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THEMATIC EVALUATION

EVALUATION OF EU SUPPORT TO YOUTH IN THE ENLARGEMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD REGIONS

VOLUME III – CASE STUDY NOTES

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Evaluation of EU support to Youth in the Enlargement and Neighbourhood regions (2014-2022)

Volume III – Case Study Notes

The report consists of three volumes:

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2. Key methodological elements
3. Evolution of EU support
4. Main findings: Design and delivery of EU support
5. Main findings: Effects of EU support in sectors of focus
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List of acronyms and abbreviations

ABL	Administrative Boundary Lines
ACF	Action contre la Faim
CBC	Cross Border Cooperation
CCI	Cultural and Creative Industries
COBERM	Confidence Building Early Response Mechanism
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
CSE	Country Strategy Evaluation
CSF	Civil Society Facility
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area
DG NEAR	Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
EC	European Commission
EIDHR	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights
ENI	European Neighbourhood Instrument
EQ	Evaluation Question
ERASMUS	European Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
EUD	European Union Delegation
EU MS	European Union Member State
EUROMED	Euro-Mediterranean
EVET	Employment and Vocational Education and Training programme
FRIT	Facility for Refugees in Türkiye
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
HQ	Headquarter
IDP	Internally displaced people
ILO	International Labor Organisation
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
JC	Judgement Criteria
JEUN'ESS	Promotion de l'économie sociale et solidaire et création d'emploi décent pour la jeunesse Tunisienne
KfW	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau
İŞKUR	Turkish Employment Agency
LEP	EU Support to Local Employment Partnerships
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Non-Binary, Intersex and Queer
MOBIDOC	Mobility scheme for doctoral and post-doctoral students (EU intervention Science With and For Youth)
MS	Member States
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
ReLOaD	Regional Programme on Local Democracy
ROM	Results Oriented Monitoring
RYCO	Regional Youth Cooperation Office
SME	Small and Medium Sizes Enterprises
SSF	Single Support Framework

TCF	Technical Cooperation Facility
UfM	Union for the Mediterranean
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VET	Vocational Education and Training

Regional Case Study: EU support through regional programmes¹

1 Introduction

1.1 Context

1.1.1 Main Youth challenges

The three regions covered by this evaluation (i.e. *Neighbourhood South and East region, Western Balkans*) share a number of similar youth realities, dynamics and challenges. First, the demographic factor. In each of the regions, youth² generally represents a substantial part of the overall population (higher than in the EU). Second, youth agendas have acquired political prominence in the last decade as politicians increasingly acknowledge both the potential and risks associated with youth. Third, young people's perceptions on their role in society tend to fluctuate as they either search for influenced meaningful forms of participation³ or disengage from the public arena. Fourth, major migration⁴ and brain drain⁵ challenges add pressure to act. Fifth, across regions one can observe tense relations between state actors (using centralised and top-down modes of governance) and youth (calling for economic inclusion, equal opportunities as well as transparency and accountability). Sixth, in recent years, space for civic action, and meaningful youth engagement has been shrinking in many places – reflecting the fear of powerholders towards young people.⁶

A growing number of regional reports and surveys, emanating from different sources, suggest there are equally significant differences between the three regions, linked to specific historical contexts, geographical factors, the resource base, dynamics of state formation, the quality of governance and public administration systems as well as prevailing socio-cultural norms (particularly on gender). Stakeholders interviewed or consulted through surveys stress the need to recognise the heterogeneity of youth challenges within each of the regions.⁷ The *Neighbourhood South and East region* encompass hugely diverse countries (e.g. on overall approaches to engaging with youth⁸ or on more technical aspects such as youth skills).⁹ Furthermore, youth perceptions may evolve as a result of

¹ Initially, the aim was to concentrate the analysis of EU youth support at regional level on the Eastern Partnership and its flagship program: EU4YOUTH. Yet when another case study had to be dropped on the use of the budget support modality (due to a lack of access to critical documentation), additional resources became available. In consultation with the Evaluation Manager, it was decided to expand the regional case study and also look at EU youth strategies and programmes in the Neighbourhood South and East.

² Definitions of what “youth” entails may differ from region to region – and at country level. For instance, in the Western Balkans, youth ranges in age from 15 to 24 years (in Kosovo), 15 to 29 (In Albania and North Macedonia) and 15 to 30 (in Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina).

³ Surveys indicate that in several places, youth actors are losing interest in politics and traditional forms of participation (e.g. political parties, elections), seeking for more concrete and rewarding engagement opportunities, particularly at local and community levels.

⁴ De Bel-Air (2018): Blocked Youth The Politics of Migration from South and Eastern Mediterranean Countries Before and After the Arab Uprisings. The International Spectator. In the Neighbourhood South region, the Arab Spring has been followed by economic slowdown, regime changes and socio-political instability. This has spurred growing migration pressure while confronting the EU with security threats, fuelling policies aimed at reducing migrants' inflow while selecting prospective migrants on socio-economic and political grounds.

⁵ Icoski (2022): Toward a New Youth Brain-drain Paradigm in the Western Balkans. German Marshall Foundation. According to this report, the pace and intensity of youth brain drain rank the Western Balkan countries as the top brain leaders in the world, with estimations to lose a quarter to half of its skills and educated young people in the forthcoming decades. This casts doubts on the democratic and economic progress in the region as well as on prospects to becoming members of the EU.

⁶ The issue of youth interest in public affairs is a complex matter to properly assess as it tends to be a fluid and dynamic process, evolving over time and concerning a wide range of youth actors. This was confirmed by the 5th Eastern Partnership Youth Forum (November 2021) which observed “an increase in the interest of youth towards politics and public affairs across the Eastern Partnership” while emphasising that this does apply to all categories of young people and is jeopardised by restrictive legal frameworks regarding civic space.

⁷ This point was systematically raised by EU officials and youth organisations interviewed in the Neighbourhood East region – many of whom argued this calls for much more differentiated, country-specific approaches to be applied in regional EU support programmes.

⁸ Petkovic (2018): The Berlin Process – A New Impetus for Youth Work? Recent Achievements and Current Challenges in Youth Policies in the Western Balkans. ERASMUS+/SALTO-Youth Report. Despite the fact that Western Balkan countries share a common tradition in youth policy development and implementation, young people are treated differently by sector specific acts and policies across the region.

⁹ European Training Foundation (2022): Youth transition and skills mismatch in the Eastern Partnership.

internal events (e.g. the end of democratic transition in *Tunisia*, the failed opening-up of the political system in *Belarus*) or external events (e.g. the war between *Israel* and Hamas).¹⁰ The above brief analysis of youth challenges across regions was largely confirmed by the survey with youth actors carried out in the framework of this evaluation (See Volume II Annex 6.2).¹¹

1.1.2 Regional Policy frameworks and main actors

Integration dynamics are weak in each of the three regions covered by this evaluation. A wide range of factors contribute to this in the respective regional settings, often linked to legacies of the past, persisting conflicts, inward-looking approaches by political and economic powerholders, the heterogeneity of the countries involved (e.g. in *Neighbourhood South* and *East region*). This, inevitably, means that regional structures and policy-making processes tend to be limited, fragile, and even non-existing in the various regions covered by this evaluation. **This also affects European Union (EU) regional policies and concrete support measures towards youth** as illustrated by the following elements:

- In the *Neighbourhood East region*, there is no overarching regional body representing the various countries and in charge of elaborating regional policies in a variety of domains on behalf of its members. Regional policy commitments towards Youth are formulated in the framework of the relations with the EU (e.g. during recurrent summits or when the EU reviews the Eastern Partnership cooperation).
- In the *Neighbourhood South region*, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)¹² is the core regional body with a mandate to formulate policies and foster dialogue/collaboration relevant for all parties involved. Its legitimacy, outreach, and impact are limited due to weak ownership among members, funding constraints, and institutional shortcomings. However, in the absence of other regional structures, it can be instrumental in pushing for regional policy developments and subsequent uptake by members. This happened over time with the youth agenda. With EU support (see further EQ 3 below), the UfM embraced the youth topic and invested in building awareness on the need for regional strategies, networking, and exchanges. This culminated in the adoption of the UfM Youth Strategy 2030 to facilitate common action in the Euro-Mediterranean (EUROMED) region on urgent youth challenges.¹³
- In the *Enlargement region*, there are two regional bodies worth mentioning in the youth domain. First, the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), acting as an all-inclusive, regionally owned cooperation framework. It engages participants from the South East Europe, members of the international community and donors. Within the framework of the general political guidelines set by the South-East European Cooperation Process, the RCC works to develop and maintain a political climate of dialogue, reconciliation, tolerance, and openness towards cooperation, with a view to enabling the implementation of regional programmes aimed at economic and social development to the benefit of the people in the region. Second, the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) is an independently functioning institutional mechanism focussing on youth, founded by the Western Balkan countries, to promote a spirit of reconciliation and cooperation between youth in the region, primarily through youth exchange programs.¹⁴

In addition to these regional actors, a wide range of national public and private agencies, civil society organisations (CSO), local authorities, and youth organisations participate in the roll out of regional initiatives.

¹⁰ End 2022, the EU conducted an “Opinion Poll” in the ten countries on the Neighbourhood South region, seeking to assess how citizens from the region (including young people between 15-24 years) perceive the EU, trust the institution and recognise its added value and importance. Overall, the results are quite positive (with important country variations), including 47% of young people having a “positive image” of the EU. However, it can be assumed that a new opinion poll may come up hugely different perceptions after the war between Israel and Hamas irrupted and young people across the region adopt a critical stance towards the EU’s perceived partisan approach to the conflict (source: interviews and inputs from the Youth Advisory Board set-up for this evaluation).

¹¹ The survey got a high response rate of 187 actors from across the 3 regions.

¹² The UfM is an intergovernmental body composed by EU MS and 16 countries from the Southern and Eastern shores of the Mediterranean.

¹³ The UfM Strategy is aligned to UN/EU youth strategies. It sees young people as “architects” whose involvement is key in policy-making and implementation. Six priority areas are identified: climate and energy; environment and water; urban and rural development; economic development; education and training; social inclusion and participation. There is no explicit focus on youth and governance/peace and security – which can be linked to the political economy of the organisation and related need to find a compromise acceptable for all members.

¹⁴ For instance, in December 2023, RYCO facilitated a meeting of young people of the region on the topic of “Empowering Youth for Peace and Security”.

1.1.3 EU regional cooperation framework regarding youth

The overall policy review conducted in the framework of this evaluation¹⁵ shows that EU engagement strategies (at both bilateral and regional levels) gradually became more sophisticated, particularly from 2015 onwards, as a result of different push factors (e.g. policy developments within the EU, pressing youth challenges in partner countries, increased voice of young people, etc.).

This leap forward can be observed in the EU's regional policy frameworks. Youth issues were highlighted in the revised (2015) European Neighbourhood Policy, as well as in the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI). Relevant priorities included institutional cooperation and capacity development; sustainable and inclusive economic development for youth (with a focus on social justice, cohesion, and employment; support to Small and Medium Sizes Enterprises (SME), employment, education, and skills development). Below a brief overview of major EU policy developments in each region:

Neighbourhood East region

With regard to the *Neighbourhood East region*, the 2011 Communication *A new response to a changing Neighbourhood* contains some generic references to investing in youth education and exchanges. A more explicit policy document is the “*20 Deliverables for 2020*”, which includes Priority IV, calling the EU to “*support for and empowering of the young generation, particularly in terms of developing their skills, civic engagement and fostering their employability*”.¹⁶ This fuelled important evolutions in terms of youth policy in the Eastern Partnership countries,¹⁷ including the launch of a regional flagship initiative (EU4 Youth). The Communication “*Eastern Partnership beyond 2020*” puts forward five core goals with recurrent references to the role of youth¹⁸ which were further spelled out in a Joint Staff Working Document.¹⁹

Another important source of policy developments regarding youth is to be found in then recurrent Eastern Partnership Youth Summits between the EU, EU member states (EU MS) and partner countries. For instance, the 3rd Eastern Partnership Youth Summit (Warsaw), recommended the need to treat young people as active, critical, and responsible citizens and to build their entrepreneurship spirit and capacities, so that they are empowered to take the future into own hands.²⁰

Neighbourhood South region

The Arab Spring of 2011 propelled youth more forcefully onto the radar of EU development cooperation and external action. Several core Communications were issued between 2011 and 2021, illustrating the gradual maturation and sophistication of EU approaches towards youth. Policy documents elaborated after the start of the Arab Spring (2011) are all about promoting democratic, peaceful, inclusive, and equitable societies; however, there is scant specific attention to youth (beyond education and people-to-people contact). The most recent Communication on the *Neighbourhood South region* from 2021²¹ reflects well the political prominence youth has since then formally acquired in EU external action. In a dedicated section called “*Empowered Youth*”, the EU stresses that “*investing in young people should be at the heart of our cooperation*” as the “*empowerment, participation and involvement of young people as agents of change*” is key for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals/SDG.

Enlargement Region

From the Thessaloniki European Council in 2003, the accession dynamics linked to the European integration of the *Western Balkans*, have contributed to stimulate political, social and economic reforms, including the formulation of national youth strategies and sectoral policies over time, which in turn impacted on pushing forward regional agendas around shared challenges.

In 2018, the European Commission (EC) adopted a Communication titled “*A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans*”.²² It calls the countries of the region to accelerate and deepen the required fundamental reforms by linked to the acquis, as well as to “*invest more in their younger generations, our future European citizens and give them a perspective for the future, not the past*”. These generic policy orientations are discussed with partner countries during

¹⁵ See Volume II Annex 3 for the Policy Analysis.

¹⁶ This common reform agenda was approved at Eastern Partnership Summit in 2017.

¹⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Poland and FRSE (2018): Youth Policy in Eastern Partnership Countries. Overview of youth policy in Eastern Partnership Countries and its European support mechanisms.

¹⁸ European Commission (2020): Eastern Partnership beyond 2020. Reinforcing Resilience – As Eastern Partnership that delivers for all. JOIN/2020/7 final.

¹⁹ European Commission (2021): Recovery, resilience and reform: post 2020 Eastern Partnership Priorities. SWD(2021) 186 final.

²⁰ Eastern Partnership Youth Forum (2017): Recommendations. Third Conference.

²¹ European Commission (2021): A new Agenda for the Mediterranean. JOIN/2021/2 final.

²² European Commission (2018): A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans.

recurrent EU-Western Balkan Summits.²³ Additional impetus can come from other EU institutions, such as the European Economic and Social Council. In a recent opinion poll,²⁴ the Council invited governments of the region “to follow key youth policy documents of the EU”, “to further invest in evidence-based youth policies” as well as to foresee “sufficient and transparent budget allocations”. In line with its mandate, it also insisted on the need to involve key social partners and CSOs in order to “deliver a broader reform to improve social rights and the prospects of young people”.

Two political processes are relevant for regional EU youth engagement. *First*, the Berlin Process, initiated in 2014, to boost regional cooperation among *Western Balkan* countries in the context of European integration. This framework, supported by the EC, International Financial Institutions and seven EU MS, has amongst others contributed to creating youth policies through meetings of the representatives of regional CSOs and youth organisations.²⁵ A case in point is the *Action Plan for youth work* and youth policy, formulated at the 2016 Europe-Western Balkans Youth Meeting in Ljubljana.²⁶ The Berlin Process also fuelled intergovernmental cooperation through RYCO, as explained above.

A *second* relevant political framework for the EU is the South-East European Cooperation Council put in place to foster regional cooperation between thirteen countries of Southeast Europe. As mentioned before, within this structure, a RCC, launched in 2008, strives to maintain a climate of dialogue, reconciliation, tolerance and openness towards regional cooperation. In its 2020-2022 Strategy, a firm commitment is made to supporting youth policies and the inclusion of young people in decision-making processes. This builds on ongoing work of the RCC, including the implementation of the *Western Balkans Youth Lab* under the IPA Multi-country Action Programme for 2019.

1.2 Focus of the case study

This case study examines EU support to youth areas through regional programs. Case studies, like the present one, do not seek to carry out a full-fledged evaluation of all aspects of regional EU youth support. They are **mainly background notes** that feed into the overall strategic evaluation of EU support to Youth in the three regions covered. The analysis covers the diversity of EU support to regions.

Data collection and analysis were structured along the Evaluation Questions (EQ) and Judgement Criteria (JC). Issues related to: i) *the policy and policy framework and responsive programming* (EQ 1); ii) the *choice of methods, channels and instruments* (EQ 2); and iii) the *partnerships* (EQ 3) were examined by looking at the entire EU portfolio. Thematic issues, including those related to the effects on youth engagement in political/policy processes (EQ 4), Economic Integration (EQ 5), *Social Cohesion and Inclusion* (EQ 6), and *Peace and Security* (EQ 7) were examined. The structure used is the same as that used for the four country case studies, with adaptations, as some indicators do not apply to regional support programmes.²⁷

The analysis is based on a sample of EU-funded interventions identified by the evaluation team for a more in-depth analysis. The final sample of interventions was selected through the global mapping EU support (see main report), as well as feedback from relevant EU actors.

The sample reflects the diversity of EU's regional support to the youth by including i) youth-targeted interventions; ii) interventions where youth represented one of the main beneficiaries, but not exclusively; and iii) interventions in sectors relevant to youth (e.g. where youth is one of the indirect beneficiaries or where it can be expected that their interest has been mainstreamed).

Table 1 Main regional contracts sampled for IPA region

Year	Intervention/ Contract title	CRIS ref.	Contracting party	Planned amount (EUR)
2015	Divided Past – Joint Future	370393	Omladinski Komunikativni Centar (Youth Communication Center)	EUR 897.791

²³ For instance, the 2018 EU-Western Balkans Summit parties agreed to place special emphasis on creating further opportunities for youth.

²⁴ European Economic and Social Council (2022): Youth policy in the Western Balkans as part of the Innovation Agenda for the Western Balkans.

²⁵ Such as the Civil Society Forum of the Western Balkan Summit Series.

²⁶ Europe-Western Balkans Youth Meeting (2016): Connecting Youth Work and Youth Policy: Action Plan for Youth Work and Youth Policy. Ljubljana, Slovenia.

²⁷ For instance, EQ 2 includes an indicator geared at assessing the use of budget support on youth issues. This is only relevant for bilateral cooperation, not for regional programmes.

Year	Intervention/ Contract title	CRIS ref.	Contracting party	Planned amount (EUR)
2015	Balkan Platform4Youth dialogue	371185	ALDA – Association Européenne pour la Démocratie Locale	EUR 169.970
2016	Balkan Platform4Youth dialogue	382276	ALDA – Association Européenne pour la Démocratie Locale	EUR 160.120
2016	Regional Programme on Local Democracy in the Western Balkans (ReLOaD)	382867	United Nations Development Programme	EUR 8.5 million
2018	Enterprise Development and Innovation Facility (EDIF) – Guarantee Facility - Youth Employment (WB EDIF GF Youth)	401317	European Investment Fund	EUR 2 million
2018	Enterprise Development and Innovation Facility (EDIF) – Guarantee Facility – Youth Employment (WB EDIF GF Youth)	401317	European Investment Fund	EUR 8 million
2018	Enhancing youth cooperation and youth exchange in Western Balkans 6 (RYCO)	391015	Zyra Rajonale Per Bashkepunim Rinor (Regional Youth Cooperation Office)	EUR 500.000
2019	Western Balkan Youth Lab	409790	Regional Cooperation Council Secretariat	EUR 1.5 million
2018-2020	Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme	417828	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH	EUR 3.1 million
2020	Regional Programme on Local Democracy in the Western Balkans 2 (ReLOaD2)	421996	United Nations Development Programme	EUR 11.3 million

Table 2 Main regional contracts sampled for Neighbourhood South

Year	Intervention/ Contract title	CRIS ref.	Contracting party	Planned amount (mEUR)
2017	Neighbourhood South Civil Society Facility 2016 – Empowerment and participation of young women and men in the Neighbourhood South	39475		EUR 11.2 million
2017	Young Mediterranean Voices	377619	The Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue Between Cultures	EUR 3.2 million
2018	Networks of Mediterranean Youth – NET-MED Youth	336027	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)	EUR 442.000
2018	Networks of Mediterranean Youth – NET-MED Youth	336027	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)	EUR 308.000
2018	Anna Lindh Foundation Phase V (Nov 2018 – Nov 2021)	399619	The Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue Between Cultures	EUR 7 million
2018	Majalat		Consortium of civil society organisations	
2019	2018 Programme to Support Youth and Culture in the Neighbourhood South region	41260		EUR 12.2 million

Year	Intervention/ Contract title	CRIS ref.	Contracting party	Planned amount (mEUR)
2019	CREative Entrepreneurs ACTing FOR the future MEDiterranean (CREACT4MED)	412505	Euro Mediterranean Economist Association	EUR 1.9 million
2022	Support to Anna Lindh Foundation – phase VI (1st April 2022 – 31st March 2025)	434371	The Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue Between Cultures	EUR 5 million

Table 3 Main regional contracts sampled for Neighbourhood East

Year	Intervention/ Contract title	CRIS ref.	Contracting party	Planned amount (mEUR)
2017	EU4YOUTH Phase 1	38795		EUR 7 million
2017	YES! Youth Employability and Stability in Armenia, Belarus, and Ukraine	394286	Verein SOS-Kinderdorf	EUR 1.5 million
2017	Fostering potential for greater employability	394156	Danish Red Cross	EUR 1.3 million
2018	Enhancing Youth Education, Employment and Participation in Conflict-affected Areas in Georgia and Ukraine	400807	Danish Refugee Council	EUR 1.5 million
2019	EU4YOUTH Phase 2	41505		EUR 10 million
2019	Social Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Development (SEED) Programme for Green Growth in Borderline Communities	412395	Caucasus Environmental NGO Network Association	EUR 1.5 million
2019	Unlocking the potential of young social entrepreneurs in Moldova and Ukraine	412346	Gustav Stresemann Institut EV	EUR 1.5 million
2019	Youth Engagement Roadmaps	411315	GOPA Worldwide Consultants GmbH	EUR 2.2 million
2021	EU4YOUTH Phase 3	42751		EUR 8.1 million
2021	EU4YOUTH Coordination and Support	399510	Ernst & Young Advisory Services	EUR 4.5 million

2 Findings

2.1 Policy framework and responsive programming (EQ 1)

The evolving **EU external policy framework** has been globally conducive to foster stronger engagement with youth at regional level. The EU has invested in the analysis of youth realities in the regions covered. This has, on the whole, helped to ensure context-sensitive, flexible, and responsive programming. However, there is further scope to differentiate and localise regional programming to take into account national specificities. Regional programmes have added value to what is done with EU bilateral portfolios, yet there are recurrent challenges of adequately articulating both types of support. Political and institutional incentives exist to work more and better with youth, yet genuine “youth-centred approaches” are not systematically applied in regional programmes. Dedicated staff in the Headquarter (HQ) help steer and coordinate regional programmes, yet the limited number of staff imposes constraints, including in terms of political guidance and oversight. There is limited qualitative reporting on transformative results achieved or on key methodological choices made – reducing the scope for learning and adjustments of policies and practices.

2.1.1 Policy frameworks and strategies take into account regional and national specificities (JC 1.1)

EU policy frameworks and strategies have gradually become more sophisticated in recent years in terms of levels of ambitions towards youth, alignment to regional and national specificities as well as in the nature of interventions. The October 2022 Youth Action Plan for EU external action represents the first comprehensive and operational roadmap to engage with youth as strategic partners across regions and it remains to be seen how influential it will be.

In the regions covered by this evaluation, the EU has expanded its engagement on youth issues, particularly since 2015-2016. This is driven by EU internal dynamics related to youth, policy developments in EU external action,²⁸ public diplomacy goals,²⁹ as well as evolving regional and national agendas. EU regional policies initially mainly included generic commitments to engage with youth in traditional areas such as vocational educational training (VET) and employment (see section 1.1 above). Gradually other policy concerns were added, particularly in the contexts of EU summits with the regions (i.e. in the *Neighbourhood East region* and *Western Balkans*), reflecting a more holistic perspective in dealing with youth challenges.

This induced the emergence of a new generation of regional programmes, illustrating these policy and programmatic developments. A case in point is the flagship programme *EU4YOUTH* in the *Eastern Partnership*. It started in 2018, is now in its fourth phase. A reading of the successive action documents shows how the EU embarked on a learning curve, expanded the remit of its actions, sought to connect national and regional specificities and experimented with different approaches and implementing agencies. A similar trajectory can be observed in the *Western Balkans*. The EU continued to invest in , exemplified in the move from project-approaches benefitting youth yet sought, in parallel, to supporting youth to engage more at the policy level with partner countries through regional dialogues or youth labs, implemented through partners such as RYCO and RCC. In the *Neighbourhood South region*, characterised by political instability, shrinking civic space, and weak regional integration dynamics, the EU acknowledged the need to invest in regional dialogue processes involving youth (despite all difficulties) and to partner with regional structures³⁰ in order to co-create regional policies on youth. The EU has a longstanding strategic partnership with the Anna Lindh Foundation as intergovernmental body mandated to promote intercultural dialogue, including between young people. It has reached out to CSOs with a regional remit and mandate to work on youth issues.

All these initiatives got started without an overall, formal, and comprehensive EU strategy towards engaging with youth in external action. However, this did not impede relevant units at HQs and EU Delegations to go ahead and push further the youth agenda through a responsive and flexible programming at both national and regional levels.³¹ In October 2022, the EU launched the first ever *Youth Action Plan in EU external action 2022-2027*, providing an operational roadmap to deepen the strategic partnership with youth, based on three pillars (i.e. engage, empower, connect).³² For some stakeholders interviewed, the Action Plan represents a major breakthrough as it provides an ambitious EU agenda aligned to the scale and complexity of the youth challenges at stake. For others, it is a generic policy document that sets out global objectives that can be adapted to regional and national realities. Still, some fear it is too Eurocentric a policy framework, relying on European concepts and models and hence disconnected with local realities and possibilities for effective action on the ground.

The articulation between regional programmes and bilateral support – always a complex matter – can be improved. The evaluation team recorded wide appreciation for the added value that centrally managed regional programmes can produce (e.g. in terms of additional resources, promoting regional dialogues and policy developments, tackling common problems). This holds particularly true for EU Delegations (EUD) who are not in a position to roll out substantial youth interventions through their bilateral portfolio.³³ However, critical voices were also registered on how EU regional support programmes are designed and implemented. The main weaknesses reported³⁴ are the following: i) HQ-led programming process are perceived to be insufficiently inclusive in terms of involving key

²⁸ Council of Europe (2020): Youth in External Action. Council Conclusions, Relex.1.B, 8629/20 Annex. The document states that “young people are important change makers and essential partners in the implementation of the European Consensus on Development, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change”. The Council furthermore confirms that “investing in, and working with, by and for youth, is of paramount importance to build stronger, more legitimate, peaceful and democratic societies”.

²⁹ The new regulations on the MFF 2021-2027 and the NDICI-GE instrument clearly emphasise the critical importance for the EU – as a geopolitical actor – to engage more and in a smarter way in public diplomacy to defend EU values and interests. Youth actors in partner countries (particularly in accession countries or candidates) are seen as a key target group of public diplomacy.

³⁰ Such as the Union for the Mediterranean.

³¹ According to the EU survey, respondents considered that the policy frameworks were globally conducive to intervene on the expanding youth agenda.

³² European Commission (2022): Youth Action Plan for EU external action.

³³ EUDs with a relatively small overall MIP- envelope and limited number of staff tend not to have a clearly spelled out strategy towards youth. The issue is taken on board through projects in specific domains, but without the ambition to develop more integrated approaches. This is not considered to be a feasible option, as youth competes with many other priorities and the financial/human resources are not there to roll out more substantial programmes. In these EUDs, the regional programmes tend to be regarded positively, as they step in to fill important gaps.

³⁴ Source: Interviews with EUD officials.

stakeholders at national level (state agencies, youth organisations, EUD); ii) a tendency to adopt a “one-size-fits-all approach” in regional programmes – without adequate consideration for the hugely diverse conditions at country level; iii) the unclear distribution of responsibilities with regard to implementation – in particular on the role of EUDs; iv) the mixed quality and track record of the wide range of implementing agencies involved; as well as v) ineffective information and communication channels and flows.

2.1.2 Enabling institutional environment

Political and institutional incentives exist to engage in a more structured manner with youth in EU external action – including through regional programmes. Yet in practice several challenges are encountered hampering effectiveness and outcomes. Gradually, the higher profile of youth issues *within* Europe spilled over to EU external action, including in the regions covered by this evaluation. This is reflected in i) more informed policy debates on why and how to engage with youth (benefitting from growing involvement of the European External Action Service/EEAS); ii) more vocal and visible high-level political and managerial support for the youth agenda and for dialogue processes at various levels; and iii) more substantial and diversified programming choices.

While this helped to make the overall environment more conducive to work on youth issues, several caveats can be observed in implementation processes. First, several EU interviewees considered the political commitment at the top of Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) towards youth to be rather “nominal”³⁵ – driven primarily by visibility concerns and short-term perspectives. When scratching deeper, youth does not appear as a real core corporate priority to be addressed with the sense of urgency the topic would merit – according to these interlocutors. Second, policy and institutional incentives may be there, but they are not systematically used in an adequate manner at partner country or regional level, partly because of institutional and human constraints at various levels. The EU survey suggests overall satisfaction with the quality and operational support provided by DG NEAR.³⁶ However, the limited number of staff available at HQs poses challenges to deal effectively with regional programmes. This generally implies complex and time-consuming steering, coordination, and process facilitation tasks all along the programme cycle.³⁷ This is often compounded by the mixed track record of establishing effective Youth Focal Points in EUDs. One of their assumed roles is to connect the dots between regional and bilateral programmes. Yet in practice this is often not done adequately, resulting in suboptimal articulation between the two types of support. The EU survey confirms that the issue is not so much the existence of incentives, but the effective operationalisation of youth agendas.³⁸

The EU invests in different forms of analyses (of varying levels of depth and quality) to define suitable youth engagement strategies³⁹ – though a stronger “localisation” of overall EU youth support may be required. In line with the principle of “evidence-based policies” (which is expected to underpin EU support to youth), one can observe a clear trend towards more knowledge-driven and context-sensitive programming processes. These increasingly rely on a growing number of surveys, studies, sectoral/thematic analyses on core youth challenges in the various regions.⁴⁰ Some EU regional programmes contribute to building this knowledge base (including statistics). However, there is scope to enhance the level of differentiation in regional programmes. Several stakeholders stressed the need to go much further in the “localisation” of EU approaches to engaging with youth. This is particularly important considering the increased blurring of lines between internal and external EU youth policies (most visible in the Youth Action Plan for EU external action) with the resulting risk of transposing models ill-suited for specific regional/country contexts. This applies for both EU-driven dialogue processes involving young people as for actual support programmes. The call for more “localisation” is based on the assumption that young people – even in fragile/authoritarian states – may be open to values and models promoted by Europe. Yet in order to make that match work, it is key to start from *local* value

³⁵ EU survey, qualitative comments attached to question 1. This view also came up during interviews with EU staff.

³⁶ EU survey, question 1.

³⁷ Source: Interviews with EU officials and implementing agencies.

³⁸ EU survey, question 1 (p. 5), where less than the majority of respondents felt that the strategies and policies on youth are clearly operationalised at EUD level.

³⁹ The evaluation team did not find an example of a genuine and comprehensive political economy analysis to underpin regional support programmes. However, action documents generally show a sensitivity to political issues related to youth empowerment in the various regions.

⁴⁰ Joint Research Council (2022): Patchwork: Mapping international data on youth. Publications Office of the European Union. Kalantaryan, S., McMahon, S. and Ueffing, P. (2022): Youth in external action. Publications Office of the European Union. The Joint Research Council is a key resource in this regard. It has contributed to the Youth Action Plan and published the aforementioned 2 reports, mapping the existing international data on youth. The reports trace the evolution of international, EU and national youth policies and programmes and describes the extent to which they are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals.

systems, socio-cultural norms, and core concerns of various categories of youth in a given setting. Working the other way around may alienate young people and hence be counterproductive. A quote from the EU survey reflecting on HQ guidance on youth approaches summarises well the issues at stake: “Once a year, generic guidelines are disseminated, followed by a couple of webinars. The framework of reference is entirely detached from reality in each country and at regional level, where in the end we talk to a small elite”.⁴¹

As in bilateral support programmes, a mixed track record can be observed regarding the adoption of genuine youth-centred approaches in regional programmes. Evidence collected indicates young people are increasingly consulted in EU programming and related project formulation processes (see also EQ 2). Yet genuine youth-centred interventions require more than traditional forms of participation. They ideally imply youth agency in determining priorities, the application of co-management approaches in implementation, direct funding for youth organisations as well as a role for young people in monitoring relevance and impact. Evaluation findings point to a mixed track record. Implementing agencies often use the discourse of youth-centred approaches yet do not necessarily have the mandate, skills, and (financial) incentives to apply this demanding and laborious methodology. Particularly private sector firms acting as implementing agencies may be tempted to focus on their contractual deliverables towards the client rather than engaging with youth actors using an empowerment logic.⁴² Still, the evaluation could also find promising examples of EU-supported activities at regional level displaying core ingredients of genuine youth-centred approaches (see Box 1).

Box 1 Youth centred approaches in regional programmes

- The Youth Labs, implemented by the RCC managed to let the choice of priority topics to youth actors involved. This led to a youth-driven and owned agenda focussing on the themes of youth employment and mental health.
- The Anna Lindh Foundation has reviewed its overall intervention logic to empower diverse categories of youth actors to meaningfully participate in policy processes with specialist knowledge and expertise. It has also created a Youth Board to co-determine the management of the Foundation’s youth programmes, as well as the future course of the institute.
- *The Regional Programme on Local Democracy (ReLOaD)* programme – a regional joint initiative by the EU and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) – successfully sought to promote local governance in the Western Balkans by ensuring the transparent allocation of funding by local authorities to priority projects emanating from CSOs, including youth.⁴³

Regional EU interventions follow standard EU reporting guidelines, with some programmes doing a dedicated effort to track achievements. However, it is difficult to assess outcomes/transformational changes achieved as Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems tend to focus on activities and outputs. Not surprisingly, regional youth programmes encounter similar M&E challenges as bilateral interventions in terms of going beyond reporting in a quantitative manner on a particular project (e.g. numbers of young people attending a training, receiving a grant, participating in a dialogue process). Some programs, like the *EU4YOUTH* in the *Neighbourhood East region*, have mobilised a highly competent and dedicated implementing agency to take of learning as well as M&E. This has resulted in a series of impressive yearly “*Achievements Reports*” reviewing progress achieved in the various components of this multi-layered regional programme. The information provided is highly valuable at output level, but does not really allow for a deeper assessment in terms of tracking *qualitative* changes on a wide range of core issues. For example, on effective levels of youth empowerment, progress achieved at the level of governments/duty bearers (e.g. better national/regional policies, more domestic funding for youth), influence exercised by the dialogue processes (also on EU policies and practices), as well as regarding the sustainability of the EU interventions.

2.2 Mix of EU delivery methods, channels and instruments (EQ 2)

The **EU toolbox and various delivery methods** have been **adequately used in regional programmes** with a view to **respond in an effective and timely manner to expanding and evolving youth agendas** in the regions covered. A recurrent challenge has been the **choice of a suitable implementing agency that can apply genuine youth-centred approaches and link up with state agencies/EUD** – resulting in a mixed set of positive and less positive experiences, including in terms of cost-effectiveness. **While the EU engages with youth in defining priorities and programs, there has been less progress in being responsive to the expectations**

⁴¹ Source: EU survey. Qualitative comments related to question 1, Box 1.

⁴² Source: Interviews with youth organisations involved in the Eastern Partnership programme EU4YOUTH, particularly on the Youth Labs. The main criticism heard towards some implementing agencies was about the instrumental approach adopted in terms of engaging with key youth structures, including top-down approaches, last minute information flows and/or consultations, limited follow-up, reluctance to share available funding, etc.

⁴³ Van Hoof (2019): Final Evaluation Report of ReLoad.

of youth organisations regarding direct access to funding (also in terms of procedural requirements) or support for their institutional development.

