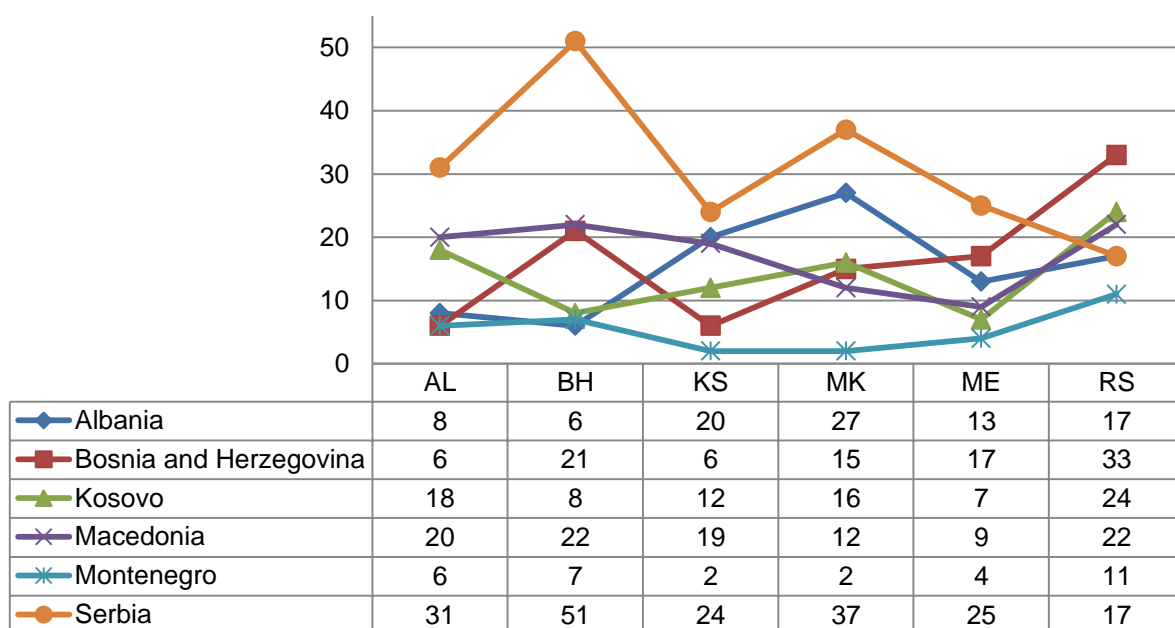
The applicants from **Kosovo** kept the very same numbers of partners coming from Serbia (24) as in the first Call. An important increase happened in this Contracting Party's case: the number of partnerships with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro doubled comparing to the previous call.

**Macedonian** applicants created most of the partnerships with the organizations/institutions from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia (22). While within the first Call, the partners from Kosovo were on the second place in terms of numbers, this year the next biggest number of partnerships is with Albanian organizations/institutions.

A slight change happened in the case of **Montenegro**, too. Although most of the partnerships are with the organizations/institutions coming from Serbia, the number of partnerships with Bosnia and Herzegovina is almost half of what was the situation within the first Call.

The applicants from **Serbia** kept the same partnership routes as in the first Call, having most of the partnerships with the organizations/institutions from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

