

United Youth for a Shared Future

A dark blue square logo containing the text 'OFAJ' and 'DFJW' in white, stacked vertically.

OFAJ
DFJW

**A Call from the youth actors of
the South Eastern Europe
Initiative**

We call on European institutions, national governments, and civil societies to act - boldly and practically - by making youth exchange between the EU and the Western Balkans a political priority, a strategic, financial investment, and an accessible right to all.

The challenges that our societies are currently facing go far beyond national borders. So must our responses. **Youth exchange and training for youth workers between the Western Balkans and the European Union must be recognized and supported as a fundamental right.**

In a time marked by political fragmentation, rising extremisms, the limitation of civic space, and increasing social isolation, **bringing young people together across borders is a strategic necessity for peace, democracy, and the creation of a resilient and inclusive Europe.** Young people from the Western Balkans and the European Union belong to one generation of Europeans. They suffered significantly during the COVID-19 health crisis, they are inheriting a world shaped by a human-made climate emergency, which limits their opportunities for freedom and poses health risks. Young Europeans are navigating through shared uncertainties, transformations and aspirations.

They must be given meaningful opportunities to meet, learn, and to build a future together.

The Western Balkans have always been a region shaped by encounters, transformation and history making. It is a place where empires collided, cultures merged, and communities gave life to shared forms of living. **The region's diversity is the foundation of its identity in the middle of Europe.**

Although this multiculturalism was violently disrupted and threatened in its very existence in 1990s by conflicts and external pressures, it quietly endures in daily practices, cultural expressions, and interpersonal relations.

This legacy is a symbol of endurance. It reminds us that multiculturalism cannot be erased, even when denied or silenced, and that what is often called differences are, in truth, the greatest strength that is stronger than nationalism, violence and hatred.

Today, young people across the region and the EU carry immense burdens: the lingering trauma of war, environmental emergency, economic precarity, and social marginalisation.

Other than youths in the EU, young people in the Western Balkans are caught between the slow-moving EU integration processes and the tightening grip of foreign influence, treated as a cheap labour force or a passive waiting room for better futures elsewhere. And yet, they are anything but passive. They are already living transnational lives - studying, working, creating, inventing, resisting, building across borders. We call for support to develop their competences and will into transformative power.

As Europe commemorates the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II, the Western Balkans also commemorate the 3rd decade of the end of the wars, marked by terrifying war crimes. **These anniversaries are not only events for remembering and mourning the human losses, they are opportunities to ask what kind of future we are willing to build, and who we will trust to lead that process.**

Youth must be at the centre of that democratic vision.

We Demand:

1. To make youth exchange a right, not a privilege.

Every young person in the EU and the Western Balkans must have access to meaningful international exchange programmes by 2030.

2. To unlock and expand funding for a truly inclusive European youth space.

Resources for youth engagement must reflect the reality of a Europe that is larger than its borders. Funding structures must be opened, expanded, and simplified to support meaningful participation, leadership, and collaboration across all corners of the continent. An inclusive and connected European youth space cannot be built on fragmented access—fair funding must become the foundation for shared opportunities and common futures.

3. To prioritise two-way mobility and mutual engagement.

Young people from the EU must be encouraged and supported to work, volunteer, and learn in the Western Balkans, not only as guests, but as equal partners and contributors. Likewise, youth from the Western Balkans must have full, unhindered access to mobility opportunities across the EU—not as temporary participants, but as co-creators of shared European experiences, ideas, and futures. Exchange must flow in both directions, grounded in reciprocity, respect, and real collaboration to create friendships and cohesion. Helping to learn from each other, creates synergies and benefit from all our achievement to be able to introduce them at home and elsewhere, adapted to each situation and all needs.

4. To support youth-led and grassroots initiatives.

Youth must be engaged not only as participants, but as respected and acknowledged co-creators of policies, programmes, and projects. Their voices, ideas, and critiques must shape the future. They have to be empowered to contribute on their own to building the future of a peaceful and democratic Europe.

We believe in a democratic and peaceful Europe where we grow not in parallel, but together.

We choose cooperation over competition, memory over forgetting, and courage over cynicism.

Young people are ready. We are ready. Now we need to strengthen the structures that believe and invest in youth. So we call European institutions, national governments and civil societies to act.



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