2.2.1 Responsiveness of modalities (JC 2.1)⁴⁴

A mix of delivery methods, modalities and funding channels are used in EU-supported programmes which allow for responsive approaches to evolving youth challenges.

The *EU4YOUTH* programme in the Eastern Partnership, as it evolved over the years since its launch (2018), is a case in point. It combines service contracts and grants, allowing the EU to cater for the three main components of the program: i) capacity building (Eastern Partnership Youth Window – European Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (*Erasmus+*) projects);⁴⁵ ii) the grant scheme (i.e. multi-country projects⁴⁶ focussed on disadvantaged youth and youth entrepreneurship); and iii) the coordination function (through a *EU4YOUTH* Support and Coordination and Support Team⁴⁷ and including the project on *Youth Engagement Roadmaps* since 2020).⁴⁸ In each of the components, the various actors/agencies involved in implementation seek to be responsive to youth needs – though with varying levels of depth, quality of methods and success.⁴⁹ The programme has been able to mobilise a dedicated and competent team to cater for several functions, including M&E as well as the Alumni Network. However, the Coordination and Support Team experienced challenges in *connecting the dots* of these various strands of action (carried out by a variety of actors) and in pushing some implementing agencies into “collective action” (e.g. in terms of providing timely information on project implementation, delivering quality inputs for M&E purposes or contributing to joint learning).

In the *Neighbourhood South region*, there is no such comprehensive regional flagship initiative.⁵⁰ The preferred approach has rather been to support established regional civil society structures to reach out to youth (such as EUROMED, the *Majalat* consortium or the Anna Lindh Foundation) with different levels of success and impact (see further EQ 4-7). The core regional EU initiatives in the *Western Balkans* consist of multi-annual programmatic support to respectively the RCC and RYCO. These programs also consist of several components and use service contracts as well as grants. Both surveys carried out for this evaluation as well as most interviewees (across the board) consider that both regional structures are responsive, flexible, and relevant. Despite a challenging and volatile regional environment, they have helped to define regional agendas, facilitate dialogues, experiment with new approaches to engaging with youth.

The EU relies largely on delegation agreements to carry out its youth strategy in the region. While there are positive examples of the EU carefully selecting suitable implementing agencies that can deliver genuine youth-centred programs, there is also evidence of less well motivated and successful choices. The rationale, assessment tools and decision-making processes behind the identification of the most suitable implementing agency to carry out specific regional components are often not provided or clearly spelled out.⁵¹ Available sources (e.g. action documents) do not show a truly comparative analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of different delivery methods (e.g. delegation agreements to an EU MS or other pillar-tested public agency versus competitive tendering open to private/specialised youth structures). Yet a more careful scrutiny on key criteria – such as ability to apply youth-centred approaches and building relationships with EUDs and state agencies – could have major advantages in terms of ensuring cost-effective implementation. Concerns have also been raised in interviews that the Team Europe logic, when consistently applied, will increasingly favour

⁴⁴ The budget support modality (Indicator 2.1.1.) is not applied in regional programmes.

⁴⁵ Managed by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency/EACEA, the EU’s Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency. Over three calls for proposals (2017-2019), 102 projects have been awarded worth more than EUR 11 million in total, including 59 Civil Society Fellowships (=young leaders taking part in mobility activities and work in the EU) and 43 Partnerships for Entrepreneurships.

⁴⁶ During the evaluation period, ten projects were awarded (six were launched in 2018, four in early 2020) for a total budget of EUR14,5 million, to be implemented in all Neighbourhood East region countries except Azerbaijan.

⁴⁷ Responsible for: i) visibility and communication actions on the *EU4YOUTH* programme at national and regional levels; ii) monitoring of the overall impact of the program; and iii) capitalisation of lessons learnt that may feed into EU policymaking processes. It also is in charge of the *EU4YOUTH* Alumni Network.

⁴⁸ This project aims at supporting Eastern partner countries developing effective policy responses to recurring youth challenges and foster youth involvement in policy-making. Activities include enabling thematic reviews of policies, practices and instruments, supporting the establishment of youth employment partnerships among stakeholder in the youth employment sector as well as organising regional workshops on youth employment issues.

⁴⁹ Source: Interviews with EU officials and with implementing agencies.

⁵⁰ *EU4YOUTH* programmes are rather found at national level, like in Tunisia.

⁵¹ The four country case studies raise similar concerns.

reliance on MS agencies to carry out youth programs – without necessarily checking whether they have the required expertise to apply genuine youth-centred approaches.

The *Neighbourhood East region* flagship programme *EU4YOUTH* provides an interesting testcase as in Phase 4, the choice was made to shift, for some components, from a private company to the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) as implementing agency – amongst others with the expectation that this would facilitate policy coherence and coordination at EU MS level. There is mixed evidence on the EU's ability to play an effective steering role towards implementing agencies in the delivery of regional support programmes. In some cases, genuine partnership approaches seem to prevail, where the EU and implementing agencies jointly explore how best to proceed and innovate (e.g. the EU-UNDP) partnership in the *ReLOaD* programme or the evolving relationship between EU and the Anna Lindh Foundation). In other cases, the EU is struggling to play an effective political role in steering the regional programme (e.g. the *Majalat* process in the *Neighbourhood South region*)⁵² or to exercise pressure on implementing agencies to work in a more youth-oriented way.

A mixed picture emerges regarding EU approaches used to genuinely listen to youth concerns and effectively respond to their specific demands, expectations and capacities. While the EU and EUDs increasingly seeks to consult young people and provide resources for relevant youth agendas, progress has been more limited in truly empowering youth organisations by giving them a real voice in decision-making, facilitating direct funding, and supporting institutional development.

The growing political prominence of the youth agenda in EU external action has spurred a quite widespread search for more direct engagement with young people at both country and regional levels. This holds particularly true when it comes to listen to the voice(s) of young people before determining programming priorities or defining project interventions. Both surveys confirm this, though the data collected need careful handling.⁵³ In the EU survey, respondents were quite positive on the degree of application of youth-centred approaches (also in regional programmes). However, during interviews with various key stakeholders, major doubts were expressed that this is already standard practice in EU youth support. These different perspectives may be linked to a lack of common understanding on what a genuine “youth-centred approach” entails among EU actors.

The challenge for the EU's regional programmes to reach out to truly representative youth organisations is more complicated than at national level – for obvious reasons of proximity and structuring of the youth organisations (which tend to be locally-based and concentrating on national youth agendas). The youth organisations with a genuine regional vision and mandate are much more limited in number and often weaker in terms of legitimacy, capacity and funding. The EU experience in the *Neighbourhood South region* provides a telling story in this regard. In the absence of truly representative youth structures, the EU relied on regional civil society structures in the *Majalat* process to ensure the integration of youth voices. The well-established civil society members of the *Majalat* consortium (in charge of conducting regional dialogues, with a strong youth component) did their best to reach out to young people, but ultimately had limited success do to this effectively, as a recent evaluation demonstrated.⁵⁴ Similar challenges arise when the EU tries to involve national youth structures in regional programming processes. While commendable efforts were often made to give a voice to these youth organisations, the evaluation team also collected evidence of relevant youth organisations “*not knowing what goes on at regional level*”, “*being involved lately and instrumentally in the process*” or “*being confronted with agendas for youth dialogues in which they had no real say, except in providing names of participants at the last moment*”.⁵⁵

While youth agendas have been increasingly funded by the EU (as pointed out in the surveys), the issue of “*direct funding*” to youth organisations so as to enable them to set their own priorities and assume (direct) management responsibilities, is a different ballgame. This is confirmed in the Youth survey, particularly in the qualitative statements provided.⁵⁶ Across the board, concerns are expressed about the lack of trust in directly funding youth organisations, relying too much on intermediary structures, which may end up taking over control, also on funding. Furthermore, a majority of youth actors point to

⁵² Amar and Bossuyt (2022): Final evaluation of MAJALAT.

⁵³ In the survey for youth actors, respondents give high scores regarding the EU(Ds) willingness to listen to youth and incorporate their concerns. Yet most of these testimonies come from youth actors in countries where the EUD was particularly pro-active and creative in reaching out to young people (e.g. Lebanon, Palestine). It does not necessarily allow to draw general conclusions on the degree of youth involvement across countries in the 3 regions covered.

⁵⁴ Amar and Bossuyt (2022): Final evaluation of MAJALAT.

⁵⁵ Such as apparently in some policy dialogues organised for the Youth Engagement Roadmaps in the Eastern Partnership.

⁵⁶ See Youth survey.

the **complexity of the application process and inflexibility of EU's grant administration particularly for small, new and/or youth-led Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO), which are therefore hindered from applying in the first place.** In particular, youth consider procedures not to be youth-friendly and language can also be a barrier to application. Respondents highlight that for different projects, the EU tends to collaborate with the same local and bigger NGOs located in the capital, hampering a wider outreach and engagement in smaller cities. There is a perception that larger organisations or international NGOs are favoured by the EU, leading to increased competition. Some respondents believe that funds are disproportionately allocated to cover these International NGOs/Agencies administrative costs rather than the real impact or empowerment of youth-focussed NGOs.⁵⁷ **The political environment of some countries might also affect the programming decisions of the EU.** Respondents to the youth survey raise concerns about conservative policies in some countries influencing the direction of EU grants. They express the wish that EU would be more selective and channel the funding primarily through independent civil society actors – to minimise political impact and ensure funds are freed from a political agenda.

There is much scope to enhance the complementarity and synergies between levels of intervention (bilateral, regional, global, and thematic instruments). The EU increasingly engages on a wide diversity of youth agendas at global, continental, regional, national, and local levels – showing its commitment to engage with youth in a more strategic and comprehensive manner. However, synergies remain on the whole rather limited between levels and modalities of intervention, also in regional programmes. This is linked to institutional constraints (e.g. different units/agencies working in silo's) yet is also reflects the absence of a truly shared, binding, and owned policy framework to engage with youth.

2.2.2 Flexibility, relevance and cost-effectiveness of instruments and delivery methods

There is positive evidence regarding the EU's ability to flexibly adjust its delivery methods in line with changing conditions, opportunities, and backlashes. The various phases of *EU4YOUTH* in the *Neighbourhood East region* have left room for such adaptations, partly linked to the relative experimental nature of the programme and interest taken by DG NEAR officials in charge. Like the bilateral EU programmes, regional interventions had to display quite some flexibility with Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and did so effectively.⁵⁸ There are also examples of regional programmes creatively seeking to respond to backlashes in countries, though this often represents a major challenge as the space for civic engagement shrinks and risks can be incurred in supporting youth. From a broader regional perspective, both youth and EU stakeholders interviewed, indicated that EU does not always react fast enough to changes in the local or regional context. In the *Neighbourhood East region*, only 41% agrees greatly or to some extent that the EU responds quickly and flexibly to changes in context, while in the Enlargement area, this drops to only 33%.

The issue of cost-effectiveness is a complex one to assess. First, strong perceptions exist, particularly among youth structures, on the limited cost-effectiveness of certain delegation agreements to expensive intermediaries which do not necessarily have the required skills to engage with youth as actors. Second, a substantial number of youth organisations, particularly in the Enlargement region and the *Neighbourhood East region*,⁵⁹ perceived the EU support as unsustainable. Among the reasons cited, there is the **length of the grant which is considered too short** to have an impact on policies, and the fact that **funding is restricted to project implementation, rather than support to the institutional development of youth organisations** (this applies to the *Neighbourhood East region* too). Third, there is not yet a great and systematic focus on the whole question of the sustainability of EU youth interventions. However, there is growing awareness among EU policymakers and practitioners that this will largely depend on fostering conducive policy frameworks in partner regions/countries, ensure relevant forms of alignment, engage with state actors, and push for domestic resource mobilisation for funding youth agendas.

⁵⁷ Survey to youth actors for the Evaluation of EU support to Youth in the Enlargement and Neighbourhood regions (2014-2021).

⁵⁸ DG NEAR Youth Evaluation (2023): Interim report.

⁵⁹ Survey to youth actors for the Evaluation of EU support to Youth in the Enlargement and Neighbourhood regions (2014-2021).

2.3 Partnerships are enhanced and EU-added value maximised (EQ 3)

Collaborations take place between the EU and EU MS (primarily acting as implementing agencies) as well as with other **non-EU actors** in the field of youth (including UNDP and the World Bank). But these **partnerships are generally quite limited in scope and duration** and seldom based on solid strategic foundations. There is a search for complementarities in regional programmes, particularly with national initiatives of MS, but **no real instances were found of joint analysis, programming or task division** on the basis of comparative advantages. The **EU has been able to add value** – as supranational body – to the field of youth support by **mobilising knowledge and expertise from within the Union/MS** and making it available to partner regions. Yet the **transposition of models is not without risks and calls for cautious approaches** to ensure a fit with local conditions, ownership and sustainability. Added value has also been created by **acting as a convenor/sponsor of a wide range of regional dialogue and exchange processes** involving youth from the respective regions, EU and MS as well as governments/policymakers. **Further learning is required to overcome a certain “dialogue fatigue”** (also among young people) and **enhance critical process elements** in terms of agendas setting, inclusivity of the dialogues and above all their result-oriented focus and follow-up (in the form of tangible outcomes and benefits for young people).

2.3.1 Partnerships with EU MS and other actors (JC 3.1 and JC 3.2)

On a pragmatic basis, interactions and collaborations took place between EU MS in regional programs towards youth. This mostly occurred in the framework of delegation agreements with implementing agencies of MS or co-funding arrangements. While there are concerns to avoid duplications and foster complementarities, there is less evidence of truly strategic partnerships between EU and EU MS resulting in joint analyses, programming, and division of labour. No effective Team Europe initiatives on youth were observed at regional level.

EU works together with EU MS and their international cooperation agencies in a wide range of youth interventions at various levels, including in regional programmes and dialogue processes. The *Western Balkans* is a case in point. EU has allied with EU MS (*Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Poland, the United Kingdom, Germany, Austria, France*) and the *Western Balkan* countries through the Berlin Process, bringing together governments, regional CSOs, youth and businesses. Reviews of EU reports and programming documents from this region show efforts to ensure coherence and complementarity between multicounty instruments and what EU MS are doing. The EU cooperated with GIZ in supporting RYCO to implement a successful flagship project on *School Exchanges* in the region (see EQ 4, 6 and 7).⁶⁰ Action documents related to youth programmes in the other two regions (*Neighbourhood South* and *East region*), tend to refer to the interventions carried out by EU MS, but it is hard to find evidence pointing to a pro-active search by the EU to coordinate or fully exploit possible synergies between their mutually expanding youth portfolios.

A similar story emerges from EU partnerships with non-EU donors, United Nations (UN) actors or specialised agencies (from within the EU and from the regions). There is growing interest to enter into such collaborations and in several regions good practices can be noted, such as with UNDP in the abovementioned *ReLOaD*. Yet on the whole, these valuable initiatives remain of a rather ad hoc nature. There is not yet a solid EU policy framework or set of guidelines pushing more structured forms of strategic partnerships or alliances with a wide range of non-EU actors in regional programmes. According to several interviewees, there is quite some potential and added value to be gained if these collaborations could gain momentum and become part and parcel of the EU's working methods in the complex and expanding area of youth work. This requires in-depth knowledge on evolving youth challenges, integrated approaches, mobilisation of substantial resources, long-term engagement at multiple levels, as well as specialised skills – all things the EU is not able to adequately do on its own.

2.3.2 Tracking, sharing and mobilising relevant forms of EU expertise and knowledge (JC 3.3)

The added value of the EU in supporting youth is not clearly defined in policy documents, but it is widely seen to reside in the EU's ability to mobilise and share relevant forms of European expertise on youth matters (build up at EU level and in MS). Evaluation findings confirm that the EU has effectively used its position as supranational body to mobilise relevant forms of expertise from within the Union/MS. Yet there are questions about the transferability of certain models and approaches. As explained above, the relatively rapid expansion of youth work in EU external action was largely driven and inspired by the developments within the EU. Contrary to other policy areas, there was quite an instant contamination of evolving EU approaches of working with youth *internally* and the effective use of this knowledge *externally*. This blurring of lines and cross-fertilisation between internal and external policies has allowed the EU to make a leap forward in youth engagement in the regions covered, particularly in the initial years, when there were not yet clearly spelled out policy frameworks

⁶⁰ Regional Youth Cooperation Office (2021): The EU and Germany Fund New Project to Connect Schools in the Western Balkans.

for EU engagement with youth at global, regional or country level. Confronted with increased demands to invest in youth, regional programmes sought to rely (with the support of DG NEAR) on relevant forms of EU expertise, models, and tested approaches. This involved key line DGs involved with youth in Europe and their executing agencies (e.g. European Education and Culture Executive Agency/EACEA), for specialised entities linked to the EU (such as the European Training Foundation (ETF)) or bodies linked to the implementation of *ERASMUS+* (e.g. the SALTO Resource Centres). There is less evidence of systematic attempts to track and optimally mobilise MS expertise and knowledge, yet this is a time-consuming task and capacities may be too limited for this with DG NEAR HQ.⁶¹

Reports and interviews suggest that the quality of transferred knowledge is generally appreciated.⁶² For instance, local stakeholders (governments, state agencies, youth structures) in the Western Balkans expressed interest in becoming familiar with European approaches to supporting youth in a wide range of areas, and are eager to exchange on this and explore what could be useful in their contexts.⁶³ This generated multiple uptakes in the form of policy recommendations to improve policies related to youth.⁶⁴ A wide range of EUDs reported on attempts to inject relevant forms of European experiences and approaches into policy-making processes regarding youth issues at both regional and national levels, with varying levels of success.

Several implementation challenges related to sharing European expertise and knowledge were noted. These include issues such as: i) the relative small size of international units within line DGs (reducing the capacity to respond to all demands or engage in a more structured/longer term way); ii) the tendency of these DGs to restrict their contribution to their core business and project delivery (resulting in less interest to invest in wider policy processes affecting the regional program, building synergies with other components or fostering integrated approaches). The limited institutional infrastructure to deal with youth issues at both EUD and partner country levels further compound the challenge of making the best use of the expertise and knowledge provided by line DGs or specialised agencies.

Furthermore, while successful examples of uptake exist of European models, several stakeholders warned against a mimetic transposition across regions – which would not sufficiently take into account national/local specificities. Particular concerns were raised, for instance, against exporting “*too quickly*” the Youth Guarantee scheme, which was rolled out with some success in the *Western Balkans* (though not across the board, see EQ 5) to the *Neighbourhood East region* and even more so the *Neighbourhood South region*. Such a transposition only make sense if prior to this a proper political economy analysis is done on the existence of suitable implementation conditions (in terms of interests of powerholders, vision and capacities of core agencies, scope for multi-actor partnerships in delivery, funding, etc.).

2.3.3 Exchanges between youth and Union representatives (JC 3.4)

This is another potential added value of the EU – acting as a convenor for relevant dialogue processes at different levels. A multitude of exchanges have increasingly been fostered by the EU at regional level between youth and with policymakers/practitioners in the EU. These are generally highly appreciated for the personal development and networking opportunities provided. However, there is substantial scope to enhance the relevance, impact, and sustainability – with promising steps being taken in that direction. There is abundant evidence of growing EU interest and investment in bring young people together, inside the respective regions and globally. This enables a joint discussion on shared challenges, suggest policy recommendations to their governments and the EU – not only regarding programming processes but also in terms of EU external action in general. In doing so, the EU is aware of regional specificities (also linked to history, e.g. the focus in Western Balkans to cross-border dialogues and reconciliation), political economy constraints for effective regional exchanges (e.g. problems of regional mobility in the *Neighbourhood South region*) and the challenges involved to ensure youth agendas trickle down to the country level (all regions).

In the framework of this limited case study, it is not possible to do a comprehensive analysis of the quality, relevance and impact of all dialogue processes funded and supported. The essential take away is that these regional youth exchanges are generally highly appreciated by participants for the opportunities they provide to “*discover other places, realities, perspectives as well as to share with peers common challenges and possible response strategies*”. The regional level is often seen to provide a safe space where young people can talk, learn from each other, build more coherent youth agendas,

⁶¹ Source: Interviews with officials of the European Commission.

⁶² Source: Interviews with different stakeholders from the region and EUDs.

⁶³ Source: Documentary analysis as well as interviews with different stakeholders from the region and EUDs.

⁶⁴ DG NEAR Youth Evaluation (2023): Interim report.

extend networking, engage with policy-makers or EU officials, learn about funding opportunities, etc. Box 2 provides a basic overview of regional dialogue processes in each region.

Box 2 *EU regional dialogue processes*

- In the *Enlargement region*, there is no direct channel of structured and iterative communication at the moment between the EU and youth from the Western Balkans but rather ad hoc opportunities,⁶⁵ such as the recurrent gatherings of the Western Balkans Youth Forum. The declaration that emerged from the Forum reflected youth's ownership over important topics and was presented at the margins of the Berlin Summit held in 2022 between EU and government representatives.⁶⁶
- In the *Neighbourhood East region*, the programme *Young European Ambassadors* provides an opportunity to young people from the EU MS and the region to create a network that raises awareness about the EU's cooperation with Eastern partner countries. Young Ambassadors are invited to represent their countries at meetings with high-level EU officials, contributing to policy discussions by participating in a variety of EU events, including European youth forums and Eastern Partnership conferences (such as those organised around the Eastern Partnership Youth Forum).
- In the *Neighbourhood South region*, building on a long tradition of dialogue in the framework of the Barcelona Process linking countries and people on both sides of the Mediterranean sea, the EU has used several regional civil society facilities to stimulate dialogue processes. In these processes young people in the region could be heard, exchange, and interact with EU actors, as well as propose agendas for reform. As part of the expanding EU public diplomacy work, and taking inspiration from the Young Ambassadors scheme in Eastern Partnership, the *Jeel connectors* programme seeks to build a regional network of youth actors that share EU values and are willing to act as a multiplier voice in their own country/region (helped with this by *Jeel connectors* or youth actors familiar with EU external action and support. This scheme has potential to enhance the visibility and image of the EU, yet it remains to be seen how representative these local influencers are for youth interests in the region. The perceived lukewarm reaction of the EU in relation to the recent war between *Israel* and Hamas has put the *Jeel connectors* scheme under pressure – with several young people pulling out.

Over the years, there has been quite some learning about what works and what works less well within such dialogue processes and exchanges. This was fuelled by a growing “*dialogue fatigue*” among participating young people.⁶⁷ Recurrent bottlenecks generally encountered (across regions) include: i) insufficient involvement of young people in agenda-setting; ii) tendency to rely on a rather narrow circle of well-known youth actors to engage on a wide range of (specialist) topics; iii) structural barriers to ensuring more inclusiveness in regional dialogue exchanges (e.g. in relation to language);⁶⁸ iv) often less than optimal process facilitation to ensure result-oriented dialogues; v) limited attention for effective follow-up of recommendations; and vi) disconnect between dialogue processes and subsequent actions benefiting young people. These lessons learnt are slowly but steadily being taken up by key players involved, including regional bodies (such as the Anna Lindh Foundation) as well as the EU (HQ/EUDs). As a result, we see promising trends emerging in the whole approach to organising such youth exchanges for greater impact. These include i) investing much more in properly accompanying a diversity of young people to “*get ready*” for meaningful exchanges in terms of specialised knowledge, social skills, capacity to participate in policy processes); ii) go beyond event-driven dialogues by building in, from the start, a clear link with follow-up actions at policy and operational levels; iii) using innovative approaches to foster co-creation of youth agendas; and iv) paying more attention to the ultimate impact of dialogue processes.

⁶⁵ Interview with DG NEAR official.

⁶⁶ Secretary General of The Regional Cooperation Council (2023): Report on the Activities of the Regional Cooperation.

⁶⁷ Source: Interview with Anna Lindh Foundation.

⁶⁸ Source: Interviews with EU officials and implementing agencies.

2.4 Effects on Youth Engagement in policy processes (EQ 4)

Regional programmes have been effectively used to foster youth engagement in policy processes with varying levels of quality and success. Relevant spaces were opened up at regional level, allowing for young people to exchange, network, interact with policymakers. The approaches followed generally sought to be inclusive, but important **limitations were encountered**, also linked to the requirements in **skills needed for meaningful youth participation at regional level**. Evidence suggests **capacity development of youth as actors** in society and the polity **has been fostered** through these regional programmes. The Youth Labs are a promising experiment, showing positive effects on dialogue between youth and policymakers in several places in the *Western Balkans* and the *Neighbourhood East region*. It is **too early to expect tangible results or effective changes in institutional practices** and success will ultimately depend on commitment of the governments and state agencies concerned. **Regional dialogues with and between youth have created greater awareness about the role of Europe and capacitated young people** to interact with policymakers from the Union and MS. It is **difficult to assess levels of influence on EU external action** yet that will probably be limited.

2.4.1 Political and institutional space for youth and youth organisations (JC 4.1)

EU-supported regional programmes of varying levels of scope and quality which have helped to open up space for youth to engage in relevant dialogue and policy processes, creating valuable opportunities to express voice, engage with policymakers and formulate proposals to address pressing youth challenges. Over the reference period of this evaluation and across the board, the EU has sought to use the regional level to foster the democratic participation of youth as agents of their own development in relevant policy-making processes. This strategic choice aligns with the overall EU priority to foster regional cooperation/integration, reflects a growing political commitment to involve youth in policy and external action processes. It is based on the assumption that regional programmes can add value in this sensitive domain of youth empowerment as agents of change in society and the polity.

The resulting regional programmes focussed on this objective vary in terms of scope, funding, time scale, and methods used. While not based on solid political economy analyses, they are generally context-sensitive and increasingly seeking to understand youth concerns/motivations/expectations as well as the barriers to effective political participation of youth at both national and regional levels. Evidence collected indicates that the EU contributed to create/expand valuable and valued spaces for youth engagement at regional level, in particular for youth living in restrictive national settings.⁶⁹ In the process, growing efforts were made to diversify the group of youth actors involved, though this proved challenging a task, due to structural barriers to inclusive political participation (related to social, cultural and gender norms, language barriers, territorial inequalities, discriminations, etc.). Several implementing agencies involved in regional programmes argued that **one should be realistic as to the level of inclusion that one can aim at** – as meaningful participation in regional policy processes requires youth to have knowledge and a solid set of skills and competencies.⁷⁰ Otherwise the risk of tokenistic participation is huge.

On the whole, regional programmes managed to generate positive dynamics in terms of dialogue and produce valuable gains for young people. However, it is difficult – and too early – to detect transformational changes in terms of youth empowerment and effective integration in policy-making processes. Available reporting material shows that regional programmes have contributed to foster youth engagement in relevant policy processes (ramifying into the national level) as well as to strengthen the overall capacity of the youth actors involved in terms of skills and competences, leadership, organisational development and networking, advocacy all pre-requisites for a meaningful and influential participation. Interesting recent experiences include the RCC Youth Lab project and the *Youth Engagement Roadmaps* in the Eastern Partnership *EU4YOUTH* program. They aimed at facilitating the expression of youth concerns in major policy areas (e.g. employment, education, social protection) in close dialogue with relevant government agencies. Another interesting programme is the *Balkan Platform for Youth Dialogue*, funded by the European Commission (IPA) and implemented by the Association Européenne pour la Démocratie Locale/ALDA and Local Democracy Agencies, aimed at improving social and economic exclusion of youth, especially the most marginalised ones. The main actions were capacity building and thematic networking. A great focus was on strengthening active citizenship, social inclusion, and participation of youth in policy and decision making at both the local and regional level. The project wanted to create a Regional Network for Local Democracy composed of

⁶⁹ For young people in conflict settings or confronted with shrinking civic space and authoritarian rule, the regional level offers some kind of a “lifeline” to stay connected with other realities and with peers. Source: interviews and evaluation material.

⁷⁰ The key policy point here is that youth dialogue processes at regional level may, inevitably, have a certain elite bias. Inclusion remains an important issue also in regional dialogues, but different standards of appreciation should apply at this level – compared to local/national dialogues with youth.

CSOs and authorities, with active participation of young people from target countries in order to promote and monitor their participation at the local level.

Other interventions (e.g. *MAJALAT* in the *Neighbourhood South region*) had the ambition to reach out to a wider and more diverse group of youth actors in a structured manner, but lacked institutional capacity, incentives and adequate methods to do so. A wide range of activities were set up “for” young people to engage in exchange and dialogue processes (at national and regional levels) but not really “with” them and “by” them. A recent evaluation concluded that youth actively participated in the *MAJALAT* events, expressed voice, and made recommendations. Yet in the absence of a comprehensive, youth-centric strategy all these valuable activities per se did not lead to genuine youth empowerment, to the development of stronger regional youth structures or to meaningful and sustained influence in policy processes.

2.4.2 Dialogue and cross-sectoral collaboration (JC 4.2)

Youth labs have been supported through regional programmes with a view to connect youth actors to policy-making processes at national level. Positive dynamics have been generated in terms of dialogue and cross-sectoral collaboration yet it is too early to assess impact. In both the *Western Balkans* and the *Neighbourhood East region*, the EU has since recently sought to promote the concept of Youth Labs, using a demanding methodology in terms of process organisation, as way to stimulate young people to participate in policy processes relevant to them and above all to interact with policy-makers and agencies in charge of youth matters in the respective countries. Available reports⁷¹ as well as both surveys show encouraging results in terms of bringing the two set of stakeholders together to jointly think through how concrete youth issues could be better addressed. The experience so far shows that the quality of these processes of co-creation in youth labs depends on country conditions, levels of preparedness and commitment of the various stakeholders and the quality of the process facilitation.⁷² Ensuring an adequate follow-up – with the continuing presence of key policymakers – is equally critical for tangible results to be achieved. The *EU4YOUTH* programme foresees to further invest in youth engagement in policy processes, now with GIZ as process facilitator – amongst others selected because it may facilitate the adoption of a Team Europe approach to this unfolding experiment. The major challenge is to institutionalise the process, amongst other by ensuring the involvement of the local academic/think organisations so as to anchor the practice in a sustainable manner.⁷³

2.4.3 Policy, legislative and institutional frameworks (JC 4.3)

EU interventions have sought to address cross-border issues and improve neighbourhood cooperation, though in a rather limited manner (I-4.3.3). RYCO is the most important player on this matter, and the EU recognises and supports its efforts to reinforce and promote reconciliation, cooperation, inclusion and exchange among young people. One of the flagship projects funded by EU with EUR 1.5 million focusses on *School Exchanges* in the region,⁷⁴ it generated positive dynamics in terms of youth empowerment (see further in EQ 6 and 7).

In the three regions, EU support for regional dialogue processes (see Box 2) have contributed to better informing the youth involved about the EU yet effective influence on the EU’s external agenda is limited. The various regional youth fora and dialogues organised under the umbrella of civil society networks (e.g. *MAJALAT*) or the Anna Lindh Foundation, have all created valuable opportunities to young people to better understand the role and place of Europe in the world and in their region. Exposure to European policymakers has strengthen the ability of youth actors to interact in policy processes. Yet the overall influence exercised by youth on EU external agenda is hard to assess and most probably limited.

⁷¹ See for instance the successive Achievement Reports produced by EU4YOUTH.

⁷² While positive feedback was received from the process facilitation by the Regional Cooperation Council, more mixed echoes were noted regarding the performance of GOPA in the Youth Engagement Roadmaps supported in the Eastern Partnership.

⁷³ Source: Interview with EU official, DG NEAR

⁷⁴ Regional Youth Cooperation Office (n.a): School Exchange Website.

2.5 Effects on Economic Integration (EQ 5)

The **promotion of the economic integration of youth through structured regional interventions** was primarily conducted in **the framework of the Eastern Partnership through the flagship initiative EU4YOUTH**. Focussing on the education, employment, employability, and (social) entrepreneurship, the programme has used different implementation modalities (e.g. small and large grants) to directly reach out to young people, including disadvantaged groups for various forms of support. While the scheme had a quite complex architecture (with several agencies and Technical assistance units in charge), there is ample **evidence of valuable gains for young people across the board**. Over time, the **programme has sought to invest more on policy and institutional challenges**, such as the co-creation of more solid policies through Youth Labs involving state actors. **These are promising processes but still at an incipient stage and in need of structured follow to produce tangible results**. There is a **strong awareness** among several stakeholders that to obtain **sustainable outcomes** over time, the **EU should better combine project work (benefitting young people) with a more political/institutional approach** aimed at pushing for the required reforms in terms of solid youth policies, frameworks and budgets at national level. Phase IV of the programme was inspired by such a drive, yet effective progress will be challenging considering the political conditions/conflicts in the region and the reluctance of several governments to push ahead the youth agenda.

2.5.1 Relevance of implementation approaches (JC 5.1)

The Economic and Investment Plan for the *Western Balkans 2020* aimed at supporting green and digital transformation with the vision of future youth economic growth and job creation.⁷⁵ In parallel, the Western Balkans Innovation Agenda was launched (with potential benefits for youth). So far, only limited investments in youth economic integration were found through EU's support to Green Economy and Digital Transformation (I-5.1.3). An example was the EU Support to COVID-19 Recovery and Resilience of Agriculture and Rural Development in Bosnia and Herzegovina/EU4Agri recovery.⁷⁶ One of the activities related to Output 2 within Bosnia and Herzegovina Economic Reform Programme 2021-2023 includes "women and youth run businesses improved through better access to sustainability linked and eco-innovation finance and innovation".⁷⁷ Interviewed stakeholders had minimal knowledge/awareness of such EU support, so the actual effectiveness and transformational potential of these interventions could not be corroborated through external sources.

The most important regional programme in the area of youth employment, employability, entrepreneurship, and education is the EU4YOUTH programme in the Eastern Partnership. This flagship initiative started in 2017 and has been rolled out in four phases by now (Phase IV from 2022 onwards). Led by DG NEAR in close collaboration with the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport, and Culture/DG EAC, the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion/DG EMPL, the European Education and Culture Executive Agency/EACEA, the ETF⁷⁸ and EUDs (though with varying levels of ownership and involvement (see EQ 2).

It is structured around three key pillars: i) education and employability (covered by EQ5-6); ii) entrepreneurship and employment (covered by EQ 5); and iii) engagement and empowerment (see EQ 4). Different implementation methods are used (see EQ 2). First, small grants (in total 101 between 2017-2023 involving more than 600 organisations) under the Eastern Partnership Youth Window (implemented by Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport, and Culture/DG EAC and European Education and Culture Executive Agency/EACEA focussed on capacity building activities for youth organisations and youth workers. Second, larger grants for regional projects, spread over 2-3 years, in the areas of employability, skills development, and youth (social) entrepreneurship (10 projects between 2018-2022 with 15 additional now being launched). In these grant projects, a thematic evolution can be observed, with the new generation focussing more on equipping young people with digital competencies and the development of social entrepreneurship in green and digital economies. Third, scholarships for the College of Europe (Natolin campus, Poland) supporting cross-cultural post-graduate studies for an estimated 75 young people from the Eastern Partnership. Fourth, Technical assistance that have evolved over time (via service contracts or under a delegation agreement with an EU MS agency). Fifth, EU4YOUTH also organised multi-actor EU4YOUTH Days (first held in 2021) and the Eastern Partnership Youth Forum.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ European Parliament (2022): The Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans: assessing the possible economic, social and environmental impact of the proposed Flagship projects.

⁷⁶ EU Delegation to Bosnia and Herzegovina (2020): Internal Reporting.

⁷⁷ European Commission (2021): EU4 Private Sector Development in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Post COVID-19).

⁷⁸ These various structures are part of the Steering Committee (Phase III) overlooking project implementation.