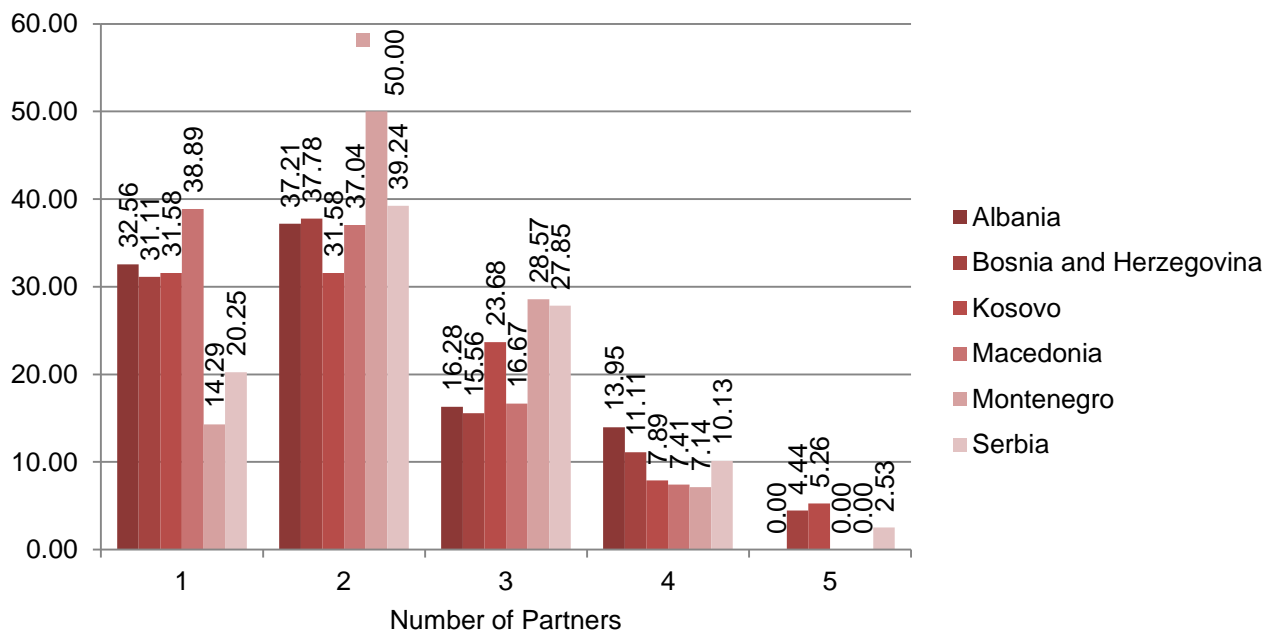
The most valuable information is the growing need for networking between organizations/institutions from Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is particularly important, having in mind that this networking is burdened with the visa regime between the two Contracting Parties.



*Number of partnerships on the submitted project proposals divided by the RYCO Contracting Parties*



It is already said that the average number of partners per applicant is 2.15, resulting in an average of 3.15 organizations/institutions per consortium applying with a project proposal. The following chart shows percentage of applications coming from a Contracting Party depending on number of partners – one to five.



*Number of applicants coming from RYCO Contracting Parties and numbers of their partners, in percentage (%)*

The following are the key conclusions on the received applications:

- Smaller number of received applications comparing to the first Open Call. Possible reasons:
  - a) RYCO Open Call period overlapping with other donor's open calls (Erasmus+)
  - b) Period of the Call coinciding with the new year's holidays season
  - c) Applicants' experience with the first RYCO Open Call for Project Proposals: a number of documents requested for the granted applicants within the first Open Call created an image that RYCO is an extremely strict donor, even though the procedures were made easier for the second Call
  - d) The focus of the Call was made more clear, narrowing down the pool of applicants
  - e) Other reasons which should be more explored
- The biggest interest is still shown by civil society organizations
- The number of secondary schools applying increased comparing to the first Open Call, probably due to the capacity building trainings organized by RYCO
- The applicants overwhelmingly applied for the bigger grants opportunity (LOT3) focusing on intercultural learning and dialogue (Specific Objective 1)
- Certain RYCO Contracting Parties recorded an increase in number of applications comparing to the first Open Call, especially those which did not have LBO when the first Call was launched
- Partnership routes slightly changed with an important increase of partnerships between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo
- An average number of partnerships did not change significantly

## **Assessment and Selection Process of Project Proposals**

RYCO's assessment and selection system relies both on external and internal expertise and ensures quality control throughout the process. The evaluation of proposals implied the three phases:

- administrative and eligibility check by RYCO Secretariat,
- external technical assessment of project proposals,
- strategic assessment of the shortlisted projects by the Selection Committee.

### **Administrative and Eligibility Check**

The RYCO Team conducted the administrative and eligibility check internally to verify whether the information contained in the applications (and supporting documents) are in conformity with the criteria set by RYCO in the Guidelines for Grant Applicants. The four-eye principle was applied to the administrative and eligibility check to ensure that no issues were overlooked. The decision to exclude a proposal on ineligibility grounds was taken as soon as the ineligibility issue became apparent. Any application that did not meet the administrative and eligibility criteria was rejected on this sole base and withdrawn from any further consideration.

In case of minor technical mistakes in an application otherwise eligible (e.g box left unticked in the application form, projected starting date left blank), the RYCO team conducting the administrative and eligibility check granted the applicants the permission to resubmit its application within a set timeframe.

