

Thematic areas that should be explored as part of the programme:

EDUCATION

Education in the Western Balkans continues to face challenges of quality, accessibility, and alignment with labor market needs. Youth mobility and advocacy can contribute to bridging the gaps between academic curricula and practical skills and foster mutual recognition of qualifications.

Within RYLMP, fellows could explore topics such as:

- Bridging the digital divide through education
- Digitalization of higher education and its inclusiveness: Internationalization of higher education
- Recognition of regional qualifications for mobility and employability: Youth's perceptions on quality education
- Youth's perspective on civic education curriculums
- Youth's participation in the decision making within the education system (universities or high schools)
- Promoting the third mission of the universities (entrepreneurial university or community engaged university)
- Addressing inequalities in access to education (e.g. rural areas, minorities, etc)

EMPLOYABILITY

Employability remains a pressing issue for young people in the region, where high unemployment, skills mismatches, and informal labor markets limit their participation in the workforce. Advocacy and research can focus on policies that foster entrepreneurship, youth internships, and labor rights.

Narrower research topics may include regional barriers to cross-border youth employment, green jobs and new opportunities in sustainable sectors, or the role of dual education and apprenticeships in reducing youth unemployment.

Fellows could also explore:

- Digital skills gaps and lifelong learning opportunities
- Barriers faced by marginalized groups (Roma, women, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+) in accessing decent work opportunities
- Youth perceptions of entrepreneurship

- Best practices of career education initiatives within the region
- The role of vocational education and training in reducing skill mismatches

MIGRATION

Migration - both external (toward the EU) and internal (rural-to-urban) - is a defining challenge in the Western Balkans, particularly due to brain drain. RYLMP fellows can shed light on the drivers of youth migration, policy responses to retain talent, and transnational civic engagement of the diaspora.

Possible research topics can include also:

- The impact of migration and reintegration policies on youth
- The impact of student exchange and mobility programs on long-term migration choices
- Exploring regional best practices to counter depopulation in rural areas
- How migration reshapes family structures and intergenerational solidarity
- How to foster brain circulation within the WB6 region
- Best practices from WB6 countries in engaging diaspora
- Gendered dimensions of migration (women migrants, care work, remittances)
- Representation of migration in regional media and public discourse

REGIONAL COOPERATION

Regional cooperation is central to reconciliation, economic integration, and youth empowerment in the Western Balkans. Strengthening intercultural understanding and collaborative policymaking can help overcome political divides.

Fellows may research topics such as youth participation in existing regional cooperation platforms (RYCO, RCC, WBF), civic-led regional initiatives as trust-building mechanisms, or the role of mobility in reducing stereotypes and fostering democratic resilience across borders.

Additional topics worth exploring include:

- The role of youth in post-conflict reconciliation and transitional justice
- Cross-border volunteering and cultural exchanges as tools of soft diplomacy
- How disinformation and nationalist narratives affect regional cooperation

- Grassroots digital platforms for regional advocacy
- Youth's perceptions on regional cooperation

DIGITAL AND GREEN TRANSITION

The digital and green transitions are often presented as parallel opportunities for modernization in the Western Balkans, but their implementation remains uneven across countries and sectors. Both these areas affect the current and future education, employability, and civic participation opportunities of young people in the region.

Within RYLMP, fellows could examine digital transformation or the green transition as separate themes, or they can aim for intersectional approaches that interconnect both of these developments.

Some suggested research topics include:

- The extent to which government services are digitalized in the Western Balkans
- The role of open data and transparency in digital governance
- The preparedness of WB6 to implement the EU Green Agenda Digital tools for monitoring environmental change
- What trends of green jobs should the WB6 countries start preparing for? Best practices of green technology use in the Western Balkans
- Mapping of initiatives promoting the green transition in the Western Balkans
- What can WB6 countries do to improve energy efficiency?