⁷⁹ The 5th Eastern Partnership Youth Forum was organised end of 2021 in collaboration with the Slovenian EU Presidency, the European External Action Service/EEAS, DG NEAR, Directorate-General for Education, Youth,

This results in a complex architecture of agencies involved in various tasks (with some overlaps). These include : i) the *EU4YOUTH* Coordination and Support team (since five years effectively implemented by a private agency, Ernst & Youngs) in charge of monitoring, visibility and communication as well as the Alumni network; ii) the *Youth Engagement Roadmaps*, fostering youth labs between state and youth actors, implemented till 2023 by a private form (GOPA); and iii) a delegation agreement with a Lithuanian public agency (Central Project Management Agency/CPMA) which will amongst other take care of a new dimension added in Phase III, i.e. capacity building among public employment services/PES and other stakeholders to address youth employment issues. The latter is a good example of learning within *EU4YOUTH*. According to several interviewees, in the initial stage the EU approach was strongly focussed on supporting young people in their concrete needs (a supply-driven approach, which was generally valued by the youth involved). As the programme evolved, the need to engage more with government agencies (as duty bearers) became very clear to ensure ownership and sustainability. The focus in Phase III on public employment services/PES – which often have a poor reputation in the eyes of young people in the *Neighbourhood East region* – illustrates this move. The regional youth labs (see EQ 4) responded to the same logic to combine direct support to youth actors with a much stronger focus on getting the policies and institutions right – as a condition for structural impact and viability of youth projects and programmes. This rebalancing is a positive evolution but *EU4YOUTH* has to operate in a very difficult environment, still recovering from the COVID-19 (with huge impact on young people)⁸⁰ and now confronted with war in *Ukraine*, open conflict between *Armenia/Azerbaijan* and backlash in *Belarus* – all crises that again have a major toll on young people as victims of the war, displaced persons or refugees. Working on deeper reforms regarding youth will continue to be an uphill struggle for the EU and MS involved.

EU4YOUTH has faced other implementation challenges since its creation, including connecting the dots between the various components, ensuring an adequate steering of the different implementing agencies, combining the roles of carrying out projects/influencing policies and ensuring political dialogue. Communicating about the programme with young people of the region using social media that speak to them was equally a highly complicated task – as communication was centralised at EU level for various EU programmes (*EU4Culture*, *EU4Business*, *EU4YOUTH*) leading to a lot of inefficiencies and an under-utilisation of the potential of direct contact with young people on the results of the programme. As mentioned in EQ 1, *EU4YOUTH* has documented its achievements in yearly reports. The quantitative data assembled are impressive, yet it is much harder to find solid analysis on outcomes and transformational changes achieved.

2.5.2 Integration of vulnerable and marginalised youth (JC 5.2)

***EU4YOUTH* has adopted since the start an approach to also reach out to disadvantaged youth, with some success.** The different Achievements Reports provide ample evidence that the programme has pro-actively sought to integrate vulnerable and marginalised youth. For instance, when providing financial support to start a business, 368 young people could benefit since 2018, 67% of which were women and 82% of which were disadvantaged youth.⁸¹

2.5.3 Ownership through improved data and dialogue (JC 5.3)

***EU4YOUTH* invests systematically in analyses of youth situation, data collection, and dissemination of the findings.** These inputs are generally highly valued (though some EUDs felt the studies were not reflecting well national specificities) and underpin regional dialogue events, youth labs and other forms of interaction with state agencies and with youth structures/actors. It is less evident that these analyses and data also help to foster greater government ownership for reforms.

2.5.4 Impact and sustainability of youth economic integration (JC 5.4)

EU interventions have effectively promoted youth economic empowerment (I-5.4.1, I-5.4.2, I-5.4.3 and I-5.4.4) yet the valuable gains achieved by *EU4YOUTH* require various forms of consolidation over time in order to have sustainable outcomes. There is ample evidence that all the various forms of youth support directly provided have capacitated and empowered a diversity of young people across the region. Several of the large grants in *EU4YOUTH* have helped to create better structural conditions for youth projects to go after their lifetime. For instance, the *EU4YOUTH* project: “Unlocking the potential of young social entrepreneurs in *Moldova* and *Ukraine*” (implemented by the Gustav Stresemann Institute) managed to sign a memorandum of understanding with four universities in *Ukraine* which agreed to incorporate the course developed by the project in their curriculum. The main challenge for

Sport, and Culture/DG EAC and Salto Eastern Europe and Caucasus resource centre as an official side-event of the Eastern Partnership Summit.

⁸⁰ *EU4YOUTH* produced with ETF a study on the impact of COVID-19 on young people in the region.

⁸¹ *EU4YOUTH* (2022): Achievement Report.

the next years in the *EU4YOUTH* process is to consolidate the gains made by further deepening the work done “beyond projects”. Several stakeholders insisted that sustainable outcomes should push to EU to better combine project work (benefitting young people) with a more political/institutional approach aimed at pushing for the required reforms in terms of solid youth policies, frameworks, and budgets at national level.

2.6 Effects on Social Cohesion and Inclusion (EQ 6)

Regional programmes did not focus on the issues related to non-formal and informal, with the notable exception of *EU4YOUTH* in the Eastern Partnership. The programme has effectively sought to foster a dialogue on the added value of non-formal education, to create space for innovative policy developments in the area, particularly in terms of recognising youth work and making a connection with national qualification systems. Some **regional initiatives focussed on youth as producer of culture** with integrated approaches in the cultural and creative industries (CCI), which generated positive dynamics that need to be sustained. No major regional interventions were detected in terms of access to sexual and reproductive rights. Mental health was addressed in a regional Youth Lab in the Western Balkans, leading to joint declaration spelling out a clear reform path – which remains to be taken up.

The **EU did show commitment to supporting vulnerable youth groups**, encompassing those from disadvantaged backgrounds, minorities, women, and others, as elaborated in different sections of this report. However, there were **no systematic efforts to promote dialogue on youth social inclusion or discrimination**, again with the exception of the Western Balkans.

2.6.1 School retention and non-formal education (JC 6.1)

Only in the *Neighbourhood East region* has the EU used regional programmes to engage structurally on issues related to non-formal and informal learning. The *EU4YOUTH* programme has effectively facilitated discussions on the value of outcomes of non-formal education, including through its Technical assistance support. The discourse has centred on the added value that can be generated, particularly for young people transitioning from education to work. Valuable skills (particularly transversal skills) could be obtained from youth work activities (such as volunteering), other forms of civic engagement or international mobility. The underlying theory of change is that promoting better recognition, validation, and certification for skills and tools can be the first step in connecting youth experiences to ongoing developments on validation of non-formal and informal learning in the context of national qualification frameworks.⁸²

2.6.2 Youth as producer of culture (JC 6.2)

Regional initiatives in the *Western Balkans* and in the *Neighbourhood South region* support cultural and creative industries with a focus on youth (as entrepreneurs) (I-6.2.1 and I-6.2.2). A concrete cultural initiative launched across Europe is cultural cooperation exchange between the Western Balkans and the EU, as well as strengthening the competitiveness of the cultural and creative industries in the Western Balkans. In the *Neighbourhood South region*, the EU-supported project *Creect4MED* (period 2020-2024) promoted youth and women to be effective cultural entrepreneurs. A quite integrated approach was followed, in collaboration with various specialised agencies, including: i) the production of mappings of CCI realities and collection of data across the region; ii) a wide range of training opportunities as well as a summers school; iii) sub-granting to a least cultural entrepreneurs (start-up, micro and small & medium enterprises) in six targeted countries;⁸³ and iv) engagement and advocacy to further consolidate the CCI in the region. Available information on the project show dynamism, a clear focus on youth as well as a package of the activities that seem closely connected to the specific needs of the target groups. There is less analysis of the outcomes achieved in the various components. In the *Neighbourhood East region*, the programme *EU4Culture* sought to promote culture and creativity as an engine for economic growth and social development in the region, awarding the project to a consortium of three cultural centres led by the Goethe Institute Georgia (period 2020-2022). The project has faced several implementation challenges and difficulties. Major weaknesses included the lack of a results-based monitoring system as well as a poor incorporation of cross-cutting issues (e.g. gender), the leave no one behind principle (minority and vulnerable groups) and of the human rights-based approach.⁸⁴ Youth was not specifically targeted in the intervention.

⁸² EU4YOUTH (2022): Achievement Report.

⁸³ Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Palestine.

⁸⁴ EU (2023): Promoting culture & creativity as an engine for economic growth and social development in the Neighbourhood East region countries. Results oriented Monitoring report.

2.6.3 Access to mental health, sexual, reproductive rights and services (JC 6.3)

No regional programmes have been found that provide structured support to youth in terms of access to mental health or sexual reproductive rights and services. In the Western Balkans, a youth lab was dedicated to the issue of mental health – at the request of young people from region. When it comes to actions addressing youth mental health, an interesting regional initiative was taken to organise a Youth Lab on Mental Health aimed at raising awareness on mental health and support measures and emphasised the importance of prevention among young people.⁸⁵ The theme has been suggested by young people of the region as a priority concern. The Youth lab gathered a regional pool of experts dealing with the issue of mental health, who presented 13 regional recommendations envisaging the ways to raise mental health awareness, support measures and communicate importance of prevention of mental health of young people.⁸⁶ The Youth Lab culminated in a Final Conference on Mental health that took place in Belgrade in June 2023.⁸⁷ The critical next step, as for the outcomes of all Youth labs, will be to promote the effective implementation of the reform agendas that were agreed upon – a task assigned to Phase IV of *EU4YOUTH* programme.

2.6.4 Space of dialogue on discrimination, gender and social inclusion (JC 6.4)

The EU has invested in inclusive dialogues involving youth, local structures, communities, schools, etc. on issues related to discrimination, social exclusion, and various stereotypes. In the *Western Balkans*, the EU-supported “Regional Youth Exchange Association” has sought to foster an intra-regional dialogue and provide young people with tools to create regional ties that would encourage a new regional narrative to fight stereotypes, discrimination, and fear of the neighbouring countries (JC 6.4). However, there is no evidence that more vulnerable young persons were specifically targeted. A good practice in terms of inclusion is the above-mentioned Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme (see EQ 4), implemented by RYCO and GIZ. The project opened a channel of cooperation with education ministries in the *Western Balkan* countries to ensure that the exchange was open to schools in remote areas as well as towards vulnerable groups and minorities. The fruitful cooperation led to the signing of 6 letters of support by the ministers confirming their support to the implementation of the Superschools exchanges.⁸⁸ Moreover, among the criteria used to shortlist the schools that could participate in this scheme, there was a particular focus on schools from rural areas, students coming from minorities, students with disabilities and disadvantaged background in general. The Superschools are therefore focussed on ensuring the inclusion of marginalised groups (because of ethnicity, religion, unprivileged education or economic background, from rural areas). In particular, during the first exchange, 55% of the students were coming from rural environment (village, small city/town), and 2 partnerships (4 schools, 60 students) involved young people with mental disabilities and visual impairment.⁸⁹ While positive dynamics are generated by this type of projects, effective changes in perceptions, mindsets, and attitudes at a larger scale will require time – particularly taking into account the highly volatile and polarised conditions in the region.

2.7 Effects on Peace and Security (EQ 7)

There are only a **limited number of regional programmes directly dealing with peace, security, reconciliation, counterterrorism, and radicalisation** – despite the multiple challenges affecting the regions and young people in particular. The **most relevant** and structured interventions are in the **Western Balkans and focus on reconciliation**. In this context, **programmes adopted a youth lens and have delivered considerable positive effects** in terms of youth sensibilisation and empowerment. Yet the **overall political environment remains tense and volatile, hampering project implementation** as well as the **prospects of scaling up** against a background of institutional constraints at the level of the main implementing agency (RYCO).

2.7.1 Adoption of youth-lens in peace and security strategies (JC 7.1)

While in the three regions covered there is no shortage of peace, security, reconciliation, and radicalisation challenges affecting youth, the EU’s engagement at regional level has been limited. Existing response strategies and programming documents do not adopt a consistent youth lens, with exceptions for the Western Balkans (I-7.1.1, I-7.1.2 and I-7.1.3). Over the past decade, the EU has increasingly recognised the positive role of young people in the construction of more peaceful and secure societies. In line with the 2015 United Nations Security Council/UNSC Resolution 2250, the EU calls for a meaningful participation of youth in building lasting peace,

⁸⁵ Regional Cooperation Council (n.a): Western Balkans Youth Lab Project.

⁸⁶ Regional Cooperation Council (n.a): Western Balkans Youth Lab Project.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ RYCO and GIZ (2021): Annual Progress Report for Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme.

⁸⁹ RYCO and GIZ (2022): Annual Progress Report for Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme.

contributing to justice and reconciliation as well as countering violent extremism. The analysis conducted in the framework of this evaluation shows that EUDS have generally been quite reluctant to enter into this arena with their bilateral portfolios, despite the existence of pressing challenges.⁹⁰ In some partner countries, the EU did seek to engage strategically on peace and security matters with youth (e.g. *Syria*), but response strategies were often limited in scope and impact (*Libya, Tunisia, Serbia*). A similar story emerges at the regional level, also characterised by a rather limited EU presence and action regarding youth in this policy domain. There are several indicators confirming this state of affairs. Overarching regional policy and programming documents do not provide specific mandates to work on peace and security issues,⁹¹ including with a focus on youth. Comprehensive regional support programmes directly targeting youth in peace and security/reconciliation are largely confined to the *Western Balkans* (see below) while in the *Neighbourhood South region* the topic is mainly incorporated in regional civil society facilities (among other themes and with youth as one beneficiary).⁹² Through the European Union Peace Initiative/EUPI attempts have been made to promote Cross Border Cooperation (CBC) between young people of *Israel* and the *Palestine*⁹³ on different issues not necessarily linked to peace – with the idea that getting youth to exchange is in itself a positive effect. Still these initiatives were limited in scope and the EU also felt other actors were better positioned to do this work.

In the three regions, the EU supports data collection and relevant forms of analysis to better understand youth realities, needs and expectations, including in fragile and conflict settings. Yet the knowledge accumulated does not lead to more ambitious and comprehensive interventions, investments in dedicated youth networks or to structured forms of dialogue at regional level. When it comes to EU external action agendas, there is some space, largely event-driven, for youth of the regions to enter into dialogue on priorities related to peace and security, but the outreach and influence is limited. According to different sources consulted there are several reasons for the rather low profile use of the regional level to addressing peace and security challenges, including: i) funding and capacity constraints at EU level; ii) resistance by partner countries in a context of fragile regional integration processes and deep divides between members⁹⁴ – reducing the scope for more ambitious programs; iii) the application of the subsidiarity principle in the sense that in some countries, particularly those affected by fragility and conflict, the real challenge may be to first work at local and national level on peace and security before engaging at regional level.

2.7.2 Empowering youth as changemakers (JC 7.2)

Regional programmes targeting youth in relation peace and security matters in the *Western Balkans* have successfully sought to empower youth while fostering dialogue, ownership and institutionalised forms of participation. Yet they face political and institutional challenges of deepening and scaling up the work done. The inventory of EU support carried out in the framework of this evaluation shows that the *Western Balkan* states have been the preferred target for regional programmes since years, always articulated around the central concern of reconciliation, by integrating young people in the process. Several initiatives and projects succeeded each other such as *Divided Past – Joint Future*, the Balkan Youth Dialogue Platform, the Regional Youth Exchange Association⁹⁵ or the Western Balkans Schools Exchange Programme under RYCO. The latter project, already examined under EQ 4 and 6 above, provides a good illustration of the adoption of a genuine youth-centric approach, leading to effective empowerment and substantial positive effects on the pursued goal of fostering reconciliation and greater regional cohesion (see Box 3).

⁹⁰ See case country studies of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Türkiye. Another example is Armenia, where peace is a top priority for youth now, and where EU struggles to develop a coherent strategy.

⁹¹ This is the case for the Regional East Multiannual Indicative Programme 2017-2020.

⁹² Peace and security were one of the core themes underpinning MAJALAT. It proved a very difficult policy issue to address effectively in dialogue with European policymakers and to ensure relevant youth inputs.

⁹³ This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.

⁹⁴ In the context of the Western Balkans and the countries' shared history of past conflicts, reconciliation is considered a key requirement to building sustainable peace and preventing a relapse into conflict. The region, however, understands peace building and reconciliation differently and have different narratives. For example, in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, peace-building is a process to talk about the past conflict, admit crimes or implement measures for transitional justice; but in Serbia the focus is on the future and to close the chapter of what happened.

⁹⁵ Youth Initiative for Human Rights (n.a.): Official Website.

Box 3 *Pursuing reconciliation starting from the individual level in schools*

RYCO is an example of good practice in addressing reconciliation issues while adopting a genuine youth-centred approach. It has received a clear mandate from the six Western Balkans countries that created it to coordinate regional youth cooperation to foster reconciliation and promote a sense of belonging to Europe. RYCO recognises that stereotypes and divisive narratives are obstacles to peace-building and reconciliation. To counter them, RYCO facilitates youth mobility and exchanges in the region, with a particular focus on schools from smaller communities (rural areas), therefore providing chances for young people to move and meet other youngsters. To implement this highly relevant intervention, RYCO clearly opted for a youth-centred approach, as reflected in the following elements:

- RYCO's governing board is composed by six government representatives and six youth representatives, who share voting and decision-making powers on an equal basis.
- The theory of change underlying the Schools Exchange programme is that effective reconciliation starts at the individual level with the adoption of new perspectives on each person's values systems.
- The direct agency of youth participating in the school exchanges stands central in rolling out the program.
- RYCO works with specialised CSOs to facilitate youth empowerment.

Available reports and ROMs show that the consistent and effective use of such youth-centric approaches – where young people are seen as actors rather than beneficiaries – has had substantial impact on the participating youngsters and contributed to influencing mindsets for genuine reconciliation processes.

Transitional justice is also recognised as key for reconciliation. RYCO, for example, is keen to engage more on it, for instance by having young people visit the courts, speak with prosecutors and judges, etc.⁹⁶ However, the political situation in the region remains very complex with the tensions between *Serbia* and *Kosovo*⁹⁷, and the ongoing political crises in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. All this, inevitably, impacts on RYCO's governing structures, operational processes, and the execution of project activities. Moreover, RYCO has struggles with retaining staff. In 2022, a great number of employees resigned and replacing them has proven particularly difficult. This challenge extends beyond the “core staff” to the Superschools team responsible for implementing school exchanges. Remarkably, nearly 10 team members left the project shortly after joining, including the project coordinator. The reasons behind these departures include a range of issues such as inadequate disciplinary management, internal conflicts, absence of a robust human resource policy, and an uncompetitive compensation package that fails to incentivise relocation to Tirana for regional positions. Furthermore, the local branch offices of RYCO, excluding the one in Tirana, lack legal entity registration and do not possess local bank accounts. This lack of legal standing adds complexity to the implementation of Superschools exchanges and the organisation of local activities. It also hinders the ability to provide proper employment contracts for RYCO staff, exacerbating the already critical staff retention problem.⁹⁸ Staff turnover and insufficient induction training have been identified as the main challenges for RYCO's capacity.

2.7.3 Addressing root causes of marginalisation, disengagement and migratory drive (JC 7.3)

The Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme is an example of positive practice and regional cooperation. Stakeholder commitment for Superschools is strong, including support from ministries of education, local authorities, and school principals.⁹⁹ Superschools organise exchanges through an online platform¹⁰⁰ where schools apply for partnership. The visits last for 5-10 days with up to 25 students. Schools from rural and marginalised areas are preferred, to the extent that some candidacies from the capitals are rejected to make sure that rural schools that had never participated before benefit from the exchange.¹⁰¹ Between December 2021 and December 2022, the project achieved significant milestones. Notably, the Superschools exchanges were successfully implemented, involving 30 project proposals (60 schools) selected for participation. The preparation and execution process included online kick-off meetings, teacher training sessions, and “Meet the Superschools” events across the *Western Balkans*. Moreover, 121 teachers were trained, resulting in well-promoted schools and developed exchange programme agendas. From March 2022 to June 2023, youth exchanges took place, involving 805 students and 121 teachers in week-long programs. Following this success, a regional youth summer camp and a closing conference were organised, aiming to collect lessons learned and showcase results to stakeholders.¹⁰²

⁹⁶ Source: Interview with RYCO 25/06/2023.

⁹⁷ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

⁹⁸ RYCO and GIZ (2022): Annual Progress Report for Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme.

⁹⁹ ROM Report, Projects and Programmes Project title Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme.

¹⁰⁰ RYCO (n.a): Superschools Website.

¹⁰¹ Source: Interview with RYCO 25/06/2023

¹⁰² RYCO and GIZ (2022): Annual Progress Report for Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme.

The project introduced changes for the second open call for applications launched in September 2022. Over 500 schools registered on the online platform, with 155 exchange project proposals submitted for 2023 implementation. A concept for long-term partnerships and a “home stays” pilot phase were developed to foster independence from RYCO funding and create sustainable partnerships. The project established close cooperation with Western Balkans ministries of education, securing six letters of support for Superschools exchanges. High-level political events were utilised for project promotion, including presentations at the Prespa Forum and the Berlin Process Foreign Ministers Meeting.¹⁰³

3 Conclusions

The EU increasingly used regional programmes in the *Neighbourhood region* and the *Western Balkans*, particularly from 2015 onwards, to address a host of common and specific challenges of the regions involved. Like for bilateral support, the expanded engagement took place under globally conducive, but quite generic policy frameworks and strategies, largely inspired on evolving EU approaches to youth within the Union. The overall environment to work structurally on youth issues is complex in each region, characterised by weak integration dynamics and regional bodies, fragile processes of state formation and democracy building, inward-looking and top-down approaches by powerholders and state agencies, and in many cases, a disengagement of youth. On the whole, the EU managed to ensure relevant, context-sensitive, flexible and responsive regional programming, using in a globally sound manner the different tools, instruments and funding channels available. In several instances, regional programs added value compared to bilateral interventions (particularly for EUDs with a less developed strategic approach towards youth as well as human capacity/funding constraints). Dedicated staff at HQ level as well as line DGs helped to ensure this expansion and delivery of valuable interventions.

However, important challenges persist in terms of: i) ensuring inclusion of vulnerable, discriminated and marginalised youth; differentiating regional responses to hugely heterogeneous country realities; ii) applying genuine youth centred approaches; iii) selecting suitable implementing agencies that have the competence, skills, structures, and incentives to empower young people; iv) deepening the voice of young people in EU dialogue and cooperation processes, particularly in the design/implementation of support programs, including more direct access to funding; v) localising support programs so as to avoid the transfer of ill-suited European values, approaches and tools; vi) ensuring a better articulation between regional, bilateral and thematic programs; vii) engaging in longer-term strategic partnerships and alliances with EU MS and other international agencies; and viii) investing in qualitative M&E systems that allow to better track possible transformational changes and use this evidence to adapt policies and practices.

In terms of positive effects and outcomes achieved, a mixed picture emerges. This ought not be surprising, considering the complexity of engaging with youth as external actor in often less than conducive political and institutional environments (as this is increasingly the case in several partner countries of the three regions covered), where the elites display low levels of commitment to structurally tackle youth challenges (through solid public policies, institutional reform, and coherent budgets) and relate with young people as changemakers. EU contributions to effective change are also hampered by the abovementioned internal challenges of policy coherence, implementation and funding methods as well as institutional constraints.

Still important positive effects were obtained through regional programs in terms of opening space for young people to participate in policy processes or dialogue processes at different levels (including with EU actors). Initially EU efforts (such as the flagship programme *EU4YOUTH* in the Eastern Partnership) focussed on delivering direct benefits to youth – particularly in terms of economic integration, skills and employability, non-formal education, Technical and Vocational Education and Training or culture). Recently, the focus is shifting towards investing more in policy, institutional regulatory reforms as well as fostering policy dialogues between state agencies and youth. The “Youth Labs” in the *Western Balkans* and the *Youth engagement roadmaps* in the Eastern Partnership, illustrate this important trend – yet the experience is still in an incipient phase so its change potential remains to be seen. In other areas, the EU has been less active (e.g. empowering youth on their sexual and reproductive health and rights, on access to mental health or to be an agent of change in peace and security issues) for several reasons, including political economy issues, added value considerations and capacity constraints.

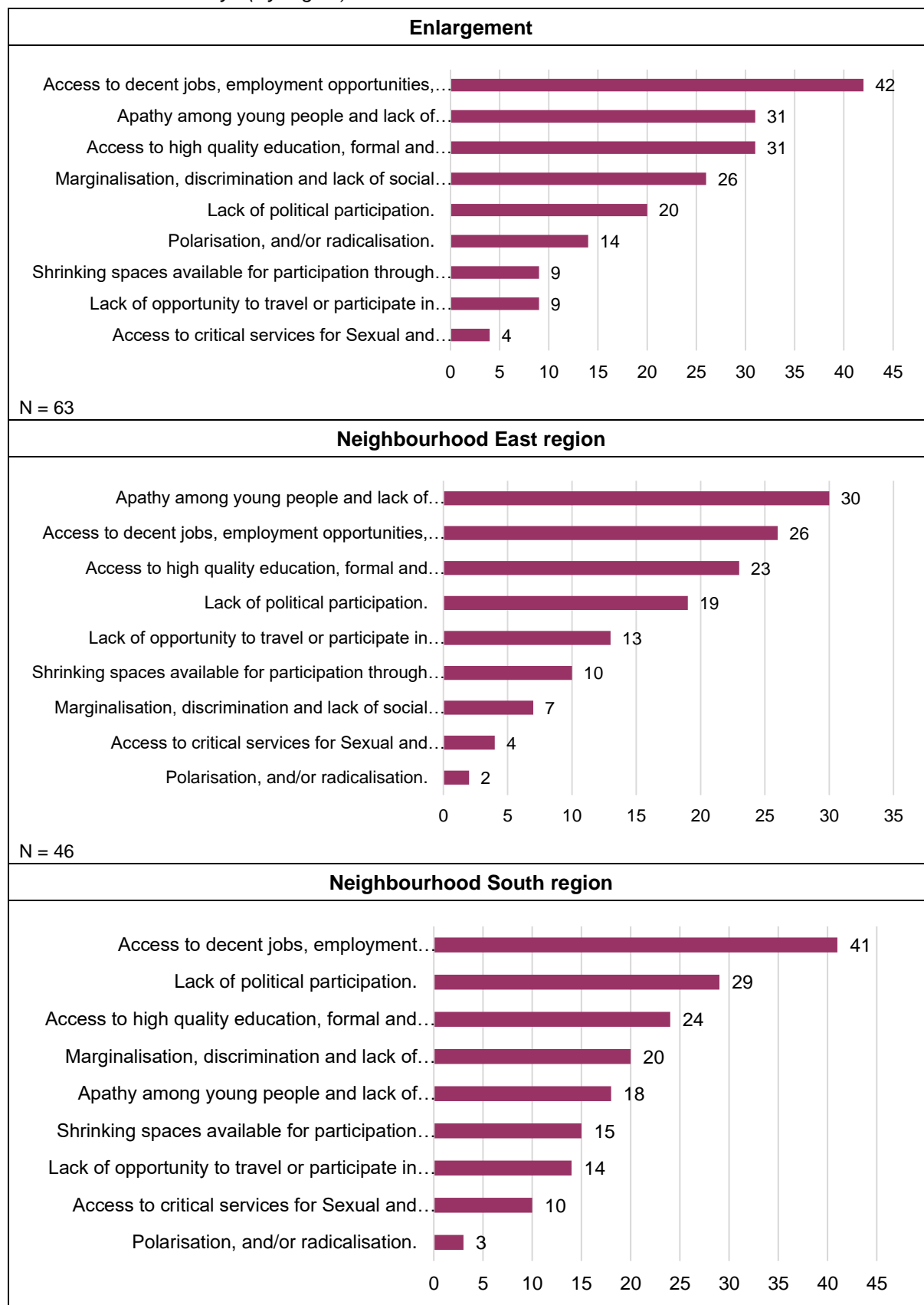
In short: EU regional programmes related to youth have shown their added value and delivery capacity (with important variations in terms of “landing” at country level in an effective manner). Yet, like the bilateral programs, they seem to be at a critical juncture in terms of scaling up the levels of engagement, focussing on policy reform, and engaging in genuine partnerships with youth organisations and actors to ensure more sustainable results.

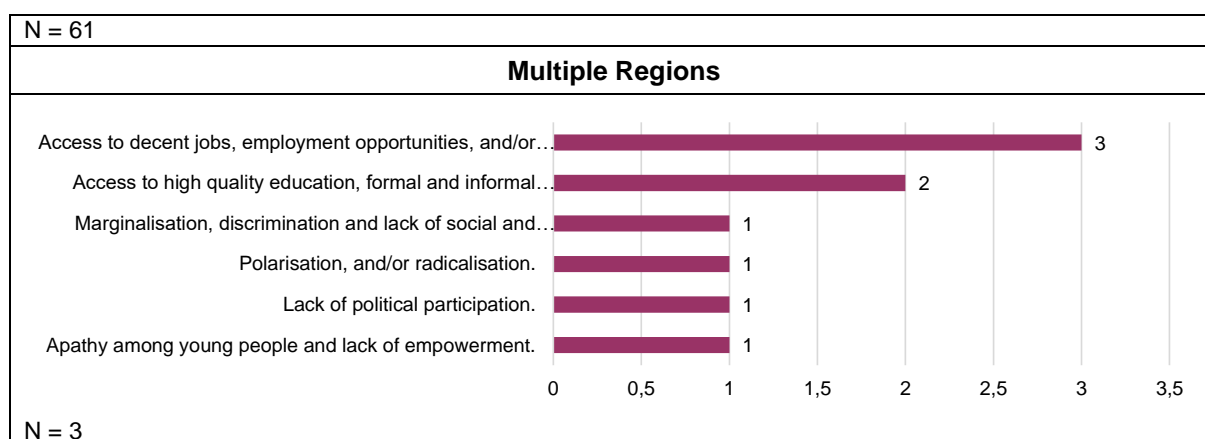
¹⁰³ RYCO and GIZ (2022): Annual Progress Report for Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme.

4 Annex

4.1 Aggregated view on perceptions collected regarding the core priorities in each region

Question 1 *In your opinion, what are the three most important challenges facing youth in your country? (By region)*





4.2 List of persons consulted

Name	Organisation	Position
EU HQ		
COSSOUL, Virginie	DG NEAR	Policy Officer – Regional Programmes on employment and entrepreneurship in the Neighbourhood South region
GRIFONI, Beatrice	DG NEAR	Programme Officer – Regional Programmes in the field of human and social development in the MENA (Neighbourhood South)
PRUNEROVA, Kristina	DG NEAR	Programme Manager – Civil society and culture (Neighbourhood South) – CREative Entrepreneurs Acting FOR the future Mediterranean and ShababTalk
SEREE, Fanny	DG NEAR	Policy Officer – Youth Guarantee Facility
VUITTON, Nicolas	DG NEAR	Project Officer – EU Youth focal point – Youth Regional Programmes Western Balkan
WITTMANN, Anne-France	DG NEAR	Programme Officer – Net-MED Youth
Implementing Partners		
FERRE, Josep	Anna Lindh Foundation	Executive Director
LAMONICA, Alessandro	Anna Lindh Foundation	Liaison Officer
YERITSYAN, Grigor	Armenian Progressive Youth (APY)	President
HERYLOVICH, Dzmitry	Belarusian National Youth Council (RADA)	Policy and Advocacy Officer
PANUS, Teodora	CNTM	Chairperson
PIJEVSKII, Max	Ernest and Young	Key Expert and Programme Coordinator – <i>EU4YOUTH</i>
SHUBA, Alena	Ernest and Young	Senior Manager, Business Consulting – EU account
WIERCX, Joke	Ernest and Young	Executive Director – EU Account
VALJEVAC, Jasmin	GIZ	Team leader/AV – Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme
HELLWIG, Wolfgang	GOPA	Senior Project Manager – Education and Employment Promotion
NOWAK, Meik	GSI-Bonn	Referent "Globale Herausforderungen" – <i>EU4YOUTH</i> : Unlocking the potential of young social entrepreneurs in Moldova and Ukraine; implemented by: Gustav-Stresemann-Institut e.V. (D)
FRANKIVSKA, Olena	National Ukrainian Youth Association (NUMO)	Coordinator
PEJIC, Miljana	National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS)	Secretary General
SHEVCHUK, Natalia	NYCU	Chairperson
BORN, Hans	Pro NGO	Chairman – <i>EU4YOUTH</i> : Unlocking the potential of young social entrepreneurs in Moldova and Ukraine; implemented by: Gustav-Stresemann-Institut e.V. (D)
WAGNER, Christian	Proquality consult	TL – <i>EU4YOUTH</i> – Youth Engagement Roadmaps

JAKUBOWSKI, Stephanie	SALTO EUROMED	Deputy Head of Cooperation Department & Coordinator of the SALTO EUROMED Resource Centre
LE FLOCH, Samuel	SALTO EUROMED	Head of Unit
National Youth Councils		
FRANKIVSKA, Olena	National Ukrainian Youth Association (NUMO)	Coordinator
HERYLOVICH, Dzmitry	Belarusian National Youth Council (RADA)	Policy and Advocacy Officer
PANUS, Teodora	CNTM	Chairperson
PEJIC, Miljana	National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS)	Secretary General
SHEVCHUK, Natalia	NYCU	Chairperson
YERITSYAN, Grigor	Armenian Progressive Youth (APY)	President

4.3 List of documents

EU Strategy Programming

- Council of Europe (2020): Council Conclusions on Youth in External Action. Relex.1.B, 8629/20 Annex.
- European Commission (2020): Eastern Partnership beyond 2020. Reinforcing Resilience -As Eastern Partnership that delivers for all. JOIN/2020/7 final.
- European Commission (2021): A new Agenda for the Mediterranean. JOIN/2021/2 final.
- European Commission (2021): Recovery, resilience and reform: post 2020 Eastern Partnership Priorities. SWD(2021) 186 final.
- European Commission (2022): Youth Action Plan for EU external action.
- European Economic and Social Council (2022): Youth policy in the Western Balkans as part of the Innovation Agenda for the Western Balkans.

EU Reporting

- Council of Europe (2021): Shrinking democratic civic space for youth.
- European Commission (2018): A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans.
- Kalantaryan, S., McMahon, S. and Ueffing, P. (2022): Youth in external action. Publications Office of the European Union.
- McMahon, S., Kalantaryan, S., Kaslama, P. and Ueffing, P. (2022): Patchwork: Mapping international data on youth. Publications Office of the European Union.
- Secretary General of The Regional Cooperation Council (2023): Report on the Activities of the Regional Cooperation.

Project documentation

The team reviewed the available project documentation (action fiches/TAPs, grant contracts, implementation and monitoring reports, evaluations, etc.) of the projects presented in the tables in section 1.2. Including, the following documents cited in the report:

- 3rd Eastern Partnership Youth Forum (2017): Recommendations.
- EU4YOUTH (2022): Achievement Report.
- Europe-Western Balkans Youth Meeting: Connecting Youth Work and Youth Policy: Action Plan for Youth Work and Youth Policy. Ljubljana, Slovenia, 25-28 September 2016.
- ROM Report, Projects and Programmes Project title Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme.
- RYCO (2021): The EU and Germany Fund New Project to Connect Schools in the Western Balkans Six.
- RYCO and GIZ (2021): Annual Progress Report for Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme.
- RYCO and GIZ (2022): Annual Progress Report for Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme.

EU evaluations

- Amar, Z. and Bossuyt, J. (2022): Final evaluation of MAJALAT.
- Van Hoof (2019): Final Evaluation Report of ReLoaD.

Other evaluations and studies

- Badescu, Mircea (2022): Youth transition and skills mismatch in the Eastern Partnership. European Training Foundation.
- De Bel-Air, F. (2018): “Blocked Youth” The Politics of Migration from South and Eastern Mediterranean Countries Before and After the Arab Uprisings. The International Spectator.
- Icoski, M. (2022): Toward a New Youth Brain-drain Paradigm in the Western Balkans. German Marshall Foundation, August 2022.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Poland and FRSE (2018): Youth Policy in Eastern Partnership Countries. Overview of youth policy in Eastern Partnership Countries and its European support mechanisms.
- Petkovic, S. (2018): The Berlin Process – A New Impetus for Youth Work? Recent Achievements and Current Challenges in Youth Policies in the Western Balkans. Report. ERASMUS+/SALTO-Youth.
- RYCO (n.a): School Exchange Website.
- RYCO (n.a): Superschools Website.
- RYCO (n.a): Western Balkans Youth Lab Project Website.
- Youth Initiative for Human Rights (n.a): Official Website.