**Out of 278 applications, 232 passed the administrative check.** This step in the selection process was based on the eight following criteria: (1) the correct Grant Application Form has been used, (2) the project proposal is typed and is in English, (3) the budget is enclosed, presented in the requested format, and stated in EUR, (4) an electronic version of the proposal is sent by e-mail, (5) the Declarations by the Applicant and all the Partners have been filled out, stamped, signed and enclosed, (6) all the required supporting documents are enclosed, (7) the LOT selected in the proposal is in line with the section 2.10. of the Guidelines for Grant Applicants, (8) only one specific objective is selected.

Divided by the RYCO Contracting Party, the following number of applications passed the administrative check:

- Albania – 36 applications (15.52%), 8 applications rejected
- Bosnia and Herzegovina – 37 applications (15.95%), 8 applications rejected
- Kosovo – 34 applications (14.66%), 6 applications rejected
- Macedonia – 45 applications (19.40%), 10 applications rejected
- Montenegro – 11 applications (4.74%), 3 applications rejected
- Serbia – 69 applications (29.74%), 10 applications rejected

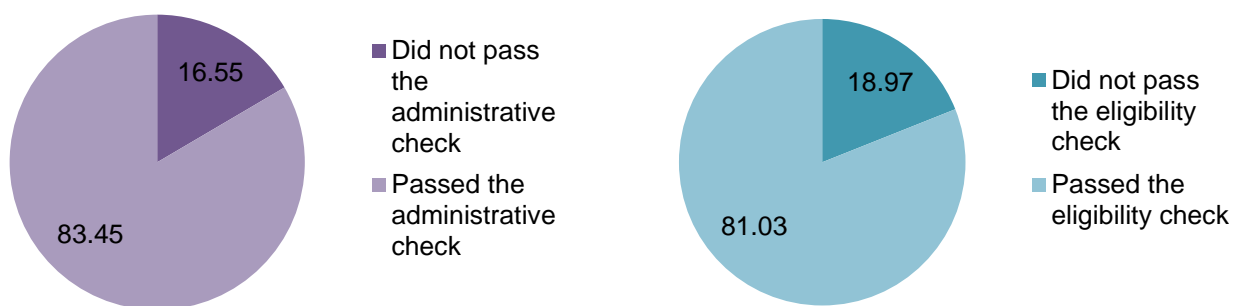
**Out of 232 applications which passed the administration check, 188 passed the eligibility check.** Eligibility check was an assessment of whether the applicant and partners satisfy the eligibility criteria outlined in the sections 2.1. – 2.6. of the Guidelines for Grant Applicants and consisted of the following criteria: (1) the applicant and its partner(s) are legal entities established at least one year prior to the launch of the Call, (2) the applicant is submitting only one project proposal, (3) the partners do not have partnership roles in other project proposals, (4) the project

will be implemented in the Western Balkans 6, (5) the duration of the project is between 3 and 9 months, (6) the requested RYCO contribution is in conformity with the stipulations outlined in the Guidelines for Grant Applicants.

Divided by the RYCO Contracting Party, the following number of applications passed the eligibility check:

- Albania – 28 applications (14.89%), 8 applications rejected
- Bosnia and Herzegovina – 33 applications (17.55%), 4 applications rejected
- Kosovo – 26 applications (13.83%), 8 applications rejected
- Macedonia – 39 applications (20.74%), 6 applications rejected
- Montenegro – 11 applications (5.85%), 0 applications rejected
- Serbia – 51 applications (27.13%), 18 applications rejected

In the two following charts, the percentage of applications that passed and did not pass both the admin and eligibility check is presented.



*Administrative check (left) and eligibility check (right), both in percentage (%)*

### **External Technical Assessment of Project Proposals by Assessors**

Since the Pool of Assessors created for the purposes of the first RYCO Open Call for Project Proposals in 2017 was still valid, as outlined in the Call for Assessors<sup>2</sup>, the assessors remained in RYCO's database for the Call launched in 2018.

The assessors from the Pool were contacted to resubmit their updated offers. The selection of seven candidates was made by three RYCO Secretariat staff members who assessed the received offers but also evaluated the work of the assessors engaged in the assessment phase within the first RYCO Open Call for Project Proposals.

The selected assessors participated in the Preparatory Meeting on the Call for Proposals, held on 12-13 February 2019 at the RYCO Head Office in Tirana. The RYCO Program Officer and Communication Officer provided the assessors with technical information on the process of assessment, presented the Call for Proposals and the Guidelines for Assessors. Moreover, the assessors discussed several assessments of project applications in order to come to the minimum of shared understanding of RYCO's priorities and to attempt to harmonize their approaches.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.rycowb.org/?p=4088>

The assessment of each eligible proposal was made as described in the RYCO Guidelines for Assessors which were reviewed and improved based on the experience of the first Call. The Guidelines for Assessors guided the assessors on how to conduct their evaluations so that all assessments are made in a coherent and consistent way for all the proposals and from all the contracting parties. The Guidelines were prepared by RYCO, and are aligned with PRAG.