Country case study: Bosnia and Herzegovina

1 Introduction

1.1 Context

1.1.1 Main Youth challenges

Youth is defined as persons between the age of 15-30 years old according to the Federation Bosnia and Herzegovina Youth Law¹⁰⁴ and the Brcko District Law on Youth,¹⁰⁵ while the Law on Youth organisation of the Republika Srpska¹⁰⁶ defines young people as those between 16-30 years old. According to Eurostat, youth between 15-30 represent 20.37% of the population, with those ages 15-24 representing 10.83%¹⁰⁷ (an estimated 3.3 million).

Continuously high unemployment rates, low wages, and lack of job prospects affect the entire Bosnian population, particularly young people. The EC Country Report (2022) estimates youth unemployment (age group of 15-24 years) at around 36% in June 2022.¹⁰⁸ Recent studies show that young people encounter several obstacles to finding employment, including “*lack of work experience, lack of contacts and connections, a mismatch between education and the labour market and corruption and nepotism in recruitment and employment*”.¹⁰⁹ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) study showed that one-quarter of the Bosnian youth desire to leave the country permanently, with an additional 23% indicating that they considered temporary migration.¹¹⁰ Regarding political participation, recent data from Institute for Youth Development KULT showed that 50% of the youth voted in the recent elections, which is not significantly different from the European average.¹¹¹ A Friedrich Ebert Stiftung study (2019) found that “*a rather small age of young people decide to engage in voluntary work, with only 13% stating that in the last 12 months they have taken part in at least one activity that could be characterised as voluntary work*”.¹¹² Available studies focussing on youth in *Bosnia and Herzegovina* also recorded a high-level of social division. A recent United States Agency for International Development/USAID survey found strong community/ethnic affiliations among Bosnian youth, with religion (60%) and ethnic affiliation (56%) being the highest.¹¹³

Multiple challenges affect the education system. Approximately 93% of students completed secondary education in 2019,¹¹⁴ while national statistical data from 2020 showed that 75% of secondary education students in *Bosnia and Herzegovina* were enrolled in technical and vocational schools (out of which 70% were male).¹¹⁵ A challenge raised by analyses of the education system in the country also pertained to the fact that large shares of students continue to leave school without mastering basic competencies, and there are signs of inequities in the learning outcomes.¹¹⁶

1.1.2 Policy framework and main actors

The Bosnian Constitution establishes four tiers of government: state-level – *Bosnia and Herzegovina*; asymmetrical government structure reflected in the different organisations of two Entities: the *Federation Bosnia and Herzegovina* and the *Republika Srpska*, as well as semi-autonomous District of Brcko.¹¹⁷ The *Republika Srpska* is a centralised Entity, while the *Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina* is

¹⁰⁴ Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2010): Youth Law. Zakon O Mladima Federacije Bosne I Hercegovine, Službene novine Federacije Bosnia and Herzegovina broj 36/10, 16.06.2010.

¹⁰⁵ Brcko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina (n/a): Youth Law. Zakon o Mladima Brčko distrikta Bosnia and Herzegovina.

¹⁰⁶ Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2010): The Law on Youth Organisation of the Republika Srpska, Закон о Омладинском Организовању, “Службени гласник Републике Српске” бр. 98/04, 119/08 и 1/.

¹⁰⁷ IndexMundi (2023): Bosnia and Herzegovina Demographics Profile.

¹⁰⁸ EC (2022): Country Report: Bosnia and Herzegovina, p. 5.

¹⁰⁹ UNFPA (2021): Survey on Youth Emigration in Bosnia and Herzegovina, p. 25.

¹¹⁰ UNFPA (2021): Survey on Youth Emigration in Bosnia and Herzegovina; p. 11.

¹¹¹ Council of Europe (2019): Contribution of non-programme Countries to EU Youth Wiki; Chapter 5: Participation: Bosnia and Herzegovina.

¹¹² Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (2019): Youth Study Bosnia and Herzegovina 2018/1019, p. 47.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Eurostat (2019): Ključni podaci o zemljama obuhvaćenim proširenjem.

¹¹⁵ Bosnia and Herzegovina Agency of Statistics (2020).

¹¹⁶ OECD (2022): OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Bosnia and Herzegovina.

¹¹⁷ Dayton Peace Agreement, Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitution, Article I.

decentralised to 10 cantons with their own governments. At the national level, youth issues are under the jurisdiction of the Commission for Co-ordination of Youth Issues in *Bosnia and Herzegovina* and the newly established Section for youth and mobility at the Ministry of Civil Affairs.¹¹⁸ However, most of the constitutional competences regarding youth issues are at the entity level. At the *Bosnia and Herzegovina* (central) level, the Commission for Coordination of Youth Issues and the Section for Youth and Mobility are in place and operational within the Council of Ministers and the Ministry of Civil Affairs. At the entity level, all three tiers of government (*Republika Srpska*, *Federation Bosnia and Herzegovina* and the Brcko District) have their respective youth laws. *Republika Srpska* had a youth policy for 2016-2020, while the new one is yet to be developed. *Republika Srpska* adopted its Employment Strategy 2021-2027, including the Youth Guarantees. A similar strategy was not adopted in the *Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina*. In addition, several local-level youth strategies are developed across the country, though most of the country's local municipalities lack such documents. Youth Councils have been established across different tiers of government, though a national-level Council is not in place. Youth Councils are organised as institutional representative youth structures able to participate in all decision-making processes concerning youth at all levels of government.

Relevant sector strategies include the Joint Socio- Economic Reform Agenda, Strategic Framework for *Bosnia and Herzegovina* and Economic Reform Programme, updated annually on a 3-year roll-on basis. As a rolling programme, the Economic Reform Programme 2017- 2020 and 2021-2023 contain a medium-term macroeconomic and fiscal policy framework. The *Joint Socio-Economic Reform Agenda for 2019- 2022* underlines the accession to the EU as the key strategic priority and identifies the key reform objectives: sustainable and accelerated economic growth, increased competitiveness and improved business environment; depoliticisation, improved sustainability and efficiency of public enterprises; improved quality of the health system; improved opportunities for youth, women and other vulnerable groups. The *Strategic Framework for Bosnia and Herzegovina*¹¹⁹ outlines a medium-term development vision of the country and presents five growth and development principles: integrated, smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, as well as governance for growth; and 14 strategic priorities/goals, with the ones relevant for this Action Document's objectives being: i) ensure human capital development; ii) increasing employment opportunities; and iii) reducing poverty and social exclusions. In addition, the Ministry of Civil Affairs initiated and coordinated a process of developing a country-wide employment strategic document – *Priorities in the Field of Youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2019- 2022* that would encompass entity-level strategies.¹²⁰

1.1.3 EU-Bosnia and Herzegovina cooperation framework

The *Stabilisation and Association Agreement/AA* with the EU was signed in 2008 and came into force in June 2015. Following several steps taken within the EU accession process, the EC submitted a recommendation to the EU Council to grant *Bosnia and Herzegovina* a candidate status in October 2022, which was granted by the European Council in December 2022. Under the Strategic Asset Allocation, *Bosnia and Herzegovina* and the EU MS were required to cooperate, among other sectors, on formal and non-formal education, youth policy and work.¹²¹ Besides, the Commission Communication of 2018 on *A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans*¹²² stressed the challenges facing the private sector in the region, emphasising a youth lens. Further, the *Joint Conclusions of the Economic and Financial Dialogue between the EU and the Western Balkans and Türkiye*¹²³ (May 2020) called upon *Bosnia and Herzegovina* to take immediate measures to strengthen the employment sector.

The framework for EU assistance to the country during the period under evaluation was defined by the country (revised) *Indicative Strategy Paper* initially adopted for 2014-2017 and then subsequently updated in 2018 for 2014-2020.¹²⁴ The review of Annual Action Programmes/AAP showed that in most years of Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) II, the sectors mainly supported were: i)

¹¹⁸ Council of Europe (2019): Contribution of non-programme Countries to EU Youth Wiki; Chapter 5: Participation: Bosnia and Herzegovina.

¹¹⁹ Bosnia and Herzegovina Council of Ministers (2015): Strategic Framework of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

¹²⁰ Endorsed at the Second EU – Western Balkans Ministerial Meeting on Employment and Social Affairs, held in Slovenia in July 2021.

¹²¹ EC (2019): Analytical Report Accompanying the document Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council Commission Opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina's application for membership of the EU, p. 153.

¹²² EC (2018): Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Strasbourg, 6.2.2018.

¹²³ Council of Europe (2022): Joint Conclusions of the Economic and Financial Dialogue between the EU and the Western Balkans and Türkiye, Brussels, 24.5.2022.

¹²⁴ EC (2018): Revised indicative strategy papers 2014 – 2020 for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brussels, 3.8.2018.

Democracy and Governance; ii) Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights; and iii) Education, Employment and Social Policies. *Erasmus+* (2014-2020) offers opportunities for youth mobility. IPA instruments (CBC, Civil Society Facility (CSF) also provide support to the youth organisations).¹²⁵

Over the period between 2014-2020, *EU and the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina cooperated on various youth issues* at both the national and regional level, through EU-led initiatives addressing youth key challenges. Regionally, the country participated in several youth initiatives focussed on youth engagement, employment and mobility. A good example is the *Western Balkans Youth Lab* Project, a three-year EU-funded and RCC implemented project that aims to enable youth participation in decision-making. *Bosnia and Herzegovina* participates actively in the *Western Balkans* Platform on Education and Training, in the international dimension of the *Erasmus+* programme and its Western Balkans Youth Window, as well as in policy support networks and electronic platforms. However, consecutive EU Country Reports for *Bosnia and Herzegovina* noted the lack of effective coordination at the state level as an issue of concern as it relates to the country's full participation in the EU's education programme.¹²⁶ The country also participated since 2017 in the EU's Competitiveness of Enterprises and SMEs programme. However, the 2020 and 2021 EU Country Reports for *Bosnia and Herzegovina* noted that the country did not tap into the potential of Competitiveness of Enterprises and SMEs to assist SMEs in accessing markets.¹²⁷

The country contributes to the *RYCO*, which is the initiative that fosters youth participation and regional cohesion. Besides, Bosnia and Herzegovina benefits from the Digital Agenda for the World Bank and the *World Bank Agenda for Innovation Research, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport*, which contributes to a more sustainable economy, jobs creation and digital transformation of the region. Under the World Bank Agenda for Innovation, research, culture, youth and sports, Bosnia also benefits from the *EU4YOUTH: EU Scheme for Young Professionals in the Western Balkans*, contributing to "reconciliation and good neighbourly relations in the *Western Balkans* by increasing people-to-people contacts and regional cooperation opportunities for young professionals, notably young civil servants".¹²⁸

The country also benefits from other regional programmes benefiting youth or other vulnerable groups, including the *Technical assistance to CSOs in the Western Balkans and Türkiye*, improving capacities and strengthening the role of CSOs. *ROMACTED*, which promotes good governance and Roma empowerment at the local level, also include *Bosnia and Herzegovina*. The country is also associated with *Horizon 2020*, where it participates in activities more directly related to the industry, mainly with providers of support services and not in the SME Instrument.

As for bilateral initiatives, *Bosnia and Herzegovina* benefits from EU partnerships with EU MS and/or their international development agencies, including *Sweden, Austria, Poland, and Germany*. Partnerships are made across the sectors, mainly focussing on the ones which have a strong youth component, such as employment (e.g. *Youth Employment Project* with the involvement of *Austria* and *Switzerland*), education (e.g. *School Exchanges Project* in cooperation with GIZ), but also some sub-sectors such as agriculture and rural development, addressing vulnerable groups such as youth and women (e.g. *Contribution Agreement for the Action: EU Support to COVID-19 Recovery and Resilience of Agriculture and Rural Development in Bosnia and Herzegovina/EU4Agri recovery*). More details on bilateral and multilateral initiatives are in the findings section below.

Other relevant donor initiatives supporting youth include *Promoting Inclusive Labour Market Solutions in the Western Balkans Project*, implemented by the Austrian Development Agency, International Labour Organisation (ILO) and UNDP, which started in 2018 and is in its second phase of implementation, with one of the core activities being the creation of a learning portal for the Public Employment Service staff (including management). *The Employment and Social Affairs Platform* project is a regional project financed by the EU and implemented jointly by the RCC and ILO, working along the three main components: i) informal Employment and Undeclared Work; ii) employment Policies and Measures; and iii) Western Balkans engagement in EU employment and social policies. *Youth Employment Project* is a longstanding bilateral project funded by the Swiss Cooperation Office, whose objective was to support youth employment in *Bosnia and Herzegovina*.

1.2 Focus of the case study

This country case study examines EU support to youth areas in *Bosnia and Herzegovina*. Case studies, like the present one, do not seek to carry out a full-fledged evaluation of all aspects of EU youth support.

¹²⁵ DG NEAR (n.a.): Factographic Bosnia and Herzegovina.

¹²⁶ See EC (2020): Country Report: Bosnia and Herzegovina; or EC (2021): Country Report: Bosnia and Herzegovina.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ EC (2021): Action Document for "EU4YOUTH: EU Scheme for Young Professionals in the Western Balkans", IPA III/2021/043-643/09.

They are mainly background notes that feed into the overall strategic evaluation of EU support to Youth in the three regions covered – by going deeper into country-specific factors that influenced the design of programmes and interventions to support youth needs and priorities, their implementation and the results achieved. The analysis covers the diversity of EU support to the youth in *Bosnia and Herzegovina* in terms of types of programmes, themes, modalities and channels (National Government, UN and development agencies, EU MS, NGOs, and private sector).

Data collection and analysis were structured along the EQ and JC. Issues related to: i) the policy and policy framework and responsive programming (EQ 1); ii) the choice of methods, channels and instruments (EQ 2); and iii) the partnerships (EQ 3) were examined by looking at the entire EU portfolio. Thematic issues, including those related to the effects on youth engagement in political/policy processes (EQ 4); Economic Integration (EQ 5); Social Cohesion and Inclusion (EQ 6), Peace and Security (EQ 7) were examined, focussing on a sample of EU-funded interventions identified by the evaluation team for a more in-depth analysis. The final sample of interventions was selected through: i) the global mapping EU support (see main report); ii) the mapping of EU support to *Bosnia and Herzegovina*; and iii) feedback from the EUD.

The sample reflects the diversity of EU support to the youth in *Bosnia and Herzegovina* by including i) youth-targeted interventions; ii) interventions where youth represented one of the main beneficiaries, but not exclusively; iii) interventions in sectors relevant to youth (e.g. where youth is one of the indirect beneficiaries or where it can be expected that their interest has been mainstreamed). Besides, CBC projects and regional interventions that also included *Bosnia and Herzegovina* as a country of focus (e.g. RYCO, RCC's Youth Lab' UNDP's *ReLOaD* project, etc.) were also examined.

Table 4 *Main bilateral contracts sampled in Bosnia and Herzegovina*

Year	Intervention/ Contract title	Cris ref.	Contracting party	Ctr amount
2018	Civil Society Facility and Media Albania-Action 2	D-38961		
2018	Youth Empowerment and Development Initiative – CSF – 2018	C-400814	Agency for Cooperation Education and Development	499.991
2018	Education Reform to Secure Youth Employment through Enterprise-based Learning – CSF – 2018	C-402461	Association Rights for All	397.787
2020	CSF and media Albania – Action 2 – allocation 2019 (2018-2019CSF)	D-40647		
2020	Youth Retention Programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina General Mobilisation – Youth and CS	C-421628	Citizens Association	500.000
2020	Youth for Better Media – Youth and CS	C-421495	Media And Civil Society Development Foundation	467.480
2022	Employment, Education and Social Policies	D-41214		
2022	Facilitation of Academic Exchange Lot 1 Universities in Support of EU goals, policies, cooperation and integration Unis 4 EU	C-436001	International Burch University	248.910
2022	Facilitation of Academic Exchange Lot 2: Introducing Student Research Mobilities to Bosnia and Herzegovina Unis – Introducing Student Research Mobilities to Bosnia and Herzegovina Universities (INSTREAM)	C-436018	International Burch University	149.834
2022	Facilitation of Academic Exchange Lot 3: Increasing Bosnia and Herzegovina participation in Horizon Europe by supporting academic staff – IPH SAS	C-436025	International Burch University	399.547
2022	Facilitation of Academic Exchange Lot 4	C-435998	International Burch University	199.938
2021	Go Digital in Bosnia and Herzegovina	C-430435	European Bank for Reconstruction And Development	9.000.000
2020	EU Support to Local Employment Partnerships – Phase II (LEP II)	C-421753	ILO	4.000.000

<i>Year</i>	<i>Intervention/ Contract title</i>	<i>Cris ref.</i>	<i>Contracting party</i>	<i>Ctr amount</i>
2021	EU4DigitalSME: EU support for digitalisation of Small and Medium size Enterprises in Bosnia and Herzegovina	C-425779	GIZ	3.500.000
2021	EU4DigitalSME: EU support for digitalisation of Small and Medium size Enterprises in Bosnia and Herzegovina	C-425779	GIZ	1.500.000
2022	CBC 2018-2020 Action Programme Bosnia and Herzegovina-Montenegro (Allocation 2019)	D-41462		
2022	EU Support to Youth Employability and Employment Opportunities in the Cross-border area Your Job – CBC employment	C-432032	Caritas of Bosnia And Herzegovina	364.438
2018	Special Measure on supporting Bosnia and Herzegovina in managing migration flows	D-41545		
2018	Special Measures to Support the Response to the Refugee and Migrant Situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina	C-401625	International Organisation for Migration (IOM)	7.217.168
2019	Special Measure on supporting Bosnia and Herzegovina in managing migration flows	D-42095		
2019	Special Measures to support the response to the Refugee and Migrant situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina Phase II	C-408095	International Organisation for Migration (IOM)	23.000.000
2020	Special Measure on supporting Bosnia and Herzegovina in managing migration flows	D-42501		
2020	Special Measure to support the response to the refugee and migrant situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina Phase III	C-417356	International Organisation for Migration (IOM)	45.000.000

Table 5 *Main regional contracts sampled in in Bosnia and Herzegovina*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Intervention/ Contract title</i>	<i>Cris ref.</i>	<i>Contracting party</i>	<i>Planned amount</i>
2018	Cross-Border Institution Building (CBIB+) Phase III	D- 39402		
2018	Enhancing youth cooperation and youth exchange in Western Balkan	C-391015	RYCO	500.000
2018	Enterprise Development and Innovation Facility (EDIF) – Guarantee Facility - Youth Employment (WB EDIF GF Youth)	C-401317	European Investment Fund	2.000.000
2020	Civil Society Facility and Media Albania – 2020CSF	D-42327		
2020	Regional Programme on Local Democracy in the Western Balkans 2 (ReLOaD2)	C-421996	UNDP	11.350.000
2017	Regional Programme on Local Democracy in the Western Balkans (ReLOaD)	C-382867	UNDP	8.500.000

2 Findings

2.1 Policy framework and responsive programming (EQ 1)

The EU has made efforts to understand the youth challenges in the country context. Rooted in the Indicative Strategy Papers, Annual Action Programmes/AAPs, and country-specific reports, the EU's commitment covers a broad spectrum, including support to education, employment, social inclusion and civil society strengthening, albeit with political participation receiving lesser emphasis. While the commitment to youth issues is commendable, the strategy often amalgamates the youth with a myriad of vulnerable groups, thus diluting the focus. **A lack of a dedicated focal point for the youth portfolio within the EUD, further fragments the youth programming and presents a threat of missing opportunities for more comprehensive or coherent youth-related portfolio.** Peace-building and reconciliation interventions specifically targeting youth at the country level were not found.

The complexity of the Bosnian governance and administrative structures pose **challenges in designing realistic interventions that can be implemented within the operational framework.** Particularly highlighted in the Annual Action Programme/AAP from 2020, the intricate governance structures in *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, which divide responsibilities across various cantonal and entity levels, have impeded the EU's initiatives. Although the EU invests significantly in understanding and addressing youth challenges, there exists a recurrent discord between strategic commitments and their operationalisation. As illustrated, the Education and Employment Project, as critiqued by Results Oriented Monitoring (ROM), was challenged by issues like ambitious timelines and overlooked local capacities and stakeholder interests.

Lastly, **while reporting structures exist, there is an inconsistency in their implementation.** Though some interventions, like the EU Support to Local Employment Partnerships – Phase II (LEP II), showcase best practices in monitoring and evaluation, a broader consistency in reporting mechanisms is lacking. This gap hinders a comprehensive understanding of the collective contributions of various projects and interventions.

2.1.1 Policy frameworks and strategies take into account regional and national specificities (JC 1.1)

The EU's strategic frameworks and initiatives highlight a commitment to addressing youth educational and employability challenges in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but a number of operational, administrative, and strategic aspects of operationalising this commitment warrant recalibration (I-1.1.1 and I-1.1.2). The EU's strategic (Indicative Strategy Papers, Annual Action Programmes/AAPs, etc.), and analytical documents (EU country reports, intervention level reports, etc.) showcase a concerted effort to understand pressing challenges encountered by the youth in *Bosnia and Herzegovina*. The EU's commitment is underlined by its extensive exploration of themes such as youth education, employment, migration, empowerment, civic understanding, though to a lesser extent the youth political participation. Strategic instruments, such as the Indicative Strategy Papers and the Annual Action Programmes/AAPs, include commitments to addressing such youth challenges, though including the youth as one among a variety of vulnerable beneficiary groups (women, minorities, elderly, children, etc.). The EU has interwoven youth perspectives and responses to the youth challenges under sector interventions and also under narratives like democratisation, human rights, civil society both at country-level and regionally. For instance, regional interventions, such as the RYCO or RCC's Youth Lab, have made notable strides in connecting with the Bosnian youth. The case study research did not find specific evidence of peace-building or reconciliation interventions focussing on youth at the country level, though the RYCO interventions included the youth in regional social cohesion interventions.

However, there are variations in terms of scope and outreach of these interventions to young people. Some interventions under the Employment, Education and Social policies (e.g. the LEP II) are longer-term, highlighting the EU's sustained engagement. The LEP II foresaw at least ten programmes and services for groups with limited access to employment, including vulnerable youth and women, long-term unemployed, people with disabilities and minorities.¹²⁹ The LEP II followed up on previous LEP cycle which was implemented for the period 2016-2019, resulting (among other outputs) in at least 1,000 trained unemployed or working poor with at least 33% from vulnerable groups (youth, returnees, minorities, etc.).¹³⁰ The long-term engagement has resulted in more sustained changes in terms of building local partnerships and coherent approaches, as corroborated by ROM reports and stakeholder interviews. Simultaneously, the EU's interventions have been circumspectly expanded to include programmes like the *Youth Retention Programme* in *Bosnia and Herzegovina* and the *General Mobilisation Project*, among others.

However, a closer examination, particularly of the Annual Action Programme/AAP from 2020, brings to light certain operational bottlenecks. The complex governance and administrative structures in *Bosnia*

¹²⁹ EC (2022): EU Support to Local Employment Partnerships- Phase II, Annual Progress Report, Jan 2021-April 2022, p.13,16.

¹³⁰ EC, International Labour Organisation (2014): Support to Local Employment Partnerships in Bosnia and Herzegovina, p.7.

and *Herzegovina*, reflected in fragmented responsibilities across cantons and entities, has inadvertently stifled EU's endeavours in the employment and education spheres, as found in document review and corroborated by interviewed stakeholders. For illustration, the Education and Employment Project was criticised by ROM for not taking into consideration the capacities or opposed interests of beneficiaries, finding the overall project design has been proved to be overambitious, in terms of time management and capacities.¹³¹

2.1.2 Enabling Institutional environment (JC 1.2)

EU's efforts to programme youth responsive interventions in complex systems such as the Bosnian one encounter challenges in designing lean and realistic interventions, which would be feasible to implement within the given operational framework (I-1.2.2 and I-1.2.3). EU invests in political economy and analysis of youth challenges and translates them into concrete and relevant engagement activities in various youth-related fields – education, employment, civic knowledge, political participation, youth migration, etc. However, findings collected through document review and stakeholder interviews point to concerns regarding realistic engagement strategies, project design, and implementation ambitions, stemming from varied extent to which EU interventions took into account the actual capabilities and limitations of stakeholders or the different interests of beneficiaries. The challenges encountered in designing realistic interventions within the operational framework of the Bosnian system were cited by interviewed stakeholders to stem from the complex governance structure, which involves multiple entities and divisions of responsibilities. Conflicting interests among various stakeholders, limited understanding of local capacities and needs, and the political and social dynamics of the country further contribute to the difficulties in developing interventions that can effectively address youth challenges. In some cases, the case study research found that EU included overambitious interventions that have been timely and capacity-wise unrealistic to execute.¹³² Besides, as found in document review and corroborated through stakeholder interviews, EU's sector interventions applied a catch-all style, targeting too many sector areas and installing complicated coordination mechanisms, which raised concerns about their effectiveness.

A lack of a dedicated focal point covering youth portfolio in EUD contributes to fragmentation of youth-related interventions (I-1.2.1). EU programmes do respond to youth challenges by integrating youth-specific responses concretely in education and employment or other sector-specific youth-related initiatives. However, interventions are distributed among different managers with sector-specific portfolios rather than having a centralised and dedicated focus on youth issues. The absence of a dedicated focal point for youth portfolio within the EUD contributes to fragmentation and insufficient coordination of youth-related interventions. It also leads to missing opportunities to design and implement more comprehensive interventions, due to lack of understanding or interest to explore synergies or complementary actions across sectors, as corroborated by stakeholder interviews. According to the feedback from stakeholders, there is little information or guidance on youth mainstreaming or incentives for mainstreaming youth in the programmes. According to some EUD interlocutors, the mainstreaming of the youth is not seen as priority. The EUD is not informed consistently on updates or initiatives for youth mainstreaming, and there is no political support or demand from the EU HQ to focus on this.

While EU interventions follow standard EU reporting guidelines, there is a lack of consistent programme-level reporting, which would ensure a comprehensive overview of how individual projects and activities contribute to joint results (I-1.2.3). The review of sampled interventions indicates to inconsistent approaches by implementing partners when it comes to level of elaboration of Monitoring and Evaluation framework, as also corroborated by ROM reports,¹³³ which see this as a limitation. An example of good practice is the LEP II Project, which has an adequate internal monitoring system in place, with a quarterly reporting system for LEP grantees and periodic visits to the field, including a full time engaged Monitoring & Evaluation Officer.¹³⁴ Intervention level reporting follows EU reporting guidelines, presenting youth-related output level results and ensuring an insight in the gaps, recommendations and follow-ups (as exemplified by the *Youth Retention Programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina General Mobilisation*; Education Reform to Secure Youth Employment through Enterprise-based Learning; etc.). ROMs were done on a number of sampled projects, but not on all. No mid-term or final evaluations were available for sampled interventions.

¹³¹ EU (2021): Education for Employment, Bosnia and Herzegovina, ROM Report, p.4.

¹³² Ibid, p.3.

¹³³ E.g. Education for Employment, Bosnia and Herzegovina or Facilitation of Academic Exchange Lot 2: Introducing Student Research Mobilities to Bosnia and Herzegovina Unis – INSTREAM.

¹³⁴ EU (2022): EU Support to Local Employment Partnerships – Phase II (LEP II), ROM Report, p.5.

2.2 Mix of EU delivery methods, funding channels and instruments (EQ 2)

The EU's support for youth-related challenges in Bosnia and Herzegovina is provided through various means and channels, including both targeted interventions and components within sector-specific support. **Synergies and complementarities between EU sector portfolios, especially in the employment sector, have been observed in various projects**, demonstrating some level of flexibility and openness to adjustments based on opportunities and constraints. **However, challenges exist in ensuring efficient project implementation** due to complex setups, the involvement of numerous stakeholders, and insufficient capacities or resources, but also due to internal fragmentation and coordination issues in youth-related interventions.

EU programming is done through joint consultative processes with government, EU MS, implementing partners and civil society; consultations with the youth are minimal and not consistent.

2.2.1 Responsiveness of modalities (JC 2.1)

There are no budget support modalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The selection of modalities and implementing partners is done in consultation with the government and development partners, though consultations with the youth are limited and inconsistent (I-2.1.2, I-2.1.3, I-1.2.4). The EU acts as a singular donor but works in consortium with other bilateral and multilateral actors (as shown in EQ 3), mainly using grants (e.g. *EU4Business*) and service contracts. The case study research found that the selection of the modalities at intervention or sectoral level basis was based on consultations with the government, other donors or is based on experiences from prior cooperation with implementing partners. According to the feedback from stakeholders, the EU does consider the added value of applied modalities in light of complex governance system in Bosnia and Herzegovina, ensuring that there is a right and feasible mix of interventions.

There is evidence of synergies between EU sector portfolios, especially concerning employment, which is an important intervention sector. Additionally, there is evidence that the EU selects partners who have experience in implementing youth related activities, but also who have strong strategic positioning in themes concerning the youth. For instance, the LEP II is implemented by ILO, which has had long time experience in implementing youth-related interventions. The LEP II includes a youth component referring to support to young people in the IT sector and *EU4Business*, a joint EU-Federal Republic of Germany funded project, have been seen as an example of good synergies, where the Start and Improve Your Business Programme trainers certified through *EU4Business* are available to LEPs to provide trainings for at least 300 unemployed persons.¹³⁵ Also, Facilitation of Academic Exchange Lot 2: Introducing Student Research Mobilities to Bosnia and Herzegovina Unis/INSTREAM (under Employment, Education and Social Policies), has been in synergy with other projects referring to the academic community and no overlaps with other interventions taking place at the same time have been identified.¹³⁶ Additionally, CBC Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina 2022 Action Document emphasise that for the first thematic priority for the Joint Task Force – investing in youth, education and skills – the alignment and synergies with other EC interventions would be ensured (for instance, with *Erasmus+* and European Solidarity Corps).¹³⁷ Within CBC *Montenegro* and *Bosnia and Herzegovina* 2022 Programme, there is a synergy between the only operation within a programme targeting youth in particular, i.e. the *Youth Drive* – Programme for raising awareness on proper waste management and empowering legislators to take action, and another operation from the same Call, i.e. “Cycling routes to improve natural and cultural heritage of *Herzegovina and Montenegro*”,¹³⁸ when it comes to environment protection. Similarly, the EU4Private sector development in *Bosnia and Herzegovina* (post COVID-19) activity notified that its grant support would be synchronised with Youth Guarantee Facility, as well as with ongoing and planned programmes aimed at youth and women entrepreneurship (e.g. the ones creating and strengthening links with diaspora).¹³⁹ Finally, linkages between EU-funded activities and United States Agency for International Development/USAID’s Monitoring and Evaluation Support Activity II (MEASURE II) were mentioned.¹⁴⁰ According to collected feedback from stakeholders and

¹³⁵ EU (2022): EU Support to Local Employment Partnerships – Phase II (LEP II), ROM Report, p.4.

¹³⁶ EU (2023): Facilitation of Academic Exchange Lot 2: Introducing Student Research Mobilities to Bosnia and Herzegovina Unis – INSTREAM, ROM Report.

¹³⁷ EC (2020): Cross-border cooperation programme Serbia: Bosnia and Herzegovina for 2021-2027, Action Document, p.22.

¹³⁸ EC (2021): Mid-term evaluation of cross border cooperation programmes between IPA II beneficiaries, Volume II – IPA CBC Programme Review Bosnia and Herzegovina – Republic of Montenegro, p.114.

¹³⁹ EC (2021): EU4 Private Sector Development in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Post COVID-19), 2021, p. 9.

¹⁴⁰ United States Agency for International Development (2023): Monitoring and Evaluation Support Activity II (MEASURE II) National youth survey in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2022. Final Report, p.7.

document review, the EU does not insist in youth-centred approaches, which results in the youth being included as one among many beneficiary groups.

However, the case study research found that the EU does not maintain close consultations with the youth (representatives) (I-1.2.1). As cited by interviewed stakeholders from EUD and youth organisations, more consistent interaction is made between the EUD's political section and the youth when it comes to youth advocacy or outreach activities. The EU Info Centre network in strategic country points (Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Brcko District and Mostar) are considered as good venues to gather local insights and ensuring "go local" approach when it comes to various demands and challenges, including youth-related ones. However, these were noted more in the context of improving EU visibility and communication, and interviewed stakeholders raised uncertainties to the extent to which the youth demands come through such initiatives nor how and if they feed the EU's programming strategy. In line with this, the case study research found that the youth participation in EU's programming is minimal, which is considered as a shortcoming by interviewed stakeholders from civil society. Young leaders are consulted within the framework of some projects, such as the *Youth Retention Programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina – General Mobilisation Project* where a Youth Expert Network was established and consulted on further project developments.¹⁴¹ However, interviewed stakeholders emphasised that such engagement is not ideal as it is project-based and does not develop into a more sustainable consultation strategy.

2.2.2 Flexibility of instruments and delivery methods (JC 2.2)

There has been a certain degree of flexibility and openness to timely adjustments depending on new opportunities or constraints (I-2.2.1 and 2.2.2). The EU interventions in Bosnia and Herzegovina were affected by a number of factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic but also economic downturns and challenges stemming from the Bosnian complex governance and administrative structures, necessitating swift adaptations in strategy and implementation. The EU mitigation measures included no-cost extensions or shifting activities online in response to the COVID-19 disruptions. Beyond the pandemic, projects faced other, more localised challenges. The "Combating unemployment through partnership with local actors" activity experienced a 2-month delay due to a combination of heavy snowfall and an extended procurement process.¹⁴²

Political and governance challenges were also found to affect the efficiency of projects, as also noted under EQ 1 above. The EU and implementing partners invested efforts to mitigate risks, though to a varying extent. For instance, the LEP II and "Facilitation of Academic Exchange Lot 3: Increasing *Bosnia and Herzegovina* participation in *Horizon Europe* by supporting academic staff," showcased efficacy across multiple facets, from choosing appropriate implementation modalities to proficiently managing unforeseen delays.¹⁴³ Others, namely, *Education for Employment in Bosnia and Herzegovina Project* and *Special Measures to Support the Response to the Refugee and Migrant Situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, was only efficient with regards to some aspects, such as the implementation mechanisms and/project management (e.g. *Special Measures to Support the Response to the Refugee and Migrant Situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina* – the International Organisation for Migration/IOM was responsible for the most resource-intensive activities, the accommodation, food, while United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees/UNHCR took over primary and secondary health care, protection of vulnerable groups).

¹⁴¹ EC (2019): Youth Retention Programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina – "General Mobilisation". Contract number: 2020/421-628, Civil Society and Media Programme for Bosnia and Herzegovina 2019 – Support to existing and newly established CSOs networks in various areas, p.2.

¹⁴² SIR (2017); Combating unemployment through partnership of local actors, Explanatory Note, p.1.

¹⁴³ EU (2022): EU Support to Local Employment Partnerships – Phase II (LEP II), ROM Report, p.6; EU (2021): Education for Employment, Bosnia and Herzegovina, ROM Report, p.5-7.

2.3 Partnerships are enhanced and EU-added value maximised (EQ 3)

EU partners and collaborates with EU MS and other development partners in interventions that, among other groups, also target youth. These partnerships cover areas such as education, employment, social inclusion at country level. Good cooperation examples include joint projects with Council of Europe, UN agencies, the World Bank and EU MS development agencies (e.g. GIZ, Sida, etc.). However, the case study research found that **a lack of coherent and systematic youth-centred approaches also diminish the full potential of EU's partnership approaches.**

Bosnia and Herzegovina participates in the *Jean Monnet* and *Erasmus+* programmes, which support youth and higher education mobility, traineeships, and non-formal development. While participation in *Erasmus+* has shown positive trends, participation in *Jean Monnet* activities, focussed on strengthening teaching and research on European integration, has been relatively weak.

Bosnian youth are also included as one of beneficiary groups in intra-regional and cross-border exchanges, or efforts to strengthen civic engagement and social cohesion at regional level. Illustrative examples include the **School Exchanges project implemented by RYCO or the RCC's Youth lab.** Challenges exist in motivating schools from *Republika Srpska* to participate in RYCO's Superschools Programme, while the Youth Lab has encountered no such challenges in engaging Bosnian stakeholders.

2.3.1 Partnerships with EU MS and other actors (JC 3.1 and 3.2)

The EU partners with EU MS in education and employment interventions, though Team Europe youth-centred approaches were not evidenced (I-3.1.1 and 3.1.2). EU partners with EU MS and their international cooperation agencies in various interventions. For illustration, the EU cooperated with GIZ in supporting RYCO to implement a flagship project on *School Exchanges* in the region, foreseen to end in 2022.¹⁴⁴ Also, to improve higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the EU and the Council of Europe joined forces for the *Strategic Development of Higher Education and Qualification Standards* Project in 2013-2015, which served as a base for further general and VET and Lifelong Learning.¹⁴⁵ The project Youth Employment implemented through the IPA 2014, with the support of *Switzerland* and *Austria*, aimed at assisting the reform of the employment system by providing youth with assistance in employment and start-up-related challenges.¹⁴⁶ According to the stakeholder feedback, however, more coherent and systematic youth-centred partnership approaches are not visible. Interviewed stakeholders cited that this mainly comes from the fact that the EU does not have a coherent or elaborated youth strategies or clear guidelines on how to approach youth programming.

Over the years, EU partnered with UN agencies, Swiss cooperation, the World Bank, etc. in implementing employment, education, and social inclusion interventions (I-3.2.1 and 3.2.2). UNDP has been the implementation partner for the EU-funded *ReLOaD2* in the *Western Balkans*, a total worth EUR 3.35 million and taking place between the beginning of 2021 and the end of 2024, focussing on strengthening civic knowledge, political participation and engagement of civil society, including the youth.¹⁴⁷ In the area of agriculture and as a countermeasure for COVID-19 (consequences), EUD concluded a Contribution Agreement for the Action: EU Support to COVID-19 *Recovery and Resilience of Agriculture and Rural Development in Bosnia and Herzegovina/EU4Agri* recovery with UNDP and Czech Development Agency worth EUR 5 million. The Action is foreseen to last from January 2021 to June 2023 and includes calls for grants, leading retention of 400 jobs, 20 innovative and green start-ups and creating 100 green jobs, whereas at least half of them are for women and youth.¹⁴⁸ These interventions were considered as positive by interviewed stakeholders from the point of aid effectiveness. However, some stakeholders from civil society raised the need for partnering more closely with civil society (youth) organisations, which is now missing as civil society representatives emphasised.

2.3.2 Expertise and knowledge on youth (JC 3.3)

Though EU interventions have been a good avenue for **knowledge on European models, approaches, and good practices, they did not substantially influence national youth policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina.** Majority of projects in the sample, notably in the education and employment areas, have served as good platforms for experience/knowledge sharing on ways in which youth can be supported. Good examples include EU support to the VET education, the student mobility or LEP or other employability interventions. these interventions have brought improvements in terms of infrastructure, new jobs or new skills for the youth. The Youth Guarantee initiative and has a potential

¹⁴⁴ RYCO (2021): The EU and Germany Fund New Project to Connect Schools in the Western Balkans Six.

¹⁴⁵ EC (2016): The Annual Action Programme 2016.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, p.8.

¹⁴⁷ UNDP (n.a): ReLOaD, Regional Programme on Local Democracy in the Western Balkans.

¹⁴⁸ EU Delegation to Bosnia and Herzegovina (2020): Internal Reporting.

to bring sweeping changes across the Employment sector, and will directly focus on bringing and operationalising European experiences and trends.

2.3.3 Exchanges with youth actors (JC 3.4)

Country specific, intra-regional and cross-border interventions and exchanges supported by EU have included the youth as one of beneficiary groups, though a limited number of such interventions included the youth as main target group (I-3.4.1 and I-3.4.2). Various instruments and programmes, including CSF; CBC; Youth in Action; *Jean Monnet* or *Erasmus+* provide opportunities for exchanges between *Bosnia and Herzegovina* and countries in the region or EU MS. However, as evidenced in the document review and as corroborated by stakeholder interviews, various interventions and projects do not necessarily engage youth as their main target groups, which makes it difficult to understand the transformative potential of such instruments or programmes. For instance, the review of the CBC Programme between *Bosnia and Herzegovina* and *Montenegro*, for the programming period 2014-2020, showed that majority interventions either did not include the youth as their final beneficiary or mentioned the youth among various beneficiary groups. Some projects, such as the *Youth Drive – Programme for raising awareness on proper waste management and empowering legislators to take action* or *POWER (People with disabilities: new Opportunities for Work, Employability, professional Rehabilitation)*, were the only projects that had more visible youth dimension.¹⁴⁹ The Creative Industries for Employment without Borders Action under CBC Programme Bosnia and Herzegovina-Montenegro also targets youth within its wider employment interventions, envisaging to reach out to 10,000 youth from the target areas and 50,000 other inhabitants from the target areas.¹⁵⁰ The CBC Bosnia and Herzegovina – Serbia document review does not show any youth-related operations.¹⁵¹

Other regional programmes, such as RYCO and the Youth Lab, implemented by RCC, also engage the youth from the country. Stakeholders interviewed agreed that both programmes tried to implement a genuine youth-centered approach. At the same time, they mentioned that certain challenges exist with motivating schools from *Republika Srpska* to participate in RYCO's Superschools Programme activities. Conversely, the Youth Lab programme did not encounter challenges in engaging with Bosnian stakeholders in organising its activities.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a part of the *Youth in Action*, which is evidenced to gather and engage young people in multinational activities.¹⁵² *Jean Monnet* and *Erasmus+* Programmes also provide support to youth higher education mobility, traineeships, and non-formal education. For instance, over the period between 2014/2015-2020, there were in total 948 projects involving Bosnia and Herzegovina, showing a visible upwards trend from 2015. Erasmus Mundus Joint master's degrees awarded 49 EU-funded scholarships to Master Students from *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, also with a slight upward trend, while there were in total only six selected projects for *Jean Monnet* activities.¹⁵³

2.4 Effects on Youth Engagement in policy processes (EQ 4)

While the EU has made attempts to integrate and support youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina to participate in political life and policy processes, there is a lack of a comprehensive, sustained, and youth-centric strategy to ensure their empowerment. Most interventions treat youth as just another beneficiary group, lacking a distinct youth-centric methodology or approach. The outcome is a fragmented landscape of interventions with negligible inter-sector collaboration, resulting in diluted youth outcomes. Over the reference period, **the EU efforts to bolster youth political participation and institutional inclusion in Bosnia and Herzegovina appear to have been marginal.** The case study research data indicate a piecemeal approach, without comprehensive engagement in youth policy-making. Though there were instances of sporadic interventions, such as the RCC's Youth Lab project and the UNDP's *ReLOaD* project, these were relatively isolated and not part of a broader, integrated strategy. For instance, the RCC's *Western Balkan* Youth Lab Project aimed to bridge the gap between the youth and policymakers, ensuring that the concerns of young people are integrated into policy-making. Yet, it remains a regional initiative, without much country-specific impact in Bosnia and Herzegovina. UNDP's *ReLOaD* project, inter alia, included youth within their wider civic education and community development efforts. Besides, even successful youth initiatives backed by CBC lacked sustainability, due to a lack of a follow-up post-project. **The prevailing sporadic approach not only diminishes potential impact but also risks alienating an important demographic. The approach was also not conducive for EU's contributions to the enhancement of the**

¹⁴⁹ EC (2021): Mid-term evaluation of cross border cooperation programmes between IPA II beneficiaries, Volume II – IPA CBC Programme Review Bosnia and Herzegovina – Republic of Montenegro, p.115-116.

¹⁵⁰ EC (2022): Cross-border Programme Bosnia and Herzegovina – Montenegro under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA II): Creative Industries for Employment without Borders. Grant Contract.

¹⁵¹ EC (2021): Mid-term evaluation of cross border cooperation programmes between IPA II beneficiaries, Synthesis Report.

¹⁵² EC (2014): The Annual Action Programme, 2014, p.45.

¹⁵³ EC (2021): Erasmus+ for higher education in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

political/institutional space for youth participation, as concrete interventions or political dialogue were not going in that direction. In fact, while EU uses political economy analyses to understand challenges, these are not transformed in concrete or consistent country-level interventions to support youth political empowerment or support to the duty bearers to invest in such efforts. While there are some examples of dialogue between duty bearers and youth on policies, these were mainly locally initiated, without EU support. **The EU engaged in some ad-hoc consultations with the youth but such endeavours were rather superficial, lacking the depth to foster transformational outcomes or concrete steps to empower or engage the youth to participate in dialogue including on EU accession agenda.** As exemplified by the Youth Retention Programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina, when they happened, the consultations with civil society happened within the scope of a project, which still remained rather restrictive. The general sentiment from the civil society suggests these consultations remain tied to individual projects, not transcending into a holistic EU youth-focussed approach. Moreover, according to stakeholder feedback, the lack of dialogue platforms meant that the outreach to vulnerable/discriminated groups was minimal. Lastly, **there's an evident void in youth empowerment in relation to EU external action and influence on EU policies.** The existing approach, or lack thereof, has limited youth participation to random instances rather than a strategic commitment.

2.4.1 Political and institutional space for youth and youth organisations (JC 4.1)

The EU has only minimally addressed political and institutional space for youth and youth organisations over the reference period (I-4.1.1 and I-4.1.2). The case study research findings suggest that the EU does not engage in youth policy-making in *Bosnia and Herzegovina* or youth political participation beyond some ad-hoc or individual interventions implemented within the auspices of EUD's political section or regional initiatives (e.g. the RCC's Youth Lab project or to lesser extent the UNDP's *ReLOaD* project). The RCC's Western Balkan Youth Lab Project, was initiated in 2020 and focussed on mobilising and connecting youth and policymakers in the region (including representatives from Bosnia and Herzegovina), and creating opportunities for young people to be vocal about their challenges but also ensuring that these become integral parts of policy-making process.¹⁵⁴ Currently, there are two thematic Labs, on Unemployment and on Mental Health. Also, UNDP-implemented *ReLOaD* project includes a youth component, that aims to stimulate and ensure (inter alia – youth) participation in decision-making, civic education, volunteering, and other local solidarity initiatives for community development.¹⁵⁵ Document review also found some CBC-supported youth participation initiatives, which were not followed up on after the expiration of such CBC projects, despite their success.¹⁵⁶ A lack of more consistent and vocal EU's support to youth political participation and youth policies was criticised by interviewed youth and CSO stakeholders, particularly from the perspective of EU's crucial policy and political role within the country's complex governance and political system.

EU sector interventions do include consultations with the youth, though such activities were found to be too superficial to contribute to any wider transformational results (I-4.1.3). The main venues for consultations with youth are found to be intervention-level activities, or some outreach or communication activities implemented by the EUD's political section. For instance, the *Youth Retention Programme* in *Bosnia and Herzegovina – General Mobilisation Project* had two special sub-activities: i) Activity 2.4: Direct support to youth CSO; and ii) sub-Activity 3.1: Public debates between youth organisations, entrepreneurs and institutions related to high school enrolment policies. Both focussed on strengthening CSOs seeking to promote the emergence of young leaders.¹⁵⁷ Similarly, within the Education Reform to Secure Youth Employment through Enterprise-based Learning Project, student associations/CSOs, the business community, education and youth associations, universities or colleges joined cross-sectoral synergies and capacities with the student Erasmus Student Network.¹⁵⁸ Within a CSF-funded Youth Empowerment and Development Initiative project, a series of capacity building,

¹⁵⁴ For instance, the Youth Community Centres Project focussed on strengthening youth participation and representation in community life and the decision-making process (in Pounje region). The overall objective of improving quality of life and social cohesion was achieved and evident through developing and adopting Youth policy in Republika Srpska. Moreover, youth activism and youth participation in local communities have improved as the number of projects and activities initiated and implemented by youth increased by 30% by the end of the project, whereas two projects written by young people were funded and implemented. A youth network was developed to enhance participation, and seven Facebook pages were opened, connecting and engaging 2279 young people. However, the best practices and established mechanisms by this project did not receive any follow up support, which was found to be a major missed opportunity by interviewed stakeholders knowledgeable of the intervention.

¹⁵⁵ UNDP (n.a); *ReLOaD*, Regional Programme on Local Democracy in the World Bank.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ EC (2019): Youth Retention Programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina – “General Mobilisation”. Contract number: 2020/421-628, Civil Society and Media Programme for Bosnia and Herzegovina 2019 – Support to existing and newly established CSOs networks in various areas. Annex VI Interim Narrative Report, p.12.

¹⁵⁸ EU resurs (2023): Završen Javni poziv za izbor najboljeg videa o studentskoj praksi.

training, policy development workshops and round tables were organised strengthening youth organisations capacity and preparing them for development of Youth Manifesto.¹⁵⁹ However, the case study research did not find any evidence of the use of this Manifesto for any advocacy or follow up activities. Besides, interviewed civil society stakeholders noted that the intervention-level consultations are mostly project-based and do not contribute or help promote more consistent EU youth-centred approaches. This is considered by interviewed CSO stakeholders as a shortcoming.

2.4.2 Dialogue and cross-sectoral collaboration (JC 4.2)

Evidence collected through document review and stakeholder interviews shows a rather weak and inconsistent EU's approach to the political empowerment of the youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Some more consistent, albeit small-scale dialogue efforts that are mainly focussing on raising awareness on the role of EU Special Representative in *Bosnia and Herzegovina* are done by the Political department. The EU interventions in the country have not had consistent focus on promoting political empowerment of the youth by fostering dialogue with the state on all relevant issues for young people. There were no projects that focussed on this specifically. As noted in other sections, EU does not have consistent dialogue platforms that engage youth proactively, and where youth participate, this is mainly as representatives of civil society. The EU also did not invest in the consistent support to the youth structures and state agencies as duty bearers. Such support is mainly provided by other donors (e.g. United States Agency for International Development/USAID, Sida, etc.). As noted in other sections of this Case study, the EU also did not consistently invest in empowering the youth to participate in the policy processes on EU accession either.

2.4.3 Policy, legislative and institutional frameworks (JC 4.3)

There is no evidence of consistent EU country-specific approaches to strengthen policy, legislative or institutional frameworks in support to the youth in *Bosnia and Herzegovina* (I-4.3.1, I-4.3.2). While some interventions did include support to local youth policies as a part of wider intervention-level framework (e.g. the *Youth Retention Programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina – General Mobilisation* project), such interventions were only short-term and their results were not followed up as confirmed by desk review and stakeholder interviews.

EU cross-border interventions tackle cross-border and regional social cohesion issues and improve neighbourhood cooperation (I-4.3.3). RYCO is the most important player on this matter, and the EU recognises and supports its efforts to reinforce and promote reconciliation, cooperation, inclusion and exchange among young people. One of the flagship projects funded by EU with EUR 1.5 million focusses on *School Exchanges* in the region,¹⁶⁰ the RCC's Youth Labs project, and CBC funded small projects. However, none of these interventions go beyond social cohesion or exchanges towards peace-building.

There is scarce evidence of direct youth empowerment to engage in EU external action and influence EU policies and actions (I-4.3.4). As mentioned in other EQs, the case study research findings point to a lack of consistent youth-centred approaches, which also lead to lack of awareness or a need to consult with the youth in programming or policy dialogue. According to document review and stakeholder interviews, EU consults with civil society on sector issues, and while it may happen that youth representatives do participate, this is merely a coincidence and not a result of EU's commitment or focus. Civil society and other external stakeholders found this to be a limitation.

2.5 Effects on Economic Integration (EQ 5)

The EU's interventions in Bosnia and Herzegovina have undoubtedly made strides in youth economic empowerment. The EU has been a significant force in promoting economic development and employability, particularly among the youth. This commitment is evident in initiatives like the EU4 Employment and Education Action, which prioritises youth economic integration by making education more attuned to labour market needs. The recent initiative to introduce the Youth Guarantee in the Western Balkans is considered by stakeholder as the new incentive to assist national governments' efforts to adopt the EU's strategic approach. Although Bosnia and Herzegovina's journey with this initiative is still in its initial stages, early signs of progress are evident with the commitment of national decision makers to establish the Youth Guarantee Working Group and the identify pilot locations for modelling the Youth guarantee approaches. However, concerns persist about the absorption capacity of national institutions that are considered by stakeholders as a likely hindrance to its successful execution. Some steps in integrating the youth in the green and digital transformation were made under the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans 2020, but they still remain rather vague.

¹⁵⁹ EC (2017): Youth Empowerment and Development Initiative. 2018/400-814, Civil Society and Media Action for Bosnia and Herzegovina, p.14.

¹⁶⁰ See more about the project on Regional Youth Cooperation Office (2023): School Exchange.

The EU interventions have recognised and addressed the diverse challenges faced by various vulnerable groups, including the youth, such as those with disabilities, minorities, long term unemployed, etc. The IPA 2022 Action document and the 2022 EU4People Activity further reiterate this commitment with their focus on supporting youth, rural women, and other vulnerable unemployed categories. **However, the case study research found that EU contributions are muted by factors such as the fragmented governance structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Inconsistency in monitoring mechanisms, and a lack of a wider enabling environment for businesses** have been raised as hurdles to realising the full potential of these initiatives.

Another challenge as evidenced by this case study is the EU's approach to collecting and analysing evidence of its contributions when it comes to youth economic empowerment. The EU projects were good in collating valuable project-specific data (including on youth employment), but there is a lack of sectoral aggregation and analysis. However, the case study research found that the EU has actively promoted dialogue among local stakeholders, fostering partnerships and consultations to shape a more inclusive employment landscape. This dialogue is evident in initiatives like the LEP project and the *Youth Retention* Programme.

The case study research found that **main EU contributions are evidenced in particular when it comes to the skills development of young people, local employment support, and entrepreneurship.** However, high outmigration of Bosnian youth to Western Europe indicates deeper systemic issues that are difficult to be overcome by individual interventions, demanding more strategic approaches. Youth guarantee is considered by stakeholders to be a potentially good measure to strengthen national institutions and empower and retain Bosnia and Herzegovina's youth.

2.5.1 Relevance of implementation approaches (JC 5.1)

EU has strongly supported economic development and employability aspects, including also of youth, through its investments in youth education, employment, and entrepreneurship (I-5.1.1).

Through its strategic support, either project or programme-based, EU recognises the economic challenges youth are facing and directs a large part of its support towards enhancing vulnerable groups' (including youth) future employment prospects. Such interventions include capacity building, connecting market demands and investing in education and skills as well as strengthening formal and informal education institutions (VET, lifelong learning), etc. A good example is the Education, Employment and Social Policies Sector totalling EUR 17.9 million, within which the EU4 Employment and Education Action aimed at strengthening focal points of (youth) economic integration, namely: i) responsiveness of education to labour market needs; ii) internationalisation and mobility in higher education; iii) development of social inclusion policies in sport and pre-school at relevant levels; and iv) better employability in local communities.¹⁶¹ Activities with *EU4People* 2020 aimed at first job experience, entrepreneurship for youth, youth that are Not in Education, Employment, or Training, and youth discharged from the public care system.¹⁶² Other example is the *Local Employment Partnerships* Project that focusses on the reform of the employment system and interconnection between partners at local level.¹⁶³ As regarding education, through a *Strategic Development of Higher Education and Qualification Standards* Project, implemented a methodology which will be applied for future actions in the general and VET and Lifelong Learning.¹⁶⁴

The regional Youth Guarantee which was recently launched in the *Western Balkans* as one of the 10 flagship initiatives for this region. It is considered by interviewed stakeholders as a promising long-term commitment of national governments to introduce this measure within their national policies with support by EU and with their own funds. *Bosnia and Herzegovina* assumed its commitments in 2021 and thus far only initial steps have been undertaken, with support of ILO. At the time of the evaluation, the Youth Guarantee Working group at the state level was established in May 2022 and the *Bosnia and Herzegovina* Implementation plan was agreed to be presented as an umbrella under which three action plans would be developed (two entity level action plans, and an action plan for the Brcko District). The pilot locations for Youth guarantee modelling were also pre-selected (to start from 2024/25): Brcko District will be looked at in totality; in *Republika Srpska* it is Prijedor, and in *Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina* there will be two pilot cantons. Interviewed stakeholders noted that the main challenge with the Youth Guarantee relates to the absorption capacity within institutions and slow change in the old-fashioned manner of work. The challenge is also to ensure that the programme document for youth guarantee is designed in such manner to cover this really deep and overarching reform investment which can have positive outcomes towards better harmonised and efficient system for responding to youth. However, all interviewed stakeholder agreed that this initiative has a potential to boost far-reaching reforms within the sector.

¹⁶¹ EC (2019): The Annual Action Programme, 2019, p.10.

¹⁶² EC (2022): EU4People, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

¹⁶³ EC (2016): The Annual Action Programme, 2016, p.8.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p.8.

The Economic and Investment Plan for the *Western Balkans* 2020 aimed at supporting green and digital transformation with the vision of future youth economic growth and job creation.¹⁶⁵ However, only some and limited investments in youth economic integration were found through EU's support to Green Economy and Digital Transformation (I-5.1.3). One such intervention was the EU Support to COVID-19 *Recovery and Resilience of Agriculture and Rural Development in Bosnia and Herzegovina/EU4Agri recovery*.¹⁶⁶ Also, one of the activities related to Output 2 within Bosnia and Herzegovina Economic Reform Programme 2021-2023 includes "women and youth run businesses improved through better access to sustainability linked and eco-innovation finance and innovation".¹⁶⁷ Interviewed stakeholders had minimal knowledge/awareness of such EU support, so the actual effectiveness and transformational potential of these interventions could not be corroborated through external sources.

2.5.2 Integration of vulnerable and marginalised youth (JC 5.2)

EU's economic and employment support interventions included, under wider vulnerable group categories (women, persons from rural areas, long term unemployed, persons aged 45+, etc.) also especially sensitive groups of young women and men, including youth from disadvantaged backgrounds and areas, youth with disabilities, ethnic or any other type of minorities (I-5.2.1. and I-5.2.2). When it comes to strategic planning, under IPA 2022 Action document EU4 Social Policies, Employment and Education, Output 2 envisaged "Support to effective and targeted active labour market measures for youth, rural women and vulnerable categories of unemployed (long-term unemployed, persons with disability and Roma)".¹⁶⁸ Also, under the 2022 EU4People Activity, a EUR 5 million budget was reserved for Technical assistance and grant for the Output 1 related to Employment, aiming at "Facilitating transition of young people from education, rural women and hard to employ categories to the labour market".¹⁶⁹

Case study findings suggest that EU's support has been designed and cognisant of specific vulnerabilities and challenges the most vulnerable groups (including the youth) in *Bosnia and Herzegovina* face, and has provided adequate support in terms of raising their skills (through trainings, requalification, internships, etc.), supporting local employment services and providing entrepreneurship support. Document review and stakeholder interviews showed that cohorts of (young) people were outreached through such activities, though more aggregate statistics is not available beyond individual projects, which is a shortcoming. Interviewed stakeholders raised some challenges for the wider effectiveness of the programmes to reach the most vulnerable groups, including the difficulty to map and reach out the Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) youth due to inconsistent monitoring/oversight mechanisms of employment bureaus, lack of interest to participate in trainings, or lack of wider enabling environment for both employers or employees, or for establishing or running businesses. Complex governance structure of *Bosnia and Herzegovina* was also highlighted by interviewed stakeholders as a challenge to support more comprehensive enabling environment for economic development, due to fragmentation or division of responsibilities of public institutions, lack of incentives, etc.

2.5.3 Ownership through improved data and dialogue (JC 5.3)

The case study research found that the EU interventions, notably at local level, have contributed to stronger awareness of the value and ownership over results and established dialogue mechanisms, related to, inter alia youth employment. This is exemplified by the results of the LEP project, which show stronger engagement of stakeholders in local partnerships, which brought some positive employment generation practices in targeted communities and regionally. Over the period of LEP implementation, a number of such local partnerships were established in target communities, with increasing regional (also cross-entity) exchanges, peer learning and dialogue. This was considered by all categories of interviewed stakeholders as important contribution, particularly given complexities of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Besides, intervention level steering committees also serve as good venues to embark and maintain dialogue on important issues. An illustrative example is the *Youth Retention Programme* in *Bosnia and Herzegovina – General Mobilisation Project*, which gathered several

¹⁶⁵ European Parliament (2022): The Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans: assessing the possible economic, social and environmental impact of the proposed Flagship projects.

¹⁶⁶ EU Delegation to Bosnia and Herzegovina (2020): Internal Reporting.

¹⁶⁷ EC (2021): EU4 Private Sector Development in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Post COVID-19), 2021, p.5.

¹⁶⁸ EC (2016): The Annual Action Programme, 2016.

¹⁶⁹ EC (2022): EU4People, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

ministries and institutions¹⁷⁰ at the entity and state levels alongside EUD in the Intersectoral Project Steering Committee.¹⁷¹ Within the same project, for the sub-activity relating to creating a youth and entrepreneur network, in addition to Youth Expert Network, an entrepreneur association took active participation in public consultation and advocacy activities. Within “Education Reform to Secure Youth Employment through Enterprise-based Learning” Action, a study, mapping student practices in *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, was developed in co-creation with some 15 members of the student network (Erasmus Student Network) from different sectors (student associations, CSOs, the business community, education and youth associations, universities/colleges), providing the necessary data and information and contributing to final recommendations.¹⁷² Moreover, there is an example where youth involvement resulted in the creation of 250 start-ups with 50% of women ownership, directly by young people and vulnerable groups.¹⁷³

The EU also provided some assistance to improved government data on (youth) employment, though this support was not sufficient, according to stakeholder feedback, to overcome significant challenges that national public institutions encounter in mapping of different vulnerabilities (e.g. NEET). In order to overcome this challenge, a Technical assistance project *Improvement of labour market research* started in September 2020. The project is funded by the EU in the amount of EUR 1.28 million and provides support to beneficiary institutions in improving active employment measures, improving cooperation with employers, developing employment strategy, assisting in the strategic planning process. This project helps developing a framework for employment in *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, which is part of the European Commission Opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina's application for EU membership and a precondition for planning future financial support for the EU labour and employment sector in the country. The project provides trainings for the Employment Bureaus on how to do a labour market research based on harmonised methodology. The project also established a website¹⁷⁴ to help the Bureaus with their work. The website will be active until the end of the year and contains all research studies that were done and a Manual for the Academy (containing all modules) for further use in trainings for bureaus.

2.5.4 Impact and sustainability of youth economic integration (JC 5.4)

EU interventions have effectively promoted youth economic empowerment (I-5.4.1, I-5.4.2, I-5.4.3 and I-5.4.4). According to evidence collected through document review and stakeholder feedback, the EU's investments in employability and local economic (and entrepreneurship) partnerships have been effective and have positive transformational potential. This is mainly considered to be a result of well-sequenced or longer-term interventions, which have allowed more consistent and longer support to local partners and beneficiaries, as exemplified by the LEP. According to the LEP statistics, until now, the project succeeded to include 820 final beneficiaries in specific skill development trainings or requalification trainings (out of which 45% are young people). Out of this number, 139 beneficiaries (82 youth) got employed after these trainings in a little over one year. The entrepreneurship trainings included 422 beneficiaries (30% youth). In terms of registration of small businesses, 118 training beneficiaries (35 youth) established their small businesses. The main challenge, as emphasised by all stakeholders is the significant emigration of the Bosnian youth. As stakeholders raised, in some cases the EU support interventions (e.g. requalification, trainings, skill building, internship) are at times drivers for the youth to leave the country, once they acquire skills and knowledge that may be attractive or make them more employable in the Western Europe. Analysis of relevant migration related studies corroborates these findings. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Study, *Bosnia and Herzegovina* has the largest stock of migrants in other Western Balkan economies: more than 383,000, or 23% of the total migrant stock in neighbouring countries and economies.¹⁷⁵ As presented in Figure 1 below, the share of Bosnian migrants with mid-skilled occupations is 48%, while there is also a high share of both the low-skilled and high-skilled occupations.

¹⁷⁰ This Steering Committee gathered the Ministry of Family, Youth and Sports of the Republika Srpska, The Union of Employers' Associations of Republika Srpska, The Ministry of Economy and Entrepreneurship of the Republika Srpska, Association of Employers of Brcko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina and International Burch University.

¹⁷¹ EC (2019): Youth Retention Programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina – “General Mobilisation”. Contract number: 2020/421-628, Civil Society and Media Programme for Bosnia and Herzegovina 2019 – Support to existing and newly established CSOs networks in various areas. Annex VI Interim Narrative Report, p.2.

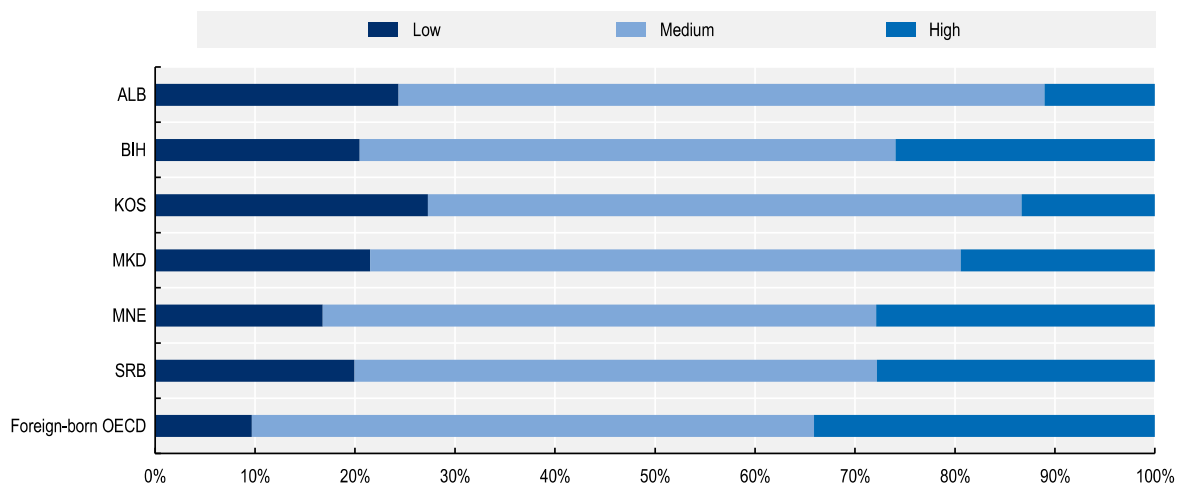
¹⁷² EC (2016): Education Reform to Secure Youth Employment through Enterprise-based Learning. Civil Society and Media action for Bosnia and Herzegovina 2016-2017, Contract number: 2018/402-461, p.44.

¹⁷³ EU Delegation to Bosnia and Herzegovina (2021): Internal Reporting.

¹⁷⁴ EU (n.d.): Project “Improving Labor Market Research”. Website.

¹⁷⁵ OECD (2022): Labour Migration in The Western Balkans: Mapping Patterns, Addressing Challenges and Reaping Benefits; p. 35.

Figure 1 Occupational skill levels among Western Balkan Six migrants in the OECD area



Source: OECD (2022): *Labour Migration in The Western Balkans: Mapping Patterns, Addressing Challenges and Reaping Benefits*, p. 39

2.6 Effects on Social Cohesion and Inclusion (EQ 6)

The EU support to education in Bosnia and Herzegovina has focussed on the VET reform and exchange programmes for students and academics. The non-formal education support efforts were fragmented. Although the *Erasmus+* programme presented an avenue for youth exchanges, Bosnia and Herzegovina has still not utilised this potential to benefit from more projects which could support non-formal education and youth work. CSF and European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) did offer opportunities for non-formal education initiatives, but these were short term and lacked follow up.

The EU support to youth and culture was also minimal. Bosnia and Herzegovina only recently integrated into the Creative Europe 2021-2027 Programme, so its benefits will only be made possible going forward. Similarly, the case study research found minimal direct EU support to mental health and reproductive rights of young people. While some regional projects aimed to raise awareness about youth mental health, the tangible benefits to Bosnia and Herzegovina's youth were not evidenced.

The EU did show commitment to supporting vulnerable youth groups, encompassing those from disadvantaged backgrounds, minorities, women, and others, as elaborated in different sections of this report. However, there were no systematic efforts to promote dialogue on youth social inclusion or discrimination, although some civil society projects, backed by CSF or EIDHR, addressed these issues in their grassroots project-based activities, which was deemed insufficient by interviewed stakeholders.

2.6.1 School retention and non-formal education (JC 6.1)

EU assistance to education is rather fragmented and scattered around sectors like VET reform (since 2019) or student or academic exchanges, but the case study research found no evidence of EU efforts regarding institutional and legislative framework addressing school retention (I-6.1.1, I-6.1.2, and I-6.1.3). A mapping exercise conducted under this evaluation resulted in a number of interventions, albeit rather fragmented, tackling education of young people. Such efforts included support to VET (e.g. a Technical assistance project under IPA 2019 on VET infrastructure and supplies); the *Youth Retention Programme* in Bosnia and Herzegovina – *General Mobilisation Project* (assisting the enrolment policy development for high schools and faculty); and the *Erasmus* and *Jean Monnet* which also supported the youth and academic staff mobility at higher/university education level. Some other, smaller, projects were also mapped which focussed on mobility of academic staff which were implemented under Employment, Education and Social Policies.¹⁷⁶ interviewed EU stakeholders cited that the EU support focussed on other levels of education as priority (preschool, primary education), due to many reasons, including the presence of other facilities such as *Erasmus* or *Jean Monnet* focussing on student/academic exchanges. However, external stakeholders noted that the needs of young people, in particular for bridging the gap between education and labour market have been huge and not sufficiently tackled by development assistance, notably EU assistance.

When it comes to non-formal education, only very fragmented, civil society lead grants obtained through CSF or EIDHR, were implemented. Such example is the project “There is no free society without

¹⁷⁶ Such examples include the project “Introducing Student Research Mobilities to Bosnia and Herzegovina Unis – INSTREAM” or the “Increasing Bosnia and Herzegovina Participation in Horizon Europe by Supporting Academic Staff” Activity

freedom of media – no free media without credible journalism” (Free Media for Free Society) Project, which provided non-formal education on investigative journalism. *Bosnia and Herzegovina* engages in *Erasmus+*, which provides a venue for youth exchanges and youth work, including also some potential for non-formal education. Within *Erasmus+*, here were 21 approved projects in 2021; and 11 projects in 2022. However, no more detailed data on these projects and their non-formal education potential were not available.

2.6.2 Youth as producer of culture (JC 6.2)

There was no evidence of consistent efforts of EU to support youth and culture in Bosnia and Herzegovina (I-6.2.1 and I-6.2.2). Document review and stakeholder interviews did not reveal significant EU support interventions focussing on youth and culture over the reference period. One concrete cultural initiative launched across Europe is Cultural Cooperation, aimed at increasing cultural cooperation between the Western Balkans and the EU and strengthening the competitiveness of the CCIs in the *Western Balkans. Bosnia and Herzegovina* only adopted a *Creative Europe 2021-2027* Programme in 2022.¹⁷⁷

2.6.3 Access to mental health, sexual, reproductive rights and services (JC 6.3)

The case study did not find evidence of consistent EU support to mental health, sexual and reproductive rights of young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina (I-6.3.1 and 6.3.1). Some general EU support to the strengthening of the health sector included the Third Health Programme within which for the period 2014-2020, Bosnia withdrew EUR 100 million for participating in four Joint Actions of the Programme in 2017, encompassing Health Information; Vaccination; Preparedness and Action at Points of Entry (air, maritime and ground crossing) and Health Inequalities.¹⁷⁸ However, the case study research did not find direct linkages or evidence of the programme’s focus on the youth. When it comes to Actions addressing youth mental health, the case study research found that a regional Youth Lab on Mental Health was organised under a Western Balkan Youth Lab Project, aimed at raising awareness on mental health and support measures and emphasised the importance of prevention among young people.¹⁷⁹ This Youth lab gathered a regional pool of experts dealing with the issue of mental health, who presented 13 regional recommendations envisaging the ways to raise mental health awareness, support measures and communicate importance of prevention of mental health of young people.¹⁸⁰ Youth experts from *Bosnia and Herzegovina* were also included in the Youth Lab. The Youth Lab culminated in a Final Conference on Mental health that took place in Belgrade in June 2023.¹⁸¹

2.6.4 Space of dialogue on discrimination, gender and social inclusion (JC 6.4)

While there is a vast of evidence showing that EU is addressing youth as well as vulnerable groups (on account of geographical or social background, sexual orientation, health disabilities, etc.) throughout its engagement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is not concrete evidence on joint activities regarding social inclusion and inequalities with schools, local structures, communities or youth leading to progress (I-6.4.1 and I-6.4.2). The case study research found that, due to the lack of EU’s youth-centric approaches, there were no comprehensive, systematic or consistent EU efforts to open space for dialogue on specific issues of discrimination or social inclusion of young people in *Bosnia and Herzegovina*. The case study research found that local CSOs included some such elements in small-scale projects implemented with support of grants under CSF or EIDHR. Besides, the advocacy and outreach activities of EUD’s political section at some points promoted dialogue on such issues, but only to some limited extent. Interviewed civil society actors and other stakeholders noted that the young people are in need of such venues to discuss such topics, and the lack of more consistent approaches by the EU were viewed as a shortcoming.