The eligible applications were dispatched to the assessors based on their previous knowledge related to the five Specific Objectives of the Call but also according to their experience with specific actors, e.g. civil society organizations or secondary schools. This was done in order to ensure a proper understanding of an average quality of project proposals per each LOT and/or Specific Objective.

Assessment was conducted respecting the relevant Guidelines for Grant Applicants and evaluation grids outlined in the Application Form. To ensure an impartial, professional and smooth assessment process, assessors were given proper documentation and guidelines for assessment within Evaluation Grid. Each proposal had to be assessed by at least two assessors. Reading by a third assessor was requested in the situation of discrepancy between the scores of two assessors bigger than 20 points. The minimum of points given by at least one assessor to qualify the project for third reading was 70 points for civil society organizations and 60 points for secondary schools. The final grade after the third reading was calculated from the average of the points of the two assessors which were the closest ones.

All assessors worked independently from each other in order to carry out the assessment of the proposals assigned to them in a consistent manner by applying the same methodology, interpretation and understanding of the objectives and criteria described in the Guidelines for Grant Applicants. It was not expected that the scores of two different assessors should be identical, but rather that each assessor applies the same standards and provides a well substantiated opinion supporting his/her individual scores. As a part of quality assurance, on several occasions during this process, the assessors received feedback on the clarity of their comments and coherence between the comments and the given points.

Once the technical assessment phase was completed, RYCO Team prepared a shortlist composed of the highest-ranking proposals in each of the three LOTs, taking into account that the principle of the geographical distribution was respected. The shortlist consisted of over 80 projects that were assessed in the next step by the Selection Committee.

### **Strategic Assessment of the Shortlisted Projects by the Selection Committee**

The strategic assessment of the shortlisted projects was consisted of the two steps:

- context inputs by the six Local Branch Officers,
- deliberations and funding recommendations of the Selection Committee.

#### Context inputs by the LBOs

To enable the Selection Committee to make the best possible funding recommendations, the LBOs were asked to share context inputs highlighting their local knowledge about the track record and context relevance of shortlisted applicants, and outlining relevant past experiences with follow-on applications. These inputs were shared in advance and taken into consideration by the Selection Committee. They proved very valuable in, for example, helping the Selection Committee identifying and prioritizing projects led by diverse partnerships and taking place in underserved/remote areas.

## Deliberations and Funding Recommendations of the Selection Committee

To ensure that the combination of applications presented to the RYCO Governing Board have the maximum potential to deliver on RYCO's strategy, and are fully owned by RYCO, the Secretary General appointed the Selection Committee in charge of preparing the Preliminary List. The Selection Committee consists of three people from the RYCO Head Office – the Deputy Secretary General, Program Officer and Finance and Administration Assistant.

In order to prepare the Preliminary List, the SC members read all shortlisted projects (and related assessment grids submitted by external assessors) and met to make consensus-based funding recommendations for each LOT, taking into consideration the geographical balance of RYCO's portfolio as well as the following selection criteria:

- *Strategic relevance of the project for RYCO's portfolio:* the Selection Committee ensures that the Preliminary List consists of a compelling mix of different actors, themes and approaches that contribute to RYCO's key strategic goals, and that each project in itself is fully endorsed by the RYCO Secretariat staff in the light of its grant making experience.
- *Relevance of the project for sectoral development:* the Selection Committee ensures that the Preliminary List includes projects that can significantly contribute to the field of intercultural youth cooperation, particularly in view of their potential for multiplier effects, methodological development and institutionalization.

Through the careful allocation of the 50 points allocated to this step, the SC could prioritize or de-prioritize applications, based on their overall strategic relevance.