2.6.5 Social inclusion of the most vulnerable and marginalised groups (JC 6.5)

EU activities aimed at supporting and empowering youth incorporate and target especially sensitive groups of young people, including youth from disadvantaged backgrounds and areas, youth with disabilities, ethnic or any other type of minorities, as well as girls and young women. Managing funds of the EIDHR and through Country Based Support Schemes, the EU Delegation in *Bosnia and Herzegovina* supported vulnerable groups, including refugees, women, youth, students, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Non-Binary, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ) community, people with

¹⁷⁷ EC (2022): Progress Report, Bosnia and Herzegovina 2022, p.96.

¹⁷⁸ EC (2014-2020): IPA II, p.9.

¹⁷⁹ Regional Cooperation Council (n.a): Western Balkans Youth Lab Project.

¹⁸⁰ Regional Cooperation Council (n.a): Western Balkans Youth Lab Project.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

disabilities, war victims of tortures, Roma and other minorities or groups in need. In 2020 all 11 grants were implemented, while ten additional grants were contracted in 2020, amounting to EUR 1.9 million.¹⁸² All interviewed stakeholders noted that such support to CSOs is needed and provides an opportunity for grass roots initiatives and support. However, civil society interviewees noted the fund and time-scope limitations, along with lack of opportunity to ensure follow up support by EU of successful initiatives as limitations.

The International Organisation for Migration/IOM was one of the main actors engaging with vulnerable groups, primarily migrants and asylum seekers. In 2020, the organisation ensured a more (culturally) adequate meal plans for people of colour, distributed over 4.700.000 meals, and paid special attention to infants and young children, ensuring nutritionally adequate and safe baby food and formula to their caregivers in reception centres in Una Sana Canton and Sarajevo Canton. According to the analysis of ROM reports and stakeholder interviews, there were efforts and actions to ensure the sustainability of actions, but this was difficult for complex projects such as the *Special Measures to Support the Response to the Refugee and Migrant Situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina* where continued benefits were only possible with the international financial support.¹⁸³

Also, CBC offered an opportunity for local actors in border regions to support their local vulnerable groups. For instance, the project *Social inclusion through work therapy* funded under the cross-border Programme between *Bosnia and Herzegovina* and *Montenegro*, aimed to improve the quality of life and work of children and youth with disabilities in the border region of the two countries. According to the reviewed documents, all results were met through strengthening the cooperation between neighbouring countries (staff meetings organised, press conferences conducted, etc.), creation of new forms of occupational therapy (greenhouse installed and planted with agricultural crops, ten beehives with bees installed, various relevant workshops organised, etc.), staff training and workshops (28 kids with disabilities acquired new working skills, nine trainers certified as a work occupational therapist, five permanent workshops started with the production), adoption of solutions for taking care of people with disabilities over the age of 21 years, staff trainings for new form of sports activities (joint camp in Ulcinj, three trainers certified as s sport work occupational therapists), publishing a Manual.¹⁸⁴

In addition, under the EU4 Local Communities – improving conditions for vulnerable groups in *Bosnia and Herzegovina* Action, a EUR 1.7 million grant was awarded for the improvement of lives of children in school, young and senior citizens, minorities and vulnerable people in general in 60 local communities across the country with main activities including equipping facilities/public areas and social centres, community events, technical support including capacity building and promotion.¹⁸⁵

2.7 Effects on Peace and Security (EQ 7)

The EU has not consistently tackled the challenges of peace, security, and youth empowerment as agents of change. This observation is supported by document reviews and stakeholder interviews which highlight the EU's incidental rather than strategic engagement with young leaders. Notable exceptions include the EUD's political section which engaged with community leaders, occasionally involving youth, and regional projects providing platforms for youth involvement. However, the reach and durability of these efforts, such as those via CSF and EIDHR grants, remain constrained, thereby limiting their transformative potential.

Regarding conflict prevention, peace-building, and counterterrorism, the case study research revealed a notable gap. Except for EU supported initiatives such as RYCO and a few cross-border exchanges, there was an absence of EU-country-specific support to these themes. Another shortcoming was noted with regards to the fact that while EU programming documents acknowledge the challenges faced by Bosnia and Herzegovina 's youth, the EU programming generally lacks a rights-based approach.

2.7.1 Adoption of youth-lens in peace and security strategies (JC 7.1)

Besides projects implemented by RYCO and some cross-border exchanges mentioned in previous sections, no Bosnia and Herzegovina-specific EU-supported interventions focussing on peace and security strategies through youth lenses were found. No projects addressing youth involvement in conflict prevention, peace-building or counterterrorism were found either (I-7.1.1, I-7.1.2 and I-7.1.3).

¹⁸³ EU (2019): *Special Measures to Support the Response to the Refugee and Migrant Situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, ROM Report, p.4.

¹⁸⁴ EU represented by the EU Delegation to Bosnia and Herzegovina and the EU Delegation to Montenegro (2016): *Social inclusion through work therapy*. Contracts numbers: 2015/357-803, 2015/357-0, 2007-20, p.15-17.

¹⁸⁵ EC (2022): *EU4 Local Communities-improving conditions for vulnerable groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina*. Annex A. I – Grant application form – Concept note, p.2.

2.7.2 Empowering youth as changemakers (JC 7.2)

No consistent EU efforts were found when it comes to empowering youth as change makers in the domain of peace, security and conflict prevention.

2.7.3 Addressing root causes of marginalisation, disengagement and migratory drive (JC 7.3)

EU programming documents do present the needs and challenges that young people face, but the programming is not explicitly based on Human Rights (I-7.3.1). As elaborated in previous sections, different projects and interventions funded by the EU tackle the multidimensional needs and challenges of young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The programming documents are not explicitly Human Rights based but implicitly target youth rights. The only project focussed explicitly on addressing human rights challenges with children and youth as beneficiaries is Connecting the Dots – Joining forces for enhanced child rights in *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, which envisaged several Outputs to that matter: Output 1: Children and Youth mobilised and empowered in advancing child rights and participation in human rights and democratisation processes in *Bosnia and Herzegovina*; Output 2: Interface online platform for coordination of relevant Child Protection stakeholders established and launched; Output 3: Integrative Child Protection interface platform functional and endorses Children and Youth participation in advancement of child rights in *Bosnia and Herzegovina*.¹⁸⁶

Document review does not provide explicit linkages or integration of youth-lens in the EU support to governance reforms, especially regarding the rule of law and the fight against corruption/impunity (I-7.3.2).

3 Conclusions

The EU's efforts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while aiming to integrate and empower youth in political and policy processes, have largely been fragmented and sporadic. The EU has presented robust political economy analyses, recognising core challenges for Bosnian youth, but there is a noticeable disconnect between these insights and their translation into consistent, country-level interventions. There is a visible lack of a sustained, comprehensive, and youth-centric strategy, leading to fragmented interventions with minimal inter-sector collaboration. This approach has reduced the potential for significant positive contributions to youth empowerment. This gap also prevents the concrete realisation of youth political empowerment and hinders the establishment of duty bearer-youth dialogues.

The EU's interventions in Bosnia and Herzegovina have played a pivotal role in fostering youth economic empowerment, emphasising skills development, employment support, and entrepreneurship. However, wider transformative potential of such initiatives is often impeded by systemic challenges in the country, including the fragmented governance structure, inconsistencies in monitoring, and lack of inadequate support for businesses, particularly affecting vulnerable groups like the youth, minorities, and long-term unemployed. The high outmigration of Bosnian youth to Western Europe further highlights the need for more strategic and systemic interventions, beyond the scope of individual projects, to address the root causes of economic disempowerment and disengagement. The recent Youth Guarantee initiative has a potential to overcome some of these challenges.

The EU's support for education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, predominantly channelled through the VET reform and various exchange programmes, has offered contributions to enhancing the academic and professional prospects of young individuals. However, the approach appears fragmented, particularly in the domain of non-formal education, where opportunities for comprehensive development and youth work remain underexploited. Programmes like *Erasmus+* and *Creative Europe* holds the potential to bridge these gaps, however, *Bosnia and Herzegovina* has yet to fully leverage these resources going forward.

Despite the EU's efforts in data collection at the project level, there is a notable gap in sector-wide aggregation and analysis, which hinders a comprehensive understanding and evaluation of the EU's impact on youth economic empowerment. The EU's approach to capturing the impact of its interventions, particularly concerning youth economic empowerment, lacks depth in sectoral aggregation and analysis. While individual projects may have yielded valuable data, the absence of comprehensive analytical frameworks diminishes the EU's ability to gauge its overall contributions effectively.

The EU's interventions in Bosnia and Herzegovina fall short of a holistic strategy to truly empower and integrate the youth in the country. The EU's support for vulnerable youth in *Bosnia and Herzegovina* lacks consistent depth and strategic focus. Its efforts towards addressing youth social

¹⁸⁶ EC (2019): Connecting the Dots – Joining forces for enhanced child rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina. EuropeAid/168566/DD/ACT/BA.

inclusion and youth empowerment have been sporadic, without engagement in peace and security. There is also a notable lack of systematic dialogue on youth inclusion and mental health support. The limited reach and sustainability of grassroots projects, coupled with gaps in conflict prevention and peace-building support, highlight the need for a more integrated and rights-based approach.

4 Annex

4.1 List of persons consulted

<i>Name</i>	<i>Organisation</i>	<i>Position</i>
EUD		
BIKOVIC, Edbera	EUD (Bosnia and Herzegovina)	Team Member – Cross-border Cooperation
BULJIC, Borislav	EUD (Bosnia and Herzegovina)	Political Officer
DAHLGREN, Stephan	EUD (Bosnia and Herzegovina)	Programme Manager – Education
DE GIACOMO, Alessandro	EUD (Bosnia and Herzegovina)	Political Officer – Focal Point for Human Rights
HAMIDOVIC, Sanja	EUD (Bosnia and Herzegovina)	Programme Manager
HODZIC-ZIJADIC Normela	EUD (Bosnia and Herzegovina)	Programme Manager – EU External Assistance Planning and Programming, Management, Coordination of Inter-services
PANDZIC, Ljiljana	EUD (Bosnia and Herzegovina)	Task Manager – Employment Sector and Youth Guarantee NEET Youth – EU Youth Focal Point
RIBAR, Maja	EUD (Bosnia and Herzegovina)	Political Advisor
Youth Organisations, CSOs		
MUMINOVIC, Maida	Media And Civil Society Development Foundation – MEDIACENTAR	Executive Director
SADIKOVIC, Nermina	Media And Civil Society Development Foundation – MEDIACENTAR	Project Coordinator – EU Project Youth for Better Media
CVJETINOVIC, Dusko	Nešto Više – Citizens Association (Nešto Više Ugnv)	Deputy Executive Director of Administrative Affairs
SEHIC, Diana	Vaša Prava – Association Rights For All	Executive Director
BOROMISA, Tanja	Zdravo Da Ste Udruzenja Gradjana (ZDS) – Youth Center Kastel	Project Manager – ILO’s Local Employment Partnership (LEP) project and Youth Guarantee
IDRIZOVIC, Maida	Centar Vladimir Nazor – Sarajevo Centre For Upbringing	Director
Implementing Partners		
CRNJANSKI-VLAJCIC, Katarina	International Labour Organisation (ILO)	Technical Officer – Skills and Employability
SELESKOVIC, Amra	International Labour Organisation (ILO)	Technical Officer – Strategies for Local Employment Development
PURIC, Samir	International Organisation for Migration (IOM)	National Project Officer – Project/Community Engagement Specialist
SABIC HAMIDOVIC, Dženana	International Organisation for Migration (IOM)	National Project Officer – Social Development Specialist
KAPIDZIC, Lejla	National Erasmus+ Office	Assistant
KUREVIJA, Vuk	NIRAS International Consulting	Project Manager – EU Project “Strengthening the capacity of the labour market institutions by improving of labour market research methodology” in Bosnia and Herzegovina
Government		
GOGALIC-DAUTOVIC, Hajrija	Ministry of Civil Affairs	Youth Guarantee Coordinator
KONJEVIC, Andrea	Ministry of Civil Affairs	Legal Project Manager

4.2 List of documents

EU Strategy Programming

- EC (2014): The AAP, 2014.
- EC (2015): The AAP, 2015.
- EC (2016): The AAP, 2016.
- EC (2018): The AAP, 2018.
- EC (2019): The AAP, 2019.
- EC (2020): The AAP, 2020.
- EC (2021): The AAP, 2021.
- EC (2018): Revised indicative strategy papers 2014 – 2020 for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brussels, 3.8.2018.
- EC (2019): Analytical Report *Accompanying the document* Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council Commission Opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina's application for membership of the EU.
- European Parliament (2022): The Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans: assessing the possible economic, social and environmental impact of the proposed Flagship projects.
- Council of Europe (2022): Joint Conclusions of the Economic and Financial Dialogue between the EU and the Western Balkans and Türkiye, Brussels, 24.5.2022.

EU Reporting

- EUD Bosnia and Herzegovina (2014): Internal Reporting.
- EUD Bosnia and Herzegovina (2015): Internal Reporting.
- EUD Bosnia and Herzegovina (2016): Internal Reporting.
- EUD Bosnia and Herzegovina (2018): Internal Reporting.
- EUD Bosnia and Herzegovina (2019): Internal Reporting.
- EUD Bosnia and Herzegovina (2020): Internal Reporting.
- EUD Bosnia and Herzegovina (2021): Internal Reporting.
- EC (2014): Progress Report, Bosnia and Herzegovina 2014.
- EC (2015): Progress Report, Bosnia and Herzegovina 2015.
- EC (2016): Progress Report, Bosnia and Herzegovina 2016.
- EC (2018): Progress Report, Bosnia and Herzegovina 2018.
- EC (2019): Progress Report, Bosnia and Herzegovina 2019.
- EC (2020): Progress Report, Bosnia and Herzegovina 2020.
- EC (2021): Progress Report, Bosnia and Herzegovina 2021.
- EC (2022): Progress Report, Bosnia and Herzegovina 2022.

Project documentation

The team reviewed the available project documentation (action fiches/TAPs, grant contracts, implementation and monitoring reports, evaluations, etc.) of the projects presented in the tables in section 1.2.

EU evaluations

- EC (2021): Mid-term evaluation of CBC programmes between IPA II beneficiaries, Volume II – IPA CBC Programme Review Bosnia and Herzegovina – Republic of Montenegro.
- EC (2021): Mid-term evaluation of cross border cooperation programmes between IPA II beneficiaries, Synthesis Report.

Other evaluations and studies

- Agency for Regional Development of the Republic of Croatia, Croatia and the EU Delegation to Bosnia and Herzegovina (2015): Youth Community Centres. Contract numbers: 2015/358-464(Bosnia and Herzegovina), 2013-0017-974004 (CRO).

- EC (2019): Connecting the Dots – Joining forces for enhanced child rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina. EuropeAid/168566/DD/ACT/BA.EC (2019): Voice of CSOs in Fighting Trafficking in Human Beings.
- Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (2019): Youth Study Bosnia and Herzegovina 2018/1019.
- EC (2021): EU4 Private Sector Development in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Post COVID-19), 2021.
- UNFPA (2021): Survey on Youth Emigration in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- OECD (2022): Labour Migration in The Western Balkans: Mapping Patterns, Addressing Challenges and Reaping Benefits.
- OECD (2022): OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Bosnia and Herzegovina
- United States Agency for International Development (2023): Monitoring and Evaluation Support Activity II (MEASURE II) National youth survey in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2022. Final Report.

Country case study: Georgia

1 Introduction

1.1 Context

1.1.1 Main Youth challenges

Young people, who make up 20% of Georgia's population,¹⁸⁷ are the country's most valuable asset, as they have a unique potential to bring fresh perspective and energy to address issues of broad societal concern. Yet, there are very few outlets in Georgia for practical youth empowerment activities designed to promote youth engagement and solidarity and to foster their employability and entrepreneurial spirit. Available data confirms that the young people of *Georgia* are disenfranchised and have difficulties accessing political space, labour market, and educational opportunities. According to the data from the 2021 Caucasus Barometer, gathered annually by the Caucasus Research Resource Center/CRRC, only 42% of the country's youth (aged 18-25) has volunteered in the past six months,¹⁸⁸ only 35% report having a job,¹⁸⁹ 47% have no personal income,¹⁹⁰ and more than 40% do not feel fairly treated by the Government.¹⁹¹ In recent years, the country has seen the emergence of youth-led civic movements, which are advocating for social and political changes and voicing their disgruntlement with the existing political party landscape that is inaccessible to them and unresponsive to their needs and demands. These movements (e.g. Shame Movement, Equality Movement, Democracy Defenders,) have been vocal in their support of Georgia's European aspirations, trying to lead broader societal efforts to seek accountability through shining light on systemic corruption and exposing human rights violations.

While poverty and unemployment are issues of grave concern for the vast majority of Georgians, incidences of poverty and extreme poverty in *Georgia* are much higher for children and youth than for working-age adults and the elderly.¹⁹² The problem of youth poverty and unemployment is exacerbated by the fact that young people, much like women and minorities, are disproportionately overrepresented in non-wage work and underrepresented in salaried work, with youth employment highest in the sectors that do not require any special training (e.g. trade) or in spheres, where it is possible to work and study (e.g. health, education). Not surprisingly, the COVID-19 pandemic had a particularly dire socio-economic impact on Georgian youth, given that the same sectors were severely affected by the pandemic.¹⁹³ As can be expected, a significant gender gap exists in both economic activity and unemployment rates, with young women having more difficulties than their male peers when it comes to finding salaried and non-seasonal work, as well as when transitioning from school to work life.¹⁹⁴

Youth emigration and migration -and the factors underpinning them- are also alarming. According to the 2018 research by ETF, *"the most striking point about emigration is that it is the youngest who leave Georgia the most. Emigration is highest in the 25-29 age group, followed by those aged 30-34, and then those in the 20-24 subset."*¹⁹⁵ Even in the less impacted 20-24 age group, the decline over the seven-year period from 2015 to 2022 is 20%.¹⁹⁶ Those who do not leave *Georgia* still end up leaving their permanent places of residence and migrating to Tbilisi or other regional centres. In both cases, lack of economic development and unemployment are the main reasons for changing residence.¹⁹⁷

Concerns over territorial integrity and conflict over the breakaway regions have dominated the public discourse in *Georgia* for more than two decades, with various International Organisations and

¹⁸⁷ UNICEF (2014): National Youth Survey: Analysis of the Situation and the Needs of Youth in Georgia, p.3.

¹⁸⁸ Caucasus Research Resources Centre (2019): Caucasus Barometer 2019, accessed on June 20, 2023.

¹⁸⁹ Caucasus Research Resources Centre (2021): Caucasus Barometer 2021, accessed on June 20, 2023.

¹⁹⁰ Caucasus Research Resources Centre (2021): Caucasus Barometer 2021, accessed on June 20, 2023.

¹⁹¹ Caucasus Research Resources Centre (2021): Caucasus Barometer 2021, accessed on June 10, 2023.

¹⁹² Biannual Welfare Monitoring Survey results from UNICEF.

¹⁹³ UNFPA (2020): Assessing the Socio-Economic Impact of COVID-19 on Young People in Georgia (2020), p. 6, on June 20, 2023. The dire impact of the pandemic in youth is also noted by the PMC Research, which notes that the share of you in Georgia's labour market "reached its lowest point in 2021 at 8.5%, marking a 4.1-percentage-point drop compared to the corresponding figure in 2017." For more details PMC Research Periodic Issue #141 Youth Employment in Georgia (29 November 2022), accessed on June 19, 2023.

¹⁹⁴ According to UNICEF, "the rate of employed young people is significantly higher among young men than among young women." UNICEF (2014): National Youth Survey: Analysis of the Situation and the Needs of Youth in Georgia

¹⁹⁵ European Training Foundation (2018), Youth Transition to Work in Georgia, 2018.

¹⁹⁶ For more details, population tables at Geostat (2020): Children and Youth in Georgia; Geostat (2022): Children and Youth in Georgia.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, p.15.

international non-governmental organisations/INGOs supporting multiple people-to-people (P2P) contacts between ethnic Georgians and ethnic Abkhaz and Ossetians. However, since the 2008 war with *Russia*, the P2P contacts within and across the Administrative Boundary Lines (ABL) have become rare, and communities across ABL in Abkhazia and South Ossetia have become increasingly isolated and ostracised from the rest of the world. Fostering P2P contacts among ethnic Abkhaz and Georgian youth is particularly salient, as these young people have come of age during the conflict and its aftermath and the absence of opportunities to interact with their peers from the conflicting sides makes them more susceptible to messages of extremism, nationalism, and violence. The data from the Georgian-controlled side of the ABL shows the saliency of the issue with just 28% of 18-34-year-olds pointing at the need for slowing down the social estrangement between Georgians and Abkhazians/Ossetians and only 22% wanting the Government to establish platforms for direct dialogue with Sokhumi and Tskhinvali.¹⁹⁸

1.1.2 Policy framework and main actors

International and national commitments

While *Georgia* is part of various human rights treaties, youth are a forgotten group in these international instruments, which means that protection of their rights can be sought mostly by promoting youth rights through the existing monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. A clear exception from this rule is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child/UNCRC and its protocols and the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities/UNCRPD and its optional protocol. *Georgia* is part of both conventions, having acceded to the first in 1994 and to the second in 2020. In addition, to these treaties, *Georgia* has taken on the obligation to seek approximation to youth-related EU policies and practices through the EU-Georgia Association Agreement/AA, which commits both parties to cooperation in the field of youth.¹⁹⁹ Lastly, *Georgia* benefits from its membership in the Council of Europe/CoE, which is one of the main standard-setters in youth policy development in the region. While its standards are not obligatory, they are often referenced when developing or advocating for various aspects of youth policy. When asked, the Council of Europe Youth Policy Department provides support to the relevant government agencies in implementing a youth policy that is in line with the Council of Europe standards.²⁰⁰

The *Georgian National Youth Policy Document*, which was adopted by the Government of *Georgia* on March 28, 2014, largely defined the country's youth policy throughout the evaluation period. It targeted youth aged 14-29 and aimed "at encouraging the establishment of a relevant environment for a comprehensive youth development which will enable the youth to fully realise their potential and be actively involved in all the areas of the public life."²⁰¹ While a welcome development, the policy was missing several key elements for good implementation, including monitoring, evaluation, and learning scheme and budget. Starting from 2020, *Georgia* has a new *2020-2030 Youth Policy Concept*, which was adopted after the expiration of the 2014 National Youth Policy and its implementation action plan. The National Youth Policy Concept finally led to the adoption of the *2023-2026 State Youth Strategy* in December 2022.

In addition to the National Youth Policy Document, *Georgia* has a *1999 Law on State Support of Children and Youth Unions*. An important breakthrough in this field is the Code on the Rights of the Child, which was developed and adopted with EU support in November 2019, and which delineates the fundamental rights and freedoms of the child and establishes a legal system for their protection and promotion. Another important piece of legislation that is relevant to young people and their development is the Labour Code, which was significantly amended over the years from one of the most liberal codes in 2006 to a Code that is increasingly in harmony with EU standards, as envisioned by the EU-Georgia Association Agreement/AA / Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) and which still is work in progress when it comes to combating and preventing discrimination and improve conditions for part-time workers and interns. Youth-related matters are also addressed in the *2019-2023 Strategy for Development of High Mountain Settlements of Georgia*, which addresses depopulation issues of high-mountain settlements and communities. Namely, its Objective 10 (support for youth) acknowledges that the main cause of youth migration from these areas is lack of employment prospects and poor access to educational opportunities and commits to increasing local job creation and financing young people's

¹⁹⁸ According to the data provided by the Caucasus Research Resources Centre, Georgia in its 2021 Caucasus Barometer Survey, accessed on June 19, 2023.

¹⁹⁹ Chapter 16, Article 360 of the EU-Georgia Association agreement, which obliges the parties to "(a) reinforce cooperation and exchanges in the field of youth policy and non-formal education for young people and youth workers; (b) support young people and youth workers' mobility as a means to promote intercultural dialogue and the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences outside the formal educational systems, including through volunteering; (c) promote cooperation between youth organisations."

²⁰⁰ One of the latest meetings of this nature took place in 2019.

²⁰¹ Government of Georgia (2014): National Youth Policy Document of Georgia, p. 2.

pursuit of higher education. Lastly, youth policy issues are highlighted in the *2021-2024 Government Programme Toward Building a European State*,²⁰² which commits to ensuring “active involvement of youth in decision-making on issues important to them, including on the development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of youth policies and programmes”.²⁰³ While these policy frameworks have much promise, their actual impact on youth empowerment is yet to be seen given the tendency of the Georgian public authorities to delay or postpone the implementation of its own sectoral reform strategies.

Table 6 Youth policy priorities in Georgia

2014 National Youth Policy Priorities	2020-2030 Youth Policy Concept Priorities
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Creating opportunities for the youth to be involved in social, economic, cultural and political life 2. Creating opportunities for appropriate and high-quality education, employment and professional growth for the youth 3. Establishing a healthy lifestyle and improving access to and quality of medical care services in a youth-friendly environment 4. Increasing awareness among young people on the civil rights and responsibilities and creating a safe and secure environment for young people, protecting their rights and supporting the young people with special needs. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Active Participation of Young People in Public Life and Democratic Processes 2. Promoting Youth Development and Realisation of their Potential 3. Health and Well-being of Young People 4. Economic Empowerment of Young People 5. Improving the Management of the National Youth Policy at Central and Municipal Levels

Youth Policy Actors

The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs was responsible for the implementation of youth policy until its abrupt abolishment in 2017 and the creation of a new Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, which was charged with leading the youth policy work. An important milestone for youth policy implementation came in August 2019, when the Government of Georgia created a new legal entity of public law, i.e. the Youth Agency²⁰⁴ so as to engage in the development, implementation, and coordination of the state youth policy. Initially, the Agency was under the purview of the Office of the Prime Minister, but in less than a year from its creation, it became a subordinate entity of the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth, which in turn was created after the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Georgia was divided into two government agencies: the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.²⁰⁵ Some of the more specific functions of the Agency include the provision of support to the Government of Georgia in developing, implementing, and monitoring youth-related strategies and action plans, defining youth worker qualification and certification rules, facilitating municipal youth policy development and implementation, and ensuring the engagement of vulnerable youth (e.g. People with disabilities, internally displaced people (IDP), youth not in employment, education or training groups, etc.).

Local authorities are among the youth policy actors in Georgia. According to the Local Self-Governance Code, municipal authorities are authorised, but not obligated, to carry out measures for the purpose of facilitating the development of youth policy at the local level. According to a recent study, “activities carried out by municipalities at the local level with regard to the youth policy are the same from year to year, and do not offer approaches suitable to the real needs of the youngsters.”²⁰⁶ This is mostly due to lack of decentralisation in the country, which has similar impact in many other areas, most notably in the fulfilment of Georgia’s obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities/UNCRPD.

Lastly, local and international CSO, as well as International Organisations, are important actors in this area. According to the web portal CSOGeorgia.org, more than 400 CSOs claim to work with or about the issues that concern young people. Of these, 65 CSOs are also members of the National Council of Youth Organisations of Georgia, an umbrella organisation that was created in 1995 to promote a favourable environment and conditions for youth organisations and to foster improved youth civic participation in Georgia. Given the centralised policy making in Georgia and general problems with civic participation, CSOs, especially those from the regions, have little say in youth policy development.

²⁰² Government of Georgia (2020): 2021-2024 Government Programme Toward Building a European State.

²⁰³ Government of Georgia (2020): 2021-2024 Government Programme Toward Building a European State, p. 41.

²⁰⁴ The Youth Agency was created with the merger of the Children and Youth Development Fund, Children and Youth National Center, and the Youth Policy Management Department of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport.

²⁰⁵ As of February 2024, the Agency once again was moved under the purview of the Ministry of Education and Science.

²⁰⁶ Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (2021): Youth Policy Implementation at the Local Level: Imereti and Tbilisi, p. 36.

However, there are several prominent, Tbilisi-based CSOs that have engaged in youth policy advocacy or run long-term youth empowerment and participation programmes, some funded by the EU. These are the Caucasus Environmental NGO Network, United Nations Association Georgia, Charity Humanitarian Centre Abkhazeti, Europe Foundation, Rondeli Foundation, and others). Among the international non-governmental organisations/INGOs and International Organisations present in the field are the United Nations agencies (UNICEF, UNDP, and UNFPA), World Vision, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Action against Hunger, Save the Children, Mercy Corps, and others.

1.1.3 EU-Georgia cooperation framework

EU-Georgia cooperation began in 1992, with the parties signing the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement on April 22, 1996. During 2006-2014, the EU-Georgia cooperation was guided by the European Neighbourhood Policy EU-Georgia Action Plan, which prepared the country for the signing of the EU-Georgia AA, including DCFTA, and its entry into force on July 1, 2016. As other Eastern Partnership countries, *Georgia* signed the Mobility Partnership agreement with EU in 2009, and its citizens, particularly youth, have been benefiting from visa liberalisation since 2017. *Georgia* is also an active participant in *Erasmus+*, *Horizon 2020*, and other programmes that promote cooperation between *Georgia* and Europe in education, research, and innovation.

Since 2014, the EU-Georgia cooperation is guided by three reiterations of the Association Agenda (2014-2016, 2017-2020, and 2021-2027), focussed on supporting *Georgia* in fulfilling its obligations under the AA/DCFTA through promoting deeper political ties, stronger economic links, and respect for common values. Youth is not an important consideration in the 2014-2016 and 2017-2020 Association Agenda, though references to youth inclusion in the labour market, youth exchanges, and “strategic approach to youth policy” were present in both documents. The 2021-2027 Association Agenda better features youth and youth-related issues, with young people viewed both as beneficiaries and actors of the reform efforts. More specifically, the new Association Agenda commits *Georgia* to the development of the youth sector and evidence- and rights-based youth policies that will enable young people (irrespective of their background) to fully realise their potential and get actively involved in all areas of public life. It seeks to support youth in knowing and claiming their rights, as well as becoming active participants of Georgia’s economy and enjoying adequate protection of health and well-being. These commitments are in line with the Youth Policy Concept and Youth Strategy described above.

An important document for EU-Georgia cooperation is the EU Roadmap for engaging with civil society. The first such document, adopted in 2014, had very rudimentary references to youth, young activists, and youth organisations. However, the next roadmap (2018-2024) is significantly more detailed in describing the efforts to be undertaken and the targets to be met, in order to make headways toward addressing the needs and priorities of Georgian young people.

EU provides over EUR 100 million to *Georgia* annually in technical and financial assistance,²⁰⁷ including to support the country’s reform efforts to implement the reforms in line with the AA/DCFTA. During 2014-2020, the EU support was funded through the ENI and through the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe for the period of 2021-2027. The EU’s framework for cooperation with *Georgia* is the multiannual programming document for the period 2017-2020, Single Support Framework (SSF), which is based on the Eastern Partnership priorities to achieve stronger economy, stronger governance, stronger connectivity, and stronger society. In addition, it included horizontal support to civil society, strategic communication, and capacity development / institution building.

Since the August 2008 War with *Russia*, the EU has operated a Civilian Common Security and Defence Policy Monitoring Mission, which monitors compliance with the EU-brokered 6-Point Agreement and the Agreement on Implementing Measures. The Mission’s mandate consists of stabilisation, normalisation and confidence-building, as well as reporting to the EU and its Member States (MS) in order to inform European policy making.

1.2 Focus of the case study

This country case study examines EU support to youth areas in Georgia. Case studies, like the present one, do not seek to carry out a full-fledged evaluation of all aspects of EU youth support. They are mainly background notes that feed into the overall strategic evaluation of EU support to Youth in the three regions covered – by going deeper into country-specific factors that influenced the design of programmes and interventions to support youth needs and priorities, their implementation and the results achieved.

Although the case study covers the whole of EU support to youth sector, the analysis of outcomes puts a specific focus on the areas of economic integration, civic and political participation, and peace and

²⁰⁷ Government of Georgia (2020): Government Programme 2021-2024. Toward Building a European State.

security. The interventions listed below were selected with three criteria in mind: i) level of youth targeting; ii) variety of modalities; and iii) thematic focus. As a result, this case study will look at the youth-targeted bilateral and regional interventions tackling these issues in a comprehensive way. The selected sample includes various projects funded under Skills Development and Matching for Labour Market Needs (EQ 5 and EQ 7), and other ENI-funded interventions, such as European School and Summer Camps (EQ 4). Three regional interventions under the *EU4YOUTH* Programme will also be reviewed for EQs 4, 5, and 7.

The evaluation matrix, including the JC and indicators which structure each EQ, guides the data collection and analysis efforts for this case study. When selecting the proposed sample of interventions, the evaluation team considered both the coverage of the evaluation matrix, as well as the diversity of implementation modalities. The data will be collected mainly during the desk and field phases, through documentary review and semi-structured interviews. The documentary review mostly took place during the desk phase and covered documentation related to EU-Georgia cooperation strategy and programming process, EU intervention-related documentation (formulation and implementation documents, monitoring reports, evaluations), policy documents from the Government of *Georgia*, reports and databases from cooperation partners, reports from national and international CSOs and other EU evaluations. The validation (field) mission involved interviews with project implementers and beneficiaries, representatives of youth organisations, including the National Council of Youth Organisations of *Georgia*, as well as relevant EUD staff and EU MS. Representatives of public authorities were also consulted, namely the Youth Agency and the Ministry of Education and Science.

Table 7 *Main bilateral contracts sampled in Georgia*

Year	Intervention/ Contract title	Cris ref.	Contracting party	Planned amount (EUR)
2020	Skills Development and Matching for Labour Market Needs	D-40319		48.850.000
2018	Skills Development and Matching for Labour Market Needs -Budget Support Contract	C-403393	Government of Georgia	30.000.000
2019	Technical assistance to Skills Development for Matching Labour Market Needs	C-409175	GOPA Worldwide Consultants GmbH	4.199.370
2018	Promoting New and Inclusive Approaches to Informal Education in Abkhazia.	C-386153	Action Contre la Faim (ACF)	1.000.000
2018	Strengthening capacities for quality assurance and governance of qualifications	C-406898	German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)	1.500.000
2016	Human Rights for all in Georgia	D- 37382		10.000.000
2016	Advocacy for child and youth protection	C-379321	The Public Health Foundation of Georgia (PHF)	450.440
2016	Improving health care, education and development opportunities for vulnerable mothers and children	C-379173	Kakheti Regional Development Foundation	395.061
	Further support to confidence building measures in Georgia	D-39073 / D-42245		7.500.000
2016	Confidence Building Early Response Mechanism (COBERM) Phase III	C-372495	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	5.900.000
2019	COBERM Phase IV	C-405942	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	5.500.000
2020	Economic and Business Development in Georgia	D-40318		11.951.000
2020	The DIGITAL RE4M Programme to foster COVID-19 recovery of SMEs	C-417111	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)	1.850.000
2022	EU4HumanRights in Georgia	D-41936		7.700.000
2022	Civil Society's Coordinated Advocacy for Implementing Disability Rights Commitments in Georgia	C-438738	Youth Organisation Changes for Equal Rights	712.303
	Various decisions			

Year	Intervention/ Contract title	Cris ref.	Contracting party	Planned amount (EUR)
2021	European School in Georgia	C-417373 & 395292	United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)	9.400.000
2017	European School Summer Camp 2018-2022 in Georgia	C-387744	Legal Entity Of Public Law Youth Agency	500.000
2020	COVID-19 Support for LGBTIQ in Georgia	C-419421	Equality Movement	60.000

Table 8 Main regional contracts sampled in Georgia

Year	Intervention/ Contract title	Cris ref.	Contracting party	Planned amount (EUR)
2018	EU4YOUTH Phase I	D-39576		4.000.000
2018	Enhancing Youth Education, Employment and Participation in Conflict-affected Areas in Georgia and Ukraine	C-400807	Danish Refugee Council	1.050.000
2019	EU4YOUTH Phase II	D-41505		
2019	Youth Engagement Roadmaps	C-411315	GOPA Worldwide Consultants GmbH	908.500
2019	Social Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Development (SEED) Programme for Green Growth in Borderline Communities	C-412395	Caucasus Environmental NGO Network Association	1.499.962

2 Findings

2.1 Policy framework and responsive programming (EQ 1)

The EU's growing ambitions toward youth are clearly seen in the evolving EU-Georgia cooperation framework and mostly reflective of national specificities. The two policy areas that seem to be neglected in policy frameworks and strategies, are youth political activism and youth engagement in peace and security processes, though both are due to extreme politicisation of youth by the Government of Georgia and the *de facto* authorities in the breakaway regions. Core youth challenges, such as skills mismatch, problems with socio-economic inclusion, and the need for meaningful youth participation in public decision-making processes, have been reflected in EU programming over the years, but support to youth organisations and young activists is still very limited. **The existing political and institutional incentives are adequate to promote youth-centred approaches, but improvements can be made**, both in terms of dedicating more human resources, as well as adding budget support indicators/conditions that directly reflect the importance of treating youth as actors and not just as beneficiaries of various actions. While an implicit approach to engaging with youth and on youth-related issues can be seen from the EU's youth portfolio in Georgia, it is not explicitly articulated on the country level.

2.1.1 Policy frameworks and strategies take into account regional and national specificities (JC 1.1)

The EU's growing ambitions toward youth are clearly seen in the evolving EU-Georgia cooperation framework, which is reflective of national specificities. The two areas that seem to be neglected in EU policy frameworks and strategies are youth political activism and youth engagement in peace and security processes, though as noted under EQ 4 below both are due to extreme politicisation of youth by the Government of Georgia and the *de facto* authorities (I-1.1.1). Youth was not an important consideration in the 2014-2016 and 2017-2020 Association Agenda, though references to youth inclusion in labour market, youth exchanges, and "strategic approach to youth policy" were present in both documents. Similarly, 2014-2017 and 2018-2020 SSFs did not prioritise youth but stressed the importance of mainstreaming youth considerations in relevant EU programming. The desk review revealed that youth considerations were minimally mainstreamed in such pre-2021 action documents as EU4Human Rights, Human Rights for All, Support to conflict-affected/displaced population and host communities, Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace/ICSP Interim Response Programme – Confidence Building Early Response Mechanism (COBERM) III. For example, the action documents for Human Rights for All²⁰⁸ in Georgia and CSF have no reference on youth. Youth is only mentioned four times in the EU4Human Rights and COBERM III action documents, mostly regarding the need for mainstreaming youth considerations. However, youth

²⁰⁸ The omission of youth from the action documents does not necessarily mean that young people are neglected by the programme. In fact, both projects awarded under the programme and reviewed as part of this case study directly target youth from most vulnerable backgrounds, supporting their empowerment and inclusion.

priorities, perspectives, and needs are well-reflected in the post-2017 programme documents relevant to such sectors as education, agriculture, and market development. Notably, youth considerations are well addressed in the Council of Europe Strategy for *Georgia* 2020-2023 (partially funded by the EU), in part because it came out after the adoption of the 2020-2030 National Youth Concept.²⁰⁹ Given the above-mentioned, it is not surprising that reflection of youth challenges has not been present in the Implementation Reports and Internal Reporting during the initial years covered by the evaluation.

The 2021-2027 Association Agenda better features youth and youth-related issues, with young people increasingly viewed both as beneficiaries and actors of the reform efforts. The youth-related priorities listed in this document are fully in line with Georgia's recently adopted 2020-2030 Youth Policy Concept and National Youth Strategy documents. Though given the country context, the 2021-2027 document could do better in terms of youth civic and political activism and the role of young people in peace processes. For the future, it is important to keep in mind that the recent *Georgia* Country Strategy Evaluation (CSE) report notes that the EU should continue to improve the quality of mainstreaming crosscutting issues, including youth.²¹⁰

Youth challenges, such as skills mismatch, problems with socio-economic inclusion, and the need for meaningful youth participation in public decision-making processes, have been reflected in EU programming over the years, but support to youth organisations and young activists is still very limited (I-1.1.2). The review of the inventory shows that the largest share of youth-targeted interventions is in the educational and market development sectors. They date back to either the 2014-2020 youth strategy or the times when the Youth Agency was under the Prime Minister and enjoyed more independence than now, including through a dedicated budget line. These interventions were mostly under the umbrella of *Skills4Jobs* programme and complemented by various grant-funded interventions implemented by local and international CSOs and projects supported through *EU4YOUTH* regional programme. The validation mission has confirmed that these interventions have done well in promoting youth causes nationally and locally. That said, it is clear that direct support to youth organisations is quite limited (only one project is implemented by a local youth CSO as a lead partner), and support to young activists remains a challenge. The validation mission confirmed that while more consultations will always be welcome, youth organisations are consulted regularly and engaged in policy dialogue. However, youth organisations, due to their size and level of institutional development, have limited access to EU financial support, which provides them the experience, legitimacy, and funding necessary to grow, especially in light of the difficulties they are experiencing when trying to access public funding. This is an important point for consideration given the newly adopted youth strategy and how the Government of *Georgia* will ensure fair and transparent inclusion of youth organisations and youth in general in its implementation.

2.1.2 Enabling Institutional environment (JC 1.2)

The existing political and institutional incentives are adequate to promote youth-centred approaches, but improvements can be made, both in terms of dedicating more human resources, as well as adding budget support indicators/conditions that directly reflect the importance of treating youth as actors and not just as beneficiaries of various actions (I-1.2.1). Throughout the evaluation period, the EUD in *Georgia* has had a dedicated youth point person. However, the same person is in charge of multiple functions, including being the M&E focal point. At the same time, youth-related interventions are implemented through three different portfolios, each having its own manager and focal point. Although this state of affairs did not lead to coordination and coherence issues, one of the portfolio managers was recently appointed the new EUD youth focal point. Given that this portfolio is most heavy on supporting youth integration, this could bode well for developing more integrated support strategies. The *EU4YOUTH* regional programme also has a national focal point, but the validation mission did not yield information on whether the *EU4YOUTH* focal point further promotes the adoption of youth-centred approaches.

Importantly, having a youth focal point has been greatly appreciated by the EUD staff, as they do not need to develop additional expertise on youth and can get relevant advice from a capable colleague, who knows youth issues and players well. This said, some members of the EUD felt that additional data on youth and their needs could aid them in independently mainstreaming youth considerations throughout their programmes. Improved EU HQ support has been noted among other additional measures that could assist them in this respect.

While incentives to adopt more youth-centred approaches exist, more could be done to motivate various youth policy actors in this direction. Different stakeholders are incentivised differently. According to the *Georgia* CSE, for instance, budget support and its conditions are the best mechanism of incentivising

²⁰⁹ Parliament of Georgia (2020): Resolution of the Parliament of Georgia – On Approval of the “Georgian National Youth Policy Concept for 2020 – 2030”, Tbilisi, 17 July, 2020.

²¹⁰ EU (2022): Evaluation of EU's Cooperation with Georgia (2014-2020), p. 48.

the Government of Georgia. At the same time, capacity development and granting schemes could create incentives in CSOs. Joint programming could support donor agencies, including those from the MS, to be more proactive in adopting youth-centred approaches in their work. In view of this, the future Calls for Proposals could be improved by ensuring that they encourage potential grantees to develop interventions that focus on engagement with youth, specifically from an empowerment perspective. Similarly, sector policy-level budget support could be improved with indicators/conditions that directly reflect the importance of treating youth as actors and not just as beneficiaries of various actions. Lastly, the EU-led joint programming embedded in the current EU discourse on youth could encourage more youth-centred work of partner donor agencies.

The EUs youth engagement interventions are clearly based on evidence and sound analysis of the context, but the EU approach to youth engagement is not explicitly articulated at the country level (I-1.2.2). The EU's youth engagement strategies are realistic, which is in part because they are based on evidence and embedded in the country's context. The focal areas of EU engagement with youth reflect both the needs of young people as perceived by them and other stakeholders, as well as the openness of the partner government to implement changes. It is due to the latter consideration that the EU support to youth in *Georgia* is not pronounced in improving young people's democratic participation. A review of the EU's youth portfolio in Georgia, which is both substantial and diverse, and discussions with the EUD programme managers, show that there is an implicit approach to engaging with youth and on youth-related issues, however, it needs to be more clearly articulated. In this regard, some lessons can be learned from the EUD's efforts to mainstream gender considerations in its work and programming.

2.2 EU choice of delivery methods, channels and instruments promote responsive, cost-effective and timely support (EQ 2)

Budget support is informed by political economy analysis and is followed by coherent measures to foster policy dialogue on youth reforms, leading to tangible positive results, from improving the Government of *Georgia* youth policies to enhancing institutional independence of the nascent Youth Agency and increasing employability of youth. There is clear evidence that EU support is provided through various implementation modalities, funding channels and procedures, and the rationale behind the final selection of a concrete modality is found in the documents. Good level of complementarities and synergies has been reached between bilateral geographic, thematic, and regional interventions and modalities used to support youth and youth-related sectors. **However, improvements are still needed, especially, when it comes to complementarities and synergies between bilateral, regional, and thematic initiatives. Flexible use of implementation modalities contributed to enhanced relevance and cost-effectiveness of youth-related interventions.**

2.2.1 Responsiveness of modalities (JC 2.1)

Finding 2.1. Budget support is informed by political economy analysis and is followed by coherent measures to foster policy dialogue on youth reforms, leading to tangible positive results, from improving the Government of *Georgia* youth policies to enhancing institutional independence of the nascent Youth Agency and increasing employability of youth (I-2.1.1). The review revealed that budget support is provided based on strong political economy analysis, which looks at existing power structures, as well as the interests and incentives of various stakeholders involved in the slated reform efforts. The interlocutors highlighted the importance of budget support indicators for ensuring positive outcomes for youth, such as support for the implementation of youth policy, including to the newly established Youth Agency, as well as increase in employment rate of the VET graduates and decrease in the VET drop-out rates. Some shortcomings have been noted in the recent *Georgia* CSE, according to which "despite VET improvements, the actual number of persons enrolled has failed to increase" due to multiple reasons, including low regard of VET among young people due to Georgia's historical experience and young people's perceptions about the post-VET career prospects." This evaluation found that the EUD was aware of the negative perceptions of youth about the VET career prospects, which is why it supported the development of the concept on VET promotion. However, the concept was not implemented by the partner government due to the ministerial changes impacting the relevant line ministry. Similarly, as noted by interlocutors, significant delays in the adoption of the VET Strategy and Action Plan, as well as the Career Guidance Strategy and Action Plan, have greatly impacted the timeline for developing and delivering support measures to ensure their effective implementation.

When it comes to the VET interventions in breakaway regions, they are only accompanied by rudimentary situation analyses sections that are focussed on the ability of the partners to implement projects in difficult political and security situations and do not delve into the different drivers or levels of conflict or consider possible (positive) impact these interventions could have on bringing together youth from both sides of the conflict divide. A notable exception is the Action contre la Faim (ACF) reference

in the Action Document for Skills Development and Matching for Labour Market Needs: “ACF is also able to integrate a confidence building component where ethnic Abkhaz, Georgian, Armenian, Russian and other minorities establish linkages and networking within Georgia's breakaway region of Abkhazia.”

The EU support is provided through various implementation modalities, funding channels, and procedures, and the rationale behind the final selection of a concrete modality is found in the documents (I-2.1.2, I-2.1.3). In this case, more information is available about the use of delegation agreements, but the analysis provided is more about the capacity of the institution to implement the intervention and not about the comparative advantage of a particular modality. Importantly, the contracts awarded to UNDP under the Skills Development and Matching for Labour Market Needs programme were competitive, as the EUD was eager to ensure that it found the most suitable implementing partner when it came to achieving results and addressing youth concerns, demands, and expectations. The decision on policy-level budget support provided to VET and SME Development was grounded on the idea that the sector policy-level budget support has minimal transaction costs and higher probability of achieving the projected results.

It is clear that good level of complementarities and synergies has been reached between bilateral geographic, thematic, and regional interventions and modalities used to support youth and youth-related sectors. However, improvements are still needed, especially, when it comes to complementarities and synergies between bilateral and regional initiatives. The documentary review and the validation mission showed that the EU support has strengthened both the SME sector and VET. However, according to the recent *Georgia* CSE, “EUD staff interviewed expressed the view that potential linkages between SME development and VET, where two budget support programmes ran on in parallel, were insufficiently exploited”. Similarly, “experts interviewed specifically identified EU support for VET and SME development as a nexus where the potential for synergy had been missed.”²¹¹ These lessons have been considered when developing the new Employment and Vocational Education and Training (EVET) support programme, which involves joint programming (between the EU, EU MS, Agence Française de Développement/AFD, and the Czech Development Agency), utilising the Team Europe approach. Importantly, the interviewed stakeholders praised the level of intersectoral coordination in the EVET field, giving much credit to the EUD’s initial and consistent efforts in this area and the leadership of the Ministry of Education and Science, which has seen both the need for coordination, as well as importance of budget support modality. In addition, complementarities and synergies have been achieved in *Skills4Jobs* programme, by ensuring regular monitoring of the grant projects through the Technical assistance programme. An area for improvement, noted by some respondents was connectivity, where improved mainstreaming of youth and gender considerations could support young people, women, and other groups in vulnerable situations in their efforts to be included in the country’s economic life.

Complementarity between regional and bilateral programming has been noted when it comes to supporting youth civic and political activism in *Georgia*, with regional programming taking on bulk of the work in this area, as bilateral programme did not support youth political activism. However, opportunities have also been missed, as the Delegation was not always aware of the regional programming that takes place in *Georgia* or learned about it only after quite some time (as was the case with Hedayah-funded interventions aiming to hinder the spread of violent extremist ideologies and rhetoric). It is clear that the fact that the EUD has not been a focal point for a regional action targeting youth has in some ways hindered the achievement of complementarities and synergies.

2.2.2 Flexibility of instruments and delivery methods (JC 2.2)

Flexible use of implementation modalities contributed to enhanced relevance and cost-effectiveness of youth-related interventions, with adjustments made utilising a problem-driven approach to programming (I-2.2.1, I-2.2.2). Apart from the COVID-19 pandemic, there has not been a major change in the country context, which would require adjustments in programming or implementation. The rapid pension reform did create additional unforeseen burden on the implementers’ project budgets, it has not impacted implementation. The reviewed EU reports note instances of no-cost extensions throughout the evaluation period, but apart from the COVID-19 pandemic, those were due to planning and implementation issues internal to concrete interventions. Most examples of flexibility come from EU response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the Skills Development and Matching for Labour Market Needs budget support was granted an extension, due to the delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Several grantees underscored the flexibility of the EUD when it came to both extending project durations and modifying project budgets to accommodate the needs of their beneficiaries due to the pandemic. In addition, the EU supported new CSO interventions to alleviate the pandemic-related burden for vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, LGBTIQ community, IDPs, children, and the elderly. The validation mission confirmed that a strategic and flexible use of

²¹¹ EU (2022): Evaluation of EU's Cooperation with Georgia (2014-2020), p. 10.

implementation modalities, funding channels and instruments has contributed to enhanced relevance and cost-effectiveness of interventions. This finding is in line with the 2022 Technical Cooperation Facility (TCF) evaluation, which only partially covered youth-related sectors, notably education/culture programmes and migration/visa-facilitation/integrated border management. The evaluation report noted that *“the flexibility in implementation has led to more effectiveness and efficiency. The unprecedented levels of flexibility seen by the Evaluation Team was due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but now that some flexible approaches have been tested, they should be considered for non-emergency situations as well, given that there were some very positive results achieved (...). A part of flexible approach to implementation is making use of various tools, such as Technical assistance, twinning and direct grants. Adopting a needs-based approach in making such decisions has proven to be successful in the past and should be applied in the design of future TCF programmes.”*

2.3 Partnerships are enhanced and EU-added value maximised (EQ 3)

There is evidence of progressively increased incidence of joint analysis, programming and division of labour with EU MS, including through the application of the Team Europe approach. While the Team Europe approach has so far been focussed on traditional sectors of cooperation, the most recent VET programming was designed utilising the Team Europe approach. Youth is gaining importance not just within the European Union and EU MS and their policies but also in other non-EU actors and multilateral organisations, with more donors working on youth issues or in youth-related sectors. This necessitates a viable donor coordination system for youth-related interventions. **There is clear evidence that sharing knowledge on European policies, models, approaches, and good practices towards youth has generated multiple policy recommendations to improve youth-related policies or legal frameworks.** Some of these recommendations have been considered and adopted by the Georgian public authorities. **EU-supported regional and international exchanges between Eastern Partnerships youth have had positive impact on empowering the beneficiary youth as leaders and agents of positive change. Additional effort is needed to reach young people from more marginalised backgrounds and those not enrolled in the high education institutions.**

2.3.1 Partnerships with EU MS and other actors (JC 3.1 and 3.2)

There is evidence of progressively increased incidence of joint analysis, programming and division of labour with EU MS, including through the application of the Team Europe approach. While the Team Europe approach has so far been focussed on traditional sectors of cooperation, the most recent VET programming was designed utilising the Team Europe approach (I-3.1.1, I-3.1.2, I-3.2.2). Joint programming in *Georgia* started a decade ago, with the EU, EU MS, and *Switzerland* agreeing initially on the joint programming roadmap (2014) and then on having a joint analysis in place for the period of 2017-2020. These, however, covered such traditional sectors of cooperation as governance, Rule of Law and justice, sustainable and inclusive economic growth, human capital development, social welfare, and sustainable use of natural resources. Similarly, there is evidence of EU partnership with regional and international actors in youth-related sectors (e.g. Council of Europe, UN agencies, World Bank). In fact, the latest VET initiative is employing a Team Europe approach to effect changes. Since the Team Europe approach is fairly new, the data is not providing evidence to speak about the effects brought by the application of the Team Europe approach on youth development. However, there is a good example of positive results of partnerships/joint programming on Georgian and the Eastern Partnership youth through the European School, which was created in part to provide concrete opportunities to young generations to find more and better employment and to promote, among students, a better understanding of the EU and of its engagement in the region. *“In this regard, complementarity with the activities of existing Member States’ schools work in promoting EU goals and values was reinforced”.*²¹²

There is a need for a viable donor coordination system for youth-related interventions. Youth is gaining importance not just within the European Union and the EU MS and their policies, but also in other non-EU actors and multilateral organisations. This has led to a growing number of donor-funded projects in *Georgia* that support youth economic inclusion and VET development. According to the recent *Georgia* CSE report, interlocutors believe that there is a need for the EU to address this challenge by leading donor coordination efforts to avoid competition and duplication of efforts and to ensure synergies and complementarity. It is important to note that the 2022 Evaluation of TCFs in *Georgia* found that the government-led coordination mechanism of *Horizon 2020* had some difficulties, emanating from: i) understaffing (only one Ministry of Education and Science staffer); ii) lack of clear understanding among the designated volunteers (National Contact Points) as to what their roles were with respect to the TCF/H2020 interventions; and iii) lack of clear indicators/guidelines from the EU. This said, the validation mission noted an excellent practice of inter-sectoral coordination to promote effective EVET

²¹² EU (2021): Action Document for European School in Georgia.

reforms in Georgia, which was initiated and led by the EUD and progressively being taken over by the Ministry of Education and Science.

2.3.2 Expertise and knowledge on youth (JC 3.3)

Sharing of knowledge on European policies, models, approaches, and good practices towards youth have positively influenced Georgia's policies in this area (I-3.3.2, I-3.3.3). There are multiple examples that demonstrate the positive impact of experience/knowledge sharing on Georgia's engagement strategies with youth. They come from various types of projects from Budget Support Technical assistance (GOPA Consulting Group) to the Eastern Partnership European School and various *EU4YOUTH* projects implemented in Georgia. Some of the most notable impact is the adoption of the National Youth Concept and Strategy, development of the Draft Law on Youth, conceptualisation of youth work, development of the VET qualification framework, etc. Other examples include knowledge sharing, models, and good practices through Twinning interventions, as is the case with the German Academic Exchange Service/DAAD and the National Center for Education Quality Enhancement/NCEQE, which had an unintended positive outcome of improving the German populations' perception of *Georgia* and Georgian citizens. Furthermore, the European School, which is one of the 20 deliverables for 2020, opened in 2018 (as a pilot), with the first cohort of 30 students, many from disadvantaged backgrounds and breakaway and rural regions, graduating in 2020. According to the Action Document for the European School in Georgia, among the many critical operational and technical lessons learnt was that "*Member States' experience in education is a precious source for structuring and developing alternative curricula and their involvement should be ensured from the outset.*" Importantly, according to the *Georgia* CSE, "*the Ministry of Education sees the European school as a role model for Georgia and consider replicating it in the national education system*".²¹³

Sharing of European knowledge and experience is constant in this project, with the Georgian education system benefitting from cooperation with Estonian colleagues on curriculum development. Another good example is research conducted by the *EU4YOUTH* project Enhancing Youth Education, Employment and Participation in Conflict-affected Areas in *Georgia* and *Ukraine*, which identified best practices of *youth employment and entrepreneurship* in *Estonia*, *Poland*, and the *United Kingdom*, highlighting their replication potential in *Georgia* and *Ukraine*. As noted by the respondents, this study was utilised by the targeted public authorities in developing relevant youth policies. Additional positive impact is likely to be achieved from the new regional programme on general education diagnostics led by ETF, as it will problematise good governance in education in partner countries, which could support the EUD in its dialogue with the Government of *Georgia* on this issue. Lastly, according to the 2022 *EU4YOUTH* Achievement Report, 29 policy strategies or legislative recommendations to improve youth education, entrepreneurship and participation have been developed in *Georgia*. The validation mission was able to confirm these outputs, but thus far the vast majority of these recommendations have yet to be considered and adopted by the Georgian authorities.

2.3.3 Exchanges with youth actors (JC 3.4)

While regional and international exchanges between Eastern Partnership youth have had positive impact on empowering the beneficiary youth as leaders and agents of positive change, additional effort is needed to reach young people from more marginalised backgrounds and those not enrolled in the high education institutions (I-3.4.1, I-3.4.2). There are several projects that have had a specific focus of bringing Eastern Partnership youth together in various institutional or informal settings, among them the Eastern Partnership European School and the European School Summer Camps projects. Others have supported youth exchanges as part of their theory of change (e.g. the *Social Entrepreneurship in Armenia and Georgia/SEAG* – project implemented by Mercy Corps). An additional opportunity for exchange is the *EU4YOUTH* Alumni Network conferences, which bring together young people from the region to share best practices and challenges and reflect on future endeavours. Apart from the Eastern Partnership exchanges, Georgia's youth greatly benefit from the Union-Georgia youth exchanges, as *Georgia* participates in all programme components of Erasmus+, including Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees, *Capacity Building in Higher Education action/CBHE* projects, *Jean Monnet* activities and International credit mobility. According to the Association Implementation Report (2020), *Georgia* was one of the most successful countries as regards to international credit mobility scholarships, ranking 6th out of 141. To be more precise, "*over 5,600 students and academic staff from Georgia have studied or taught in the EU as part of the Erasmus+ programme, and more than 300 young people and youth workers are taking part in joint activities with their counterparts from the EU.*"²¹⁴

²¹³ EU (2022): Evaluation of EU's Cooperation with Georgia (2014-2020), p. 38.

²¹⁴ DG NEAR (2023): Georgia country page, accessed on June 26, 2023.

The above-described regional and international exchanges, coupled with other targeted capacity development and empowerment activities, have supported young people in understanding the common challenges faced by the Eastern Partnership youth, forging ties with each other, and engaging in community development activities as civic leaders or social entrepreneurs. However, most interlocutors have stressed the challenge of reaching underserved youth or youth outside the higher education setting. This was also one of the findings of the most recent EU *Georgia* CSE, which underscores Georgia's stellar performance on youth exchange front, but notes that the geographic distribution of institutions participating in the programme is uneven, with vast majority being located in Tbilisi.²¹⁵ The same evaluation report notes that the positive efforts of international mobility for students, researchers, workers, and professionals have been limited to the higher education sphere.²¹⁶

2.4 Effects on Youth Engagement (EQ 4)

Judging from EU's youth portfolio, **the EU is aware of the context in which young people and youth activists operate in Georgia, which is the reason why most bilateral support in this area is focussed not on youth political and civic activism, but on youth economic inclusion.** As the state's appetite for real youth activism is not high, the EU has tried various entry points to empower youth as agents of change. Through its bilateral engagement, it has done so successfully in VET reforms resorting to various support modalities from budget support to Technical assistance and grants and utilising "whole of government" approach. When it comes to youth leadership and civic empowerment, EU support to young people of *Georgia* has come mostly through policy dialogue and regional initiatives, **EU utilised a more youth-centred approach in its support programmes under economic development, labour market and VET reforms.** The same programme has contributed to the adoption and implementation of the national youth strategy, and the development of youth worker standard, which should improve the duty bearers' capacity to engage with youth. **There is clear evidence that EU has contributed to the quality of youth policies and youth engagement frameworks in *Georgia* and will do so even more during the next cooperation period, per 2021-2027 Association Agenda**

2.4.1 Political and institutional space for youth and youth organisations (JC 4.1)

The review of EU's youth portfolio in *Georgia* confirms that the EUD's awareness of the context in which young civic activists operate in Georgia, was informed by in-depth analyses of the political economy conditions and from keen observations from capable EUD staff familiar with the local context (I-4.1.1). It is perhaps due to this awareness of the political economy conditions that much of EU's bilateral support to *Georgia* in this area is focussed not on youth political and civic empowerment, but on youth economic inclusion. Youth civic engagement has long been politicised in Georgia, with ruling parties trying to use student unions set up in public universities and other youth networks supported through state budgets to gain political advantage before or during elections. Thus, it is not surprising that appetite for real youth activism is not high within the Georgian Government, and the EUD has tried other entry points to empower youth as agents of change, while youth leadership and political empowerment are supported through regional initiatives.

An important note of caution on regional level of analysis was provided in the 2014 Evaluation of Eastern Partnership Youth in Action, which noted the following: "*According to the interviewed beneficiaries as well as the stakeholders the current regional definition which combines the three Eastern European countries with the South Caucasus Countries does not always match the latest developments and interests in the region. Countries who have signed the agreement (Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) would wish more exchange and collaboration with EU countries in the field of youth.*"²¹⁷ It seems that this cautionary note was taken into consideration when funding cross-border projects under the EU4YOUTH programme. A notable case is the project implemented by the Danish Refugee Council (Enhancing Youth Education, Employment and Participation in Conflict-affected Areas in *Georgia* and *Ukraine*), where parallels, similarities, and differences were taken into consideration during project design and implementation, supporting economic empowerment of IDP youth from both countries.

EU interventions have supported youth in elaborating their own agendas, organising themselves and developing skills and competencies as youth leaders for engagement in policy-making. However, support to CSOs that seek to promote the emergence of youth leaders could be improved (I-4.1.2). Over the years, various regional initiatives have supported interventions have supported youth in developing and/or applying skills and competences as youth leaders. One such example is the *Eastern Partnership Civil Society Fellowship* programme, through which "EU supports young civil society leaders and activists" in *Georgia* and the *Neighbourhood East region*. A review of the

²¹⁵ EU (2023): Report on Georgia's involvement in the youth components of the Erasmus+ Programme (2014-2020), p.10.

²¹⁶ EU (2022): Evaluation of EU's Cooperation with Georgia (2014-2020), p. 10.

²¹⁷ EU (2014): Evaluation of Eastern Partnership Youth in Action Window, p. 53.

fellow profiles and projects²¹⁸ shows that topics covered by the fellows were most salient during the years when the fellowship was awarded. For example, with Russia's second invasion of *Ukraine*, support for Ukrainian children and youth finding refuge in *Georgia* was one of the most pressing needs in 2022, while combatting *Russian* disinformation, increasing public awareness of visa liberalisation rules, and building capacity of regional CSOs on EU affairs was very much at the forefront of public debates during 2017 and 2018. Importantly, most Civil Society Fellows seem to have been under the age of 30 at the time of receiving the fellowship, though, some older individuals also have won the awards. Other regional projects that supported youth in elaborating their own agendas and developing the skills and competencies as youth leaders have included a Danish Refugee Council-implemented project Enhancing Youth Education, Employment and Participation in Conflict-affected Areas of *Georgia* and *Ukraine* and Mercy Corps' *Social Entrepreneurship in Armenia and Georgia/SEAG* project. Additionally, there were nine grant projects awarded under the *Skills4Jobs* Programme, which were conceived as pilot interventions, essentially, to test the new approaches on the ground and generate results to be emulated over time and in different regions and municipalities of *Georgia*. According to monitoring reports, these projects "managed to change the life course of several hundreds of beneficiaries thus contributing to important benefits at individual, community, societal and economic levels."

Importantly, the review of EU-funded actions during the evaluation period identified only one grant awarded to a local youth organisation Changes for Equal Rights for advocacy related to improved protection and promotion of rights of people with disabilities through the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities/UNCPRD provisions. This organisation credits its success to a well-established CSO in the disability field, as without their support in developing and then implementing the project, it would have been near impossible to succeed in receiving EU funds. Already, the organisation is implementing its second EU project, stressing significant institutional growth through having these two opportunities to lead complex EU-funded projects. Other youth or youth-led organisations received EU support through Erasmus+ programme and, more specifically, through its *EU4YOUTH* capacity building direction, which according to reports provided funding to 22 youth organisations only during 2017-2019. However, the validation mission could not gather evidence on the impact of EU funding on these CSOs. Those interviewed during the mission have noted that they had higher expectations of support from *EU4YOUTH* programme, which has not materialised to date.

Youth Policy Labs, funded through *EU4YOUTH* regional programme, also seem as context-sensitive EU interventions supporting youth in elaborating their own agendas, organising themselves and developing skills and competencies as youth leaders for meaningful and influential engagement in policy-making processes. However, some of the participants did not seem to know what happened after they developed common policy recommendations.

2.4.2 Dialogue and cross-sectoral collaboration (JC 4.2)

EU has reached out to and involved different categories of youth, ensuring the inclusion of vulnerable and discriminated youth groups, such as NEETs, IDP youth, and people with special educational needs (I-4.2.1). EU efforts discussed under this indicator are supported through both bilateral and regional programming. When it comes to the latter, it is mostly done through Georgia's involvement in *Erasmus+* youth component. The recent report on Georgia's participation in the programme commissioned by the EUD highlights the fact that *Georgia* is a best performing Eastern Partnership country and notes that 22 youth organisations were funded during 2017-2019, but of these only two were from Rustavi, where one can find sizable ethnic minority population, and one from Zugdidi, where IDPs from the 1990s still reside in collective IDP centres. Importantly, the report does not provide information on the types of projects funded or the impact of these projects on the CSOs' organisational development and validation mission could not gather information to that effect. The EU also supports Young European Ambassadors, which has ensured some level of diversity through improved urban rural representation, but involvement of ethnic minority youth is very low (only six ethnic minority youth).²¹⁹ Lastly, EU interventions funded through *EU4YOUTH* programme have made efforts to reach young people in most vulnerable and marginalised situations. When it comes to bilateral programming, the *Skills4Jobs* programme, including its grant component, has been specifically targeting NEETs, IDP youth, and youth with special learning needs.

As described under EQ 5, the has EU utilised a more youth-centred approach in its support programmes under economic development, labour market and VET reforms. The same programme has contributed to the adoption and implementation of the national youth strategy, and the development of youth worker standard, which should improve the duty bearers' capacity to engage with youth (I-4.2.2, I-4.2.3). According to internal monitoring documentation, policy dialogue

²¹⁸ EAP (2023): YEA fellowship profiles, accessed on July 1, 2023.

²¹⁹ EAP (2023): YEA fellowship profiles, accessed on July 2, 2023.

and negotiations on performance indicators for the 2013-2018 EVET programme have contributed to the development of a holistic national vision of VET in a lifelong learning context, helped the government to focus on vulnerable youth and adults and to reorient education and training provision towards the needs of learners and employers, and thus contributed to an improved investment environment and economic growth. The EVET reforms also provide a good example of the use of whole of government approach to youth. The same is true for policy dialogue and advocacy on youth policy development, which resulted in the adoption of the new youth strategy and action plan, creation of the Youth Agency, development of youth worker standard, etc. These changes were made with participation of youth organisations, though some respondents have noted their disappointment in the level of inclusiveness of the line ministry in charge of youth policy development.

The review identified that *EU4YOUTH*-supported interventions also aim at supporting cross-sectoral collaboration but was unable to gather information on outcomes. Among such projects is the *Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship* project implemented by Central Project Management Agency /CPMA which strives to achieve enhanced capacity for stakeholders for active labour market policies developments and evidence-based employment policy design and legal changes for better jobs and recognition of skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning. Another *EU4YOUTH* intervention implemented by GIZ that aims at increasing the policy influence young people in the *Neighbourhood East region* by capacity development support to both youth organisations and public institutions to engage in participatory and structured policy dialogue, but it is too early to discuss its results.

2.4.3 Policy, legislative and institutional frameworks (JC 4.3)

There is clear evidence that EU has contributed to the quality of youth policies and youth engagement frameworks in Georgia and will do so even more during the next cooperation period, per 2021-2027 Association Agenda (I-4.3.1). These contributions are made through Technical assistance and grant projects accompanying sectoral budget support measures and through regional and bilateral programmes implemented by GOPA Consulting Group, Central Project Management Agency/CPMA, GIZ, CSOs, and others. As noted in the 2021-2017 Association Agenda, “Georgia will continue the development of the youth sector and evidence- and rights-based youth policies with the aim of creating a sustainable ecosystem for youth development, which enables the youth to fully realise their potential and get actively involved in all areas of public life; increases young people’s understanding of democratic values and principles and supports them to claim their own rights; as well as to ensure full and equal economic empowerment, protection of health and well-being and equal access to information and resources for all young people in Georgia.”

There is a potential that young people in Georgia are now better informed and empowered to engage in EU external action and influence EU policies, but they are not mobilised to provide inputs on EU political priorities in Georgia (I-4.3.2, I-4.3.3). EU runs Blue Book and Schuman Traineeships that are open to Georgian youth to learn about and be empowered to engage in EU external action. In addition, *Erasmus+* supports work placement and traineeships, which depending upon the degree programme of the student, could be connected to EU external action or other EU institutions. These opportunities would ensure that young people who benefit from them are better informed and empowered to engage in EU external action and influence EU policies and actions. However, desk review did not provide any information as to the number of Georgian nationals benefiting from these opportunities and the actual impact they may have had on these individuals or rather on their ability to engage in EU external action. ***EU4YOUTH regional projects have a sizable regional exchange and cooperation component that aims at*** fostering a sense of belonging to a shared community, which in turn should contribute to reducing tensions between neighbouring countries.

2.5 Effects on Economic Integration (EQ 5)

Although youth economic integration was not treated in EU cooperation as a cross-cutting concern during 2014-2020, EU actions undertaken during 2014-2020 period have made tangible effort to target young people in the most vulnerable situations and youth considerations have been well mainstreamed in economic development, labour market, VET reform areas. There is undisputed evidence that education and the Technical and Vocational Education and Training curriculum and standards reformed with EU support have contributed to enhancing young people’s skills and employability, but the impact to date seems to be less than initially projected. EU actions, especially policy dialogue on youth policy development and grants to CSOs, target young people in the most vulnerable situations. Furthermore, EU support has improved youth mobility through youth exchanges, trainings, and networking activities, though access to EU-funded opportunities for groups in marginalised and vulnerable situations was more limited. The EU has supported effective dialogue for improved economic integration of vulnerable groups and has funded or otherwise encouraged employment, value chain, and other analyses needed for evidence-based reforms. The treatment of youth and youth-related issues is significantly improved in the 2021-2027 Association Agenda,

which bodes well for mainstreaming youth economic integration in national sector policies and for enhancing young people's participation in reform processes.

2.5.1 Relevance of implantation approaches (JC 5.1)

Until 2021 youth economic integration was not treated in EU cooperation as a cross-cutting concern to be mainstreamed in national sector policies. However, the 2021-2027 Association Agenda has provisions that could contribute to mainstreaming youth economic integration in national sector policies (I-5.1.1, I-5.1.2). The AA/DCFTA serves as the basis for EU-Georgia cooperation, which has been operationalised in the 2014-2016, 2017-2020, and 2021-2027 Association Agenda. While the AA and its Chapter 16 commits *Georgia* and the EU to cooperate in the field of youth, the Agreement does not explicitly mandate that the cooperation between the parties should promote youth considerations into other policy areas (as it does with environment, Art. 304). As noted above under EQ 1 (section 2.1), the 2014-2016 and then the 2017-2020 Association Agenda did not prioritise youth, though they made reference to the need for mainstreaming youth considerations in policy making. An indicator of how youth concerns, including economic integration, were treated in EU-Georgia cooperation is the Ex-post evaluation of the implementation of the DCFTA between the EU and its MS and *Georgia*, where there is no mention of youth or young people.²²⁰ The 2021-2027 Association Agenda better features youth and youth-related issues, which bodes well for mainstreaming youth and youth economic integration considerations in national sector policies.

Of the two Team Europe Initiatives in Georgia, Green and Health and Balanced Territorial Development, the latter has a potential of supporting young people's economic integration (I-5.1.2), as it strives to improve rural development and value chains through supporting SME financing, social entrepreneurship, and local job creation. This programme is treating youth as one of the beneficiary groups of the action, as it does not seem that consultations with youth took place and young people's needs are not mentioned in the available descriptions of action. Importantly, the new EVET programme has been developed utilising the Team Europe approach.

2.5.2 Integration of vulnerable and marginalised youth (JC 5.2)

The review confirmed that the EU actions, especially policy dialogue on youth policy development and grants to CSOs, target young people in the most vulnerable situations (I-5.2.1, I-5.2.2). The documentary review provides ample evidence that shows that EU actions have targeted youth in the most vulnerable situations.²²¹ This is true for actions supported through regional programmes like *EU4YOUTH* (e.g. projects implemented by Danish Refugee Council, Caucasus Environmental NGO Network Association/CENN, and Mercy Corps) to actions that have been supported from the Delegation to impact the EVET reforms, to promote social entrepreneurship, and to protect human rights. EU support to Danish Refugee Council and ACF has also been instrumental in reaching out to vulnerable and marginalised youth in the breakaway Abkhazia to contribute to both their economic and social inclusion, through utilising shuttle and sky clubs for very important sub-skills development (e.g. leadership, motivation, self-esteem development), which is an important contribution to strengthening peace and security (EQ 7). Other EU-supported interventions contributing these indicators were also funded through EIDHR supported actions implemented by local and international CSOs, which have targeted youth in the most vulnerable situations, such as those residing in ethnic-minority populated areas, IDP collective settlements, youth with disabilities and in conflict with law, etc.

2.5.3 Ownership through improved data and dialogue (JC5.3)

Finding 5.3. There is clear evidence that the EU has supported effective dialogue for improved economic integration of vulnerable groups and has funded or otherwise encouraged employment, value chain, and other analyses needed for evidence-based reforms (I-5.3.1, I-5.3.2). Some of the examples of EU-supported research and analyses are the analytical Labour Market and National Skills Anticipation reports through Technical assistance project implemented by GOPA Consulting Group, as well as other small- and large-scale assessments conducted by EU grantees for and through grant projects that aimed at increasing employability of vulnerable groups, including youth (e.g. the learn for Employment project, which also involved labour market needs assessments for project target regions). The EU has also been supporting the National Statistics Office to improve its capacities and has pushed the government in the implementation of an improved framework for social partnership. Moreover, the EU is also providing Technical assistance and capacity development support of the Youth

²²⁰ EU (2022): Ex-post evaluation of the implementation of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area between the EU and its Member States and Georgia, Draft Final Report, April 2022.

²²¹ Georgia CSE report notes that "All EU support in the areas [of economic development and market opportunities] have, in the interest of inclusive labour market development, included targeted components aimed at promoting the involvement of women, youth, and vulnerable groups."

Agency and various agencies under the Ministry of Education and Science, and through these efforts, it has contributed to some government-led analyses of various aspects of youth economic integration. The review of the Association Implementation Reports on *Georgia*, internal reports, and relevant Annual Action Programmes/AAPs confirms that the EU has long been supporting dialogue on inclusive economic reforms, recommending involving employers, employees and trade unions more systematically in all important policy decisions. However, the same reports make it clear that support to youth engagement in economic policy making was not done. The documentary review provided fragmented evidence of EU supporting meaningful youth participation in these reform efforts through regional initiatives (e.g. implemented by the Central Project Management Agency/CPMA), and the validation mission was unable to find additional information.

2.5.4 Impact and sustainability of youth economic integration (JC5.4)

The EU support for labour market and social sector policy reforms have bolstered employment incentives on both supply and demand sides of the labour market (I-5.4.1). For example, the Technical assistance project Skills Development for Matching Labour Market Needs in Georgia, which focussed on skills anticipation and matching, skills development, and entrepreneurship development, was instrumental in supporting the drafting of the national VET Strategy and its implementation Action Plan (AP), Career Guidance Strategy and its AP, improved access to VET by youth, and the development of professional standards for youth workers. Grants issues under *Skills4Jobs* also contributed to bolstered employment incentives and advocacy of international donors (including the EU) and local CSOs has finally led to February 2022 changes in the existing state social policy, which abolished a significant market disincentive for individuals drawing social protection benefits, who were discouraged from seeking employment, as even a short-term contract could lead to losing the state-funded social protection. However, the most notable EU-supported reform that will improve skills-matching and employment services for youth and other vulnerable groups is the separation of employment services from social services. The new State Employment Service Agency/SESA, which has been supported through *Skills4Jobs* Technical assistance project, became operational in January 2020 and according to respondents, this change has already led to palpable positive developments for jobseekers, notable through increasing the reach of the State Employment Service Agency/SESA's services throughout Georgia.

There is undisputed evidence that education and Technical and Vocational Education and Training curriculum and standards reformed with EU support have contributed to enhancing young people's skills and employability, but the impact to date seems to be less than initially projected (I-5.4.2). The EU has been supporting VET reforms for quite some time, with Sector Policy Support Programme in EVET already in place in 2013, which among other objectives, included improving school-to-work transition for youth. The Government of *Georgia* efforts in this area were further supported by the EU using various implementation modalities, including sector budget support and Technical assistance, as well as grants to Tbilisi-based and regional CSOs (e.g. United Nations Association Georgia, Center for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia/CSRDG -, Kutaisi Educational Development and Employment Centre/KEDEC), international CSOs (Save the Children, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung), and academic institutions (Ilia and Tbilisi State Universities), designed to support initiatives aimed at strengthening the link between labour market needs and the VET system. External evaluations have confirmed a good deal of success in this area. For example, the 2017 assessment of the EU-funded Sector Reform Contract to support reforms in EVET notes that the programme fulfilled its promise of improving labour market management, quality and relevance of the VET system, and young people's prospects for school-to-work transition. The 2022 *Georgia* CSE is also complementary of EU's efforts in this area, noting that some of the criticisms voice in the Sector Reform Contract assessment have been addressed in the later Budget Support-Technical assistance support of the sector, which improved business involvement in the reforms, and succeeded in expanding the VET coverage and strengthening the capacity of VET institutions for increased compatibility between vocational education and labour market demands. However, the evaluation also notes that "data leading up to 2018 show that, despite substantial efforts to expand and develop the VET sector and strengthen the capacities of the institutions involved, Government had not been on track of achieving its ambitious target of increasing the number of VET students".²²² Information about the impact of the grant projects was provided through the Technical assistance project which also supporting M&E efforts in this area. The impact included development and testing of new methodologies and curricular, creation of career guidance centres, upskilling of NEETs, etc. Overall, the impact of the above-described efforts is clear, though less than envisioned, mostly due to the delays experienced in the implementation of the bilateral SME support programme, which was to provide additional complementarities and synergies, for the EVET programming.

²²² EU (2022): Evaluation of EU's Cooperation with Georgia (2014-2020), p. 30.

There is a good potential for sustainability of results, given that projects were envisioned as pilot interventions, to test the new approaches on the ground and generate results to be emulated over time and in different regions and municipalities of Georgia. However, not enough time has lapsed from their completion to make judgment on their sustainability.

There is clear evidence that EU support has improved youth mobility through youth exchanges, trainings, and networking activities, though access to EU-funded opportunities for groups in marginalised and vulnerable situations is more limited (I-5.4.3). EU support has been instrumental in increasing academic and cultural mobility of Georgian youth, through various interventions funded through *Erasmus+*²²³ and *Creative Europe* programmes. Information on *Creative Europe*²²⁴ projects and their contribution to youth mobility was fairly limited, but it can be said with certainty that the programme, which supports cultural cooperation and networks, likely contributed to improved youth mobility through common capacity building and networking activities. Some of the relevant projects that could be highlighted are: i) *Tbilisi Architecture Biennial*; ii) *Brave Kids*; iii) *One Europe, One Caucasus*; iv) *School of Film Advancement/SOFA* project for cultural managers; v) *The New Dictionary for Old Ideas*; vi), *Parallel Traces*; vii) *European ARTificial Intelligence Lab*, and others. With *Georgia* signing a new agreement to take part in the *Creative Europe* Programme during 2021-2027, opportunities for youth mobility in the cultural sector should continue.

Perhaps the most obvious impact on youth mobility in *Georgia* came from *Erasmus+* Programme. According to *Georgia* CSE, “evidence for the existence and effects of international mobility mechanisms for students, researchers, workers, and professionals is limited to higher education.” The report provides that only during 2015-2019, more than 4,750 students and staff moved from *Georgia* to Europe, with around 63% of the students who participated in mobilities were female.²²⁵ Based on the information from the National *Erasmus+* office, the report notes that “students with European experiences find jobs more easily [which is why] there is strong competition for mobilities, with around 25 applications for each scholarship.”²²⁶ That said, there is an issue of equal distribution of mobility opportunities for young people in Georgia, which was also highlighted in the *Georgia* CSE report. The evaluation found that while 80% of Georgian universities take part in the *Erasmus+* programming, “70% of the mobility of students and academic staff was limited to a total of five universities, all located in Tbilisi.”

Some of the examples of mobility opportunities for youth that involve Georgian’s higher education institutions are the following: i) Creation of the Graduate Curricula in Peace Studies in *Georgia* led by Dublin City University, which provides wide opportunities for Georgian students by offering them internship and EU research mobility programmes; ii) Improving skills in laboratory practice for agro-food specialists in eastern Europe led by Ljubljana university, which included student mobility among the participating universities; iii) A Global Network for Agricultural Sciences and Viticulture: Internationalising through Joint Programmes/VITAGLOBAL led by University of Rovira I Virgili, which also had a student mobility component, and (4) Paving the way to interregional mobility and ensuring relevance, quality and equity of access led by University of Yerevan, which involved promotion of virtual mobility of teachers and students. Other projects, such as the project Paving the way to interregional mobility and ensuring relevance, quality and equity of access led by University of L’Aquila, which aimed at creating a reliable system of credit and grade transfer, so that students from various countries, including Georgia, could enjoy easier mobility.²²⁷

EU contribution to youth labour mobility is more limited. Some of the relevant work in this area was presumably through the EU-Georgia Migration Partnership which was focussed on visa liberalisation and creation of legal migration channels to EU. The 2022 TCF evaluation, which positively evaluated the EU support in visa liberalisation and integrated border management areas recommended the following: “To leverage more positive effects in both *Georgia* and EU countries and reduce the risk of brain drain, mobility schemes with circular movements and additional elements of support (internships, vocational training, mentoring, business development and diaspora engagement) as well as a dual track for training, must be promoted.”

The issue of brain drain has been highlighted in several other reports, as well as by a majority of respondents during the validation mission, which also highlighted the recently emerged issue of youth emigration, to be addressed in the new EVET programming. According to the 5th grant monitoring

²²³ As noted above, Georgia is a partner country of the Erasmus+, successfully participating in all programme components, including the International credit mobility, Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees, Capacity Building in Higher Education action (CBHE) projects, and Jean Monnet activities.

²²⁴ Georgia was the first Neighbourhood country to have joined the Creative Europe Programme in January 2015.

²²⁵ EU (2022): Evaluation of EU's Cooperation with Georgia (2014-2020), p. 36.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Note that through joining the Bologna Process in 2005 and adopting the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), Georgia ensured that its institutions of higher education have achieved credit standardisation.

exercise conducted by the Technical assistance project funded under the *Skills4Jobs* programme, “intensified migration of youth to big cities of Georgia and abroad, [as well as] lack of mobility in the regions and increasing migration are external factors that badly affect implementation of grant scheme and need to be addressed at policy level.” The Georgia CSE report notes that adopting a multi-sectoral analytical perspective for risk assessments might help the EU to better discern some of the unintended consequences of its support. The report notes the following “it is, for example, a yet-unaddressed question whether improved mobility encourages greater brain and skills drain, and how EU support to SMEs, VET/skills development, and professional mobility mitigates such a potential effect.”²²⁸ The 2018 Evaluation of EU’s Mobility Partnerships notes that while the EU-Georgia mobility partnership was in part to focus on creating legal migration channels, the impact for Georgians has been disappointing with just two projects completed in the area prior to 2020, of which one resulted in most participating healthcare workers remaining in the host country (Germany) “to work legally after the project had ended due to a lack of a mechanism supporting return and the large difference in salary earned by healthcare workers in Germany and Georgia.”²²⁹ According to the 2022 Association Implementation Report, Georgian seasonal workers worked in Germany for the first time based on the agreement between the Georgian and German employment agencies (age, settlement type, and gender breakdown is unavailable).

2.6 Effects on Social Cohesion and Inclusion (EQ 6)

EU policy dialogue and advocacy have been instrumental in the development, adoption, and implementation of the National Human Rights Strategy and relevant action plans, as well as the adoption of the Law on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination. Thus, EU efforts should have contributed to fostering social cohesion and inclusion by improving access to education, culture, and health rights for youth, especially those in marginalised and vulnerable situations. The Association Agendas and SSFs highlight the need to ensure the right to education for all children and young individuals and to improve inclusion of disadvantaged groups in mainstream education, looking at education enrolment and completion rates as one of the indicators for success.

2.6.1 School retention and non-formal education (JC 6.1)

Finding 6.1. Given that school retention is not an issue in Georgia, it is not surprising that EU efforts to support policy reforms in this area are minimal. However, both the EU and its MS have long been supporting inclusive education reforms and curriculum modernisation in Georgia. EU support for school retention reforms is limited, given the universal completion rates for primary and lower secondary (basic) education levels in Georgia. The constitution of Georgia, as well as the Law of Georgia on General Education, provides that while full general education includes 12 years of study, only primary (grade I-VI) and basic education (grades VII-IX) are mandatory. According to the data, Georgia has a universal completion rates for grades I through IX. However, the issue school retention exists, as according to UNICEF, only 66% of children manage to complete upper secondary level, with family wealth and ethnicity being the two key determinant factors.

EU’s gender equality and women’s empowerment/GEWE efforts implemented through UN agencies (UN women and UNFPA), as well as through local and international CSOs, have also addressed the issue of access to education by women and girls among minority and rural populations, where religious and cultural norms, including early marriage, often preclude young women from completing upper secondary level education. The 2014-2016 and 2017-2020 Association Agendas and SSFs provide brief information that suggests some level of involvement of the EU in this area, albeit a fairly limited one. Namely, these documents highlight the need to ensure the right to education for all children and young individuals, including those with special educational needs and to improve the inclusion of disadvantaged groups (including minorities, IDPs and other conflict-affected persons) in mainstream education, looking at education enrolment and completion rates as one of the indicators for success. The review of the internal EU reports, Association Implementation Reports, and Georgia CSE did not provide any evidence on the above indicators.

2.6.2 Youth as producer of culture (JC 6.2)

Finding 6.2. EU-funded actions have contributed to empowering youth as actors and producers of culture, but it is not possible to assess whether EU support for cultural activities adopted a youth lens (I-6.2.1, I-6.2.2). This conclusion is made based on the review of the projects funded through *Creative Europe* programme, which were listed and briefly discussed above under EQ 5 for their contribution to youth mobility. A good example is the *Platform Magic Carpets* project, which brought

²²⁸ EU (2022): Evaluation of EU’s Cooperation with Georgia (2014-2020), p. 44.

²²⁹ Sarah Langley and Clara Alberola (2018): Independent Evaluation of the Mobility Partnerships between the EU and Cape Verde, Georgia and Moldova, Maastricht Graduate School of Management, p. 54.

together 13 partners to support and showcase emerging artists and culture professionals for the implementation of audience development strategy and stimulation of international cultural activities. The project led to the establishment of a European Community Award Co-Creat & Comprehend, which is provided to the projects where communities are open to share their stories, resources, and skills with artists and cultural professionals to create a better cultural, emotional, and thus social environment together. The most recent TCF evaluation in *Georgia* found that *Creative Europe* projects, such as *Be Museum*, *Tbilisi Architecture Biennial*, *European Artificial Intelligence Lab*, and *First time in Georgia: ten EU Literature Prize winners* have contributed to social cohesion. The evaluation also noted that the programme attracted best and well-established Georgian cultural institutions and CSOs, but has not been able to reach out to nascent and quickly growing organisations, which are often at the forefront of innovation.

2.6.3 Access to mental health sexual, reproductive rights and services (JC 6.3)

Finding 6.3. There is clear evidence to conclude that EU efforts have been instrumental in developing, adopting, and implementing the 2014-2020 National Human Rights Strategy, which has a dedicated section for ensuring effective enjoyment of right to health, especially by vulnerable groups. However, information on specific EU actions covered by these indicators is not readily available or easily tracked (I-6.3.1, I-6.3.2). The 2017-2020 Association Agenda lists strengthened access to reproductive and sexual health, information and prevention, and continued fight against harmful practices directed against women, including genital mutilation and other forms of degrading treatment, in particular in rural areas as one of the short-term priorities of cooperation. The sample of projects reviewed for this case study include grants awarded to local CSOs (Kakheti Regional Development Foundation and Public Health Foundation of Georgia) under the HumanRights4All framework to support healthcare for vulnerable mothers and children and to support youth and children who are victims of domestic and sexual violence. Furthermore, EU has supported effective enjoyment of right to health by the members of LGBTIQ community both through policy dialogue, as well as its anti-discrimination efforts and emergency grant support to Equality Movement and its vulnerable constituency during the COVID-19 pandemic. The validation mission provided additional information about other projects targeting this area, notably multiple projects implemented by UN women and UNFPA, as well as projects implemented by local and international CSOs, including Women in Europe for a Common Future/WECF.²³⁰ Many other actions supported by the EU have contributed to promoting access for youth health, sexual, reproductive rights and services, including a project implemented by the Innovations and Reforms Center, which established a women's shelter in Rustavi to serve victims of violence. This shelter has been credited multiple times for supporting victims of violence, mostly young women of ethnic Azeri background, but it closed after the funding ended. Deeper probing during the validation mission has highlighted that information about EU support in this area, which is clearly provided, is not readily available or easy to track.

2.6.4 Space of dialogue on discrimination, gender and social inclusion (JC 6.4)

Finding 6.4. Through policy dialogue and advocacy, the EU has been instrumental in the development, adoption, and implementation of the National Human Rights Strategy and relevant action plans, as well as the adoption of the Law on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination. This said, the scope of the case study did not allow for more detailed probing into this matter.

2.7 Effects on Peace and Security (EQ 7)

Documentary review has yielded some evidence that confirms that EU took concrete steps to understand youth realities in the conflict context or to create space for youth in defining EU priorities regarding peace and security. When it comes to engagement across the conflict divide, the sensitivity of the issue and difficult operational environment precluded the evaluation from accessing relevant information. When it comes to using youth lens during the formulation of EU security priorities, information was either unavailable or not easily trackable, which hindered proper analysis. In the same vein, desk review did not generate evidence that EU support to governance reforms, especially regarding the rule of law and the fight against corruption/impunity, have integrated a clear youth lens and contributed to addressing root causes of the marginalisation and disengagement of youth. However, **there is some evidence that EU-supported actions have adopted potentially effective strategies and approaches to reach and empower different categories of youth for engaging in peace and security processes**, but it is difficult to judge their quality based on action descriptions alone without programme reports, other external assessments, and stakeholder interviews.

²³⁰ Now Women Engage for a Common Future.

2.7.1 Adoption of youth-lens in peace and security strategies (JC 7.1)

Finding 7.1. The review provided some evidence that confirms that EU took concrete steps to understand youth realities in the conflict context or to create space for youth in defining EU priorities regarding peace and security (I-7.1.1, I-7.1.2). Since the 2008 war with *Russia*, the EU has played an important role in confidence-building and conflict resolution in *Georgia* through rapid and continuous deployment of the EU Monitoring Mission, as well as through the deployment of multiple funding instruments to support various confidence-building measures and humanitarian work across the ABL in Abkhazia. The EU's initial conflict analysis was to the point, as it showed a clear understanding of three levels of conflict (between *Georgia* and breakaway regions, Georgian and Russia, and between ethnic Abkhaz and ethnic Georgian societies across the ABL about the future of the remaining Georgian minority in the breakaway region. While conflict analysis did not include gender and youth components, many projects funded through COBERM I and II involved youth and youth education (on tolerance, cross-cultural communications, good governance, etc.). According to some respondents, this is due to the fact that the actual conflict analysis, which served as the basis for these interventions, offered much more details and nuanced assessments, then could be shared publicly through relevant action documents. When possible, P2P contacts were also funded, mostly in projects implemented by international organisations working across the ABLs. According to the 2013 *Georgia* CSE, *“the EU enabled some innovative responses and assisted in keeping lines of communication open between conflicting parties at not only the grass-roots level but also at the middle- and higher levels. A range of EU-funded projects, the largest being COBERM I (EUR 4.5 million) and II (EUR 5 million) but also smaller projects totalling EUR 2.4 million implemented by specialist INGO. In Abkhazia, EU funding has made an important contribution to the emergence and functioning of Civil Society, which some see as an important force for further conflict prevention.”*

The review of the action document for the UNDP Dialogue Coordination Mechanism notes no major change from the earlier approach to conflict analysis, though the COBERM III action description revealed that by 2015 gender gained more prominence, with COBERM III targeting CSOs, including women's and women led CSOs, to facilitate confidence building processes. Neither this action document nor the EU reporting provides any evidence which would suggest that EU took concrete steps to understand youth realities in the conflict context or to create space for youth in defining EU priorities regarding peace and security.²³¹ However, this is not surprising, given the sensitivity of both sides, especially of *de facto* authorities, about youth engagement in political and peace processes.

When it comes to using youth lens when formulating EU security priorities, information is not easily trackable, in part because significant interventions are done through regional or thematic interventions (e.g. through the *Hedayah Strengthening Resilience to Violence and Extremism/STRIVE* Global Programme) and information on these projects was difficult to find. This said, some of the projects funded through *Hedayah* have been very positively assessed by the respondents, both in terms of their relevance, as well as targeting and potential impact. The review also noted an important work being done with EUD support in Pankisi Gorge to address root causes of radicalisation through working with youth, elders, and teachers. Lastly, respondents have highlighted EU's work in drug and crime prevention area, with two projects implemented by mostly local CSO consortia, which did not have a specific youth component, but ended up targeting young people given the need for and saliency to work with youth.

2.7.2 Empowering youth as changemakers (JC 7.2)

Finding 7.2. There is some evidence that EU-supported actions have adopted effective strategies and approaches to reach and empower different categories of youth for engaging in peace and security processes (I-7.2.1). An interesting entry point to engage different categories of youth in peace processes was found in the UNICEF project (Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace/ICSP 2016/373-694), which used the *de facto* authorities' desire to move to fully Russian developed curriculum to support native language teaching for ethnic Georgians and to provide life-skills education to middle and high-school students with focus on confidence building and conflict resolution. A similar approach was taken by Danish Refugee Council, ACF, and others which used different methodologies for youth economic empowerment (e.g. SME training hubs, shuttle methodology, sky clubs), to reach out to the most vulnerable youth residing across the ABL and to teach them sub-skills that are very important for social inclusion and for engaging in a constructive dialogue with the other (e.g. leadership, motivation, self-esteem). Information about sub-grants awarded by UNDP through COBERM III was not shared to provide evidence for more detailed response to the above criterion. Apart from COBERM III projects, the EU supported actions relevant to this indicator were funded through *Creative Europe* (e.g.

²³¹ This is confirmed by the 2017 research on EU's peace-building interventions in Georgia. See Macharashvili Nana, Ekaterine Basialai and Nikoloz Samkharadze (2017): *Assessing the EU's Conflict Prevention and Peace-building Interventions in Georgia*, Iv. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University.

Brave Kids, One Europe, One Caucasus, Parallel Traces), and other Erasmus+ programmes, namely, *EU4YOUTH* and *Capacity Building in Higher Education action/CBHE*. Other relevant projects have been funded through *Hedayah Strengthening Resilience to Violence and Extremism/STRIVE* Global Programme, but as noted above, information on these projects was difficult to find. This said, an interview with one of the implementers confirmed that effective strategies of engaging youth from Pankisi Gorge were used to address the issue of radicalisation. The EUD-supported projects in response to radicalisation and drug and crime prevention have also utilised effective strategies and approaches to reach and empower different categories of youth for engaging in peace and security processes. Lastly, which the EU Monitoring Mission also provided some support to conflict affected youth, according to the respondents, this type of support was much too small to affect the conclusions.

The review could not find information linked to indicators 7.2.2 and 7.3.3.

2.7.3 Addressing root causes of marginalisation, disengagement and migratory drive (JC 7.3)

Finding 7.3. While capacity building for public agencies is part of all EU sectoral support programmes reviewed for this case study, it is unlikely that the targeted duty bearers understand that the EU-funded capacity development actions are there to help them to better fulfil their obligations. Capacity development element for rights holders to know about and to claim their rights is also addressed in sectoral support programmes, though less so in such sectors as VET, connectivity, rural development and not specifically for youth with the exception of juvenile justice and child’s rights (I-7.3.1). This conclusion came about following the review of various Annual Action Programmes/AAPs and action descriptions.

Desk review did not generate any evidence that EU support to governance reforms, especially regarding the rule of law and the fight against corruption/impunity, have integrated a clear youth lens and contributed to addressing root causes of the marginalisation and disengagement of youth. This judgment was made based on the review of relevant Annual Action Programmes/AAPs and available sector-specific evaluations.

3 Conclusions

EU’s growing ambitions toward youth are clearly seen in the evolving EU-Georgia cooperation framework, which is reflective of national specificities. Core youth challenges, such as skills mismatch, problems with socio-economic inclusion, and the need for meaningful youth participation in public decision-making processes, have well been reflected in EU programming, but support to youth organisations and young activists is still very limited. The existing political and institutional incentives are adequate to promote youth-centred approaches, but improvements can be made, in terms of dedicating more human resources, supporting stakeholders in learning about what is meant under the youth-centred approach to programming, and providing guidance, especially from the EU HQ, on the practical steps that can be taken to better mainstream youth considerations in various EU programmes.

In *Georgia*, the **EU support to youth empowerment and integration is provided through various implementation modalities, which are informed by political economy analysis, and which are followed by coherent measures to foster policy dialogue** on youth reforms, leading to tangible positive results, from improving national youth policies to enhancing institutional independence of the nascent Youth Agency and increasing employability of youth. Importantly, **EU support has greatly contributed to sharing knowledge on European policies, models, approaches, and good practices towards youth**, which led to generated multiple policy recommendations to improve youth-related policies and legal frameworks in *Georgia*. Some of these recommendations have been considered and adopted by the Georgian public authorities, with a most notable achievement being the adoption of the National Youth Strategy. This said, as with other strategies in Georgia, the degree of its implementation remains to be seen.

As the state’s appetite for real youth activism is not high, the EU has tried various entry points to empower youth as agents of change. Through its bilateral engagement, **it has done so successfully in VET reforms resorting to various support modalities from budget support to Technical assistance and grants and utilising “whole of government” approach.** When it comes to youth leadership and civic empowerment, EU support to young people of *Georgia* has come mostly through policy dialogue and regional initiatives. Importantly, improvements are needed, especially, when it comes to complementarities and synergies between bilateral, regional, and thematic initiatives that target youth.

Young people of Georgia have greatly benefited from EU-supported youth exchanges, trainings, and networking activities. However, **access to these opportunities for groups in marginalised and vulnerable situations is more limited.** Additional effort is needed to reach young people from more marginalised backgrounds and those not enrolled in higher education institutions.

4 Annex

4.1 List of persons consulted

<i>Name</i>	<i>Organisation</i>	<i>Position</i>
EU HQ		
DELEU, Corinne	Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR)	European School in Georgia
STAMPFER, Caroline	EUD to the International Organisations in Vienna	Attaché – FPI project manager (Balkans and South Caucasus)
EUD		
BRYSON, Alexandra	EUD (Georgia)	Programme Officer – Home Affairs and Security Sector Reform – Disability, Communications, and Visibility
CHKHETIA, Lali	EUD (Georgia)	Programme Officer – Home Affairs and Security Sector Reform – Disability, Communications and Visibility – Twinning, Taix, TCF coordination, and Global Allocation
JUODSNUKYTE, Jurate	EUD (Georgia)	Programme Officer – Skills (Labour Market), Migration and IBM – Gender Focal Point
KOCHISHVILI, Nino	EUD (Georgia)	EU Youth Focal Point – Programme Officer – Education, Skills (VET), Research & Innovation, Democracy (Parliament, elections, media), and Health
NIEBOJ, Agata	EUD (Georgia)	Programme Officer – Security (including oversight and efficiency)
PAPENHEIM, Dominik	EUD (Georgia)	Team Leader – Private Sector Development: SME, Business Integration – Budget Support Coordinator
SAMVELIDZE, Nino	EUD (Georgia)	Programme Officer – Statistics, Digital, Culture, Youth, Social, Eastern Partnership European School
Implementing Partners		
GVINEPADZE, Severian	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)	Manager of the EBRD's Advice for Small Businesses Programme
ETZOLD, Cay	German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)	Resident Twinning Advisor (Retired) Strengthening capacities for quality assurance and governance of qualifications
HANDLEY, David	GOPA Consulting Group	Team Leader, Technical assistance to Skills Development for Matching Labour Market Needs
TYNDALL, Graeme	United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)	Programme Specialist
ALADASHVILI, Elene	United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)	Senior Project Manager, European School in Georgia
Government		
KHANDOLISHVILI, Kakha	Ministry of Education and Science	Head of International Relations and Strategic Development Department
GABITASHVILI, Natia	Ministry of Education and Science	Deputy Head of International Relations and Strategic Development Department, COST National Coordinator
BAAKASHVILI, Vakhtang	The Youth Agency of Georgia	First Deputy Head
MIKHANASHVILI, Nino	The Youth Agency of Georgia	Coordinator for International Relations
CSOs and Youth Organisations		
MAXFIELD, Richard	Action contre la Faim (ACF)	Technical Coordinator
MAXFIELD, Marcella	Action contre la Faim (ACF)	Regional Director, ACF South Caucasus Office
LAGURASHVILI, Natela	Caucasus Environmental NGO Network Association (CENN)	Project Officer, Social Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Development (SEED) Programme for Green Growth in Borderline Communities
JATKAR, Susan	Danish Refugee Council	Programmes Coordinator

KHOKHOBAIA, Nino	Danish Refugee Council	Project Manager, Enhancing Youth Education, Employment and Participation in Conflict-affected Areas in Georgia and Ukraine
GULIASHVIL, Mariam	Equality Movement	Interim Executive Director Project Manager, COVID-19 Support for LGBTIQ in Georgia
ALBORISHVILI, Natia	Kakheti Regional Development Foundation (KRDF)	Project Manager, Improving health care, education and development opportunities for vulnerable mothers and children
PANCHULIDZE, Ketevan	National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement	Head of Qualification Development Department
DALAKISHVILI, Nani	National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement	Head of Vocational Development Department
TSULAIA, Nino	National Council of Youth Organisations of Georgia (NCYOG)	Chairperson
SARALIDZE, Lia	The Public Health Foundation of Georgia (PHF)	Executive Director
MASKHULIA, Mariam	The Public Health Foundation of Georgia (PHF)	Project Coordinator, Advocacy for child and youth protection
KAKABADZE, Toma	Youth Organisation Changes for Equal Rights/Coalition for Independent Living	Director
TSITSAGI, Ana	Youth Organisation Changes for Equal Rights/Coalition for Independent Living	Project Coordinator, Civil Society's Coordinated Advocacy for Implementing Disability Rights Commitments in Georgia

4.2 List of documents

EU Strategy Programming

- EU (2014): Association Agenda between the European Union and Georgia 2014-2016.
- EU (2014): Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and Georgia, of the other part.
- EU (2014): Single Support Framework for EU support to Georgia 2014-2017.
- EU (2014): Working Document “Georgia-EU+ Joint Programming”.
- EU (2015): EU-Georgia Trade, Deep And Comprehensive Free Trade Area [Factsheet].
- EU (2016): 2016 National Action Plan for the Implementation of the Association Agreement between Georgia and the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and the Association Agenda between Georgia and the European Union [Unofficial translation].
- EU (2017): Association Agenda between the European Union and Georgia 2017-2020.
- EU (2017): EU+ Joint Approach to Programming in Georgia.
- EU (2017): Recommendation No 1/2017 on the EU-Georgia Association Agenda (2017/2445).
- EU (2017): Single Support Framework for EU support to Georgia 2017-2020.
- EU (2018): Takeaways of the High-Level Meeting Between Members of the Commission and of the Government of Georgia.
- EU (2019): Reflection Note “Strategic Discussion on Sector Reform Performance Contracts in Georgia”.
- EU (2020): EU-Georgia Association Agenda 2021-2027.

EU Reporting

- EC (2016): Association Implementation Report on Georgia 2016.
- EC (2017): Association Implementation Report on Georgia 2017.
- EC (2018): Association Implementation Report on Georgia 2018.

- EC (2019): Association Implementation Report on Georgia 2019.
- EC (2020): Association Implementation Report on Georgia 2020.
- EC (2021): Association Implementation Report on Georgia 2021.
- EC (2022): Association Implementation Report on Georgia 2022.
- EUD Georgia (2014): Internal Reporting.
- EUD Georgia (2015): Internal Reporting.
- EUD Georgia (2016): Internal Reporting.
- EUD Georgia (2017): Internal Reporting.
- EUD Georgia (2018): Internal Reporting.
- EUD Georgia (2019): Internal Reporting.
- EUD Georgia (2020): Internal Reporting.
- EUD Georgia (2021): Internal Reporting.

Project documentation

The team reviewed the available project documentation (action fiches/TAPs, grant contracts, implementation and monitoring reports, evaluations, etc.) of the projects presented in the tables in section 1.2.

EU evaluations

- EU (2014): Evaluation of the Eastern Partnership Youth in Action Window, EC Reference – 2014/343596.
- EU (2022): Evaluation of EU's Cooperation with Georgia (2014-2020).
- EU (2022): Ex-post evaluation of the implementation of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area between the EU and its Member States and Georgia, Draft Final Report, CEPS, March 2022.

Other evaluations and studies

- Government of Georgia (2014): National Youth Policy Document of Georgia.
- UNICEF (2014): National Youth