Key findings from the deliberations of the Selection Committee:

- The role of RYCO's Selection Committee is an essential complement to the technical assessment. It was found that technical assessors tend to prioritize projects that are well written and sometimes miss out on more original and essential projects coming from less experienced or unusual applicants.
- At times, the Selection Committee faced dilemmas between two core principles, namely the principle of proportional geographical distribution of the projects according to each Contracting Party's contribution, and the ambition to select the highest quality projects overall.
- The quality of the submitted and proposed projects was not the same across all the Contracting Parties, which is unsurprising given the different pools of potential applicants in each Contracting Party and their experience. The Selection Committee prioritized the regional distribution of the projects, and identified which projects would require the careful accompaniment of the LBOs due to the lower level of experience of the applicant and/or lower quality of the initial project design.
- While the Selection Committee did prioritize a number of technically weaker proposals due to their strong strategic and inclusion potential, it also recognizes that RYCO's staff capacities cannot be entirely dedicated to time-intensive accompaniment of less experienced applicants.
- To enable RYCO both to select as many high quality proposals as possible while also investing in the capacities of newer applicants, mitigation measures could be to:
  - a) ensure that any reserve list project making it to the final list is selected based on merits only (final overall score)

- b) invest in project development capacities of potential applicants, especially secondary schools and grassroots CSOs
- c) invest in programmatic support during the implementation of those projects that have demonstrated weaker intercultural or methodological expertise

### **RYCO's Envisaged 2019 Grant Portfolio**

The list of projects recommended for funding represents a compelling mix of themes and actors, in line with RYCO's ambition to deliver on its strategy. RYCO considers that collectively these projects enable RYCO to fulfill this ambition. This section will highlight a few of the areas of focus and their impact within the Western Balkans:

- *The Priority Area 1: Regional Youth Cooperation, Mobility and Exchange* remains the area of highest interest for the applicants. It is worth noting that in addition to a large number of inspiring intercultural learning and dialogue projects, the envisaged portfolio also entails substantive dealing with the past initiatives.
- While much less represented in the overall applications' pools, the *Priority Area 2: Enabling Environment for Regional Youth Cooperation* is also included in the final portfolio, including through projects that will boost the capacities of youth workers to engage on intercultural dialogue, and through projects that enable youth participation in areas of shared regional concern (e.g. preservation of cultural heritage, raising awareness on environmental protection, youth participation in urban development).

The Preliminary List is attached. It distinguishes between the 44 projects recommended for funding and 14 reserve list projects. In addition to summarizing basic information about each project, the final list provides more information about what each project entails and what is their added value for RYCO.

It is important to highlight that projects included in the reserve list are overall of lower quality but nonetheless offer viable alternatives should any of the 44 projects recommended for funding fall through during the budget clearance and contracting phases.

### **Quantitative Analysis of the Preliminary List**

The Preliminary List consists of 44 applications (23.40% of the eligible applications) supposed to be implemented by 140 civil society organizations and secondary schools (public and private), i.e. 44 applicants and 96 partners.

Divided by the RYCO Contracting Parties, the origin of the applications on the Preliminary List is as following:

- Albania – 7 applications (15.91%)
- Bosnia and Herzegovina – 7 applications (15.91%)
- Kosovo – 4 applications (9.09%)
- Macedonia – 6 applications (13.64%)
- Montenegro – 3 applications (6.82%)
- Serbia – 17 applications (38.64%)

The origin of the partners is as following:

- Albania – 14 partners (14.58%)
- Bosnia and Herzegovina – 21 partners (21.88%)
- Kosovo – 10 partners (10.42%)
- Macedonia – 13 partners (13.54%)
- Montenegro – 14 partners (14.58%)
- Serbia – 25 partners (25.00%)

When combined together and divided by the Contracting Party, the situation is as following:

- Albania – 21 entities (15.00%)
- Bosnia and Herzegovina – 28 entities (20.00%)
- Kosovo – 14 entities (10.00%)
- Macedonia – 19 entities (13.57%)
- Montenegro – 17 entities (12.14%)
- Serbia – 41 entities (29.29%)

The following types of applicants are on the Preliminary List:

- Civil Society Organizations – 32 applications (72.73%)
- Secondary Schools and CSOs applying on behalf of schools – 12 applications (23.27%)

While the distribution among the LOTs is as following:

- LOT 1 – 12 applications (23.27%)
- LOT 2 – 11 applications (25%)
- LOT 3 – 21 applications (47.73%)

Finally, when it comes to the Specific Objectives, the distribution among the applications on the Preliminary List is as following:

- Specific Objective 1 – 30 applications (68.18%)
- Specific Objective 2 – 7 applications (15.91%)
- Specific Objective 3 – 0 applications (0.00%)
- Specific Objective 4 – 4 applications (9.09%)
- Specific Objective 5 – 3 applications (6.82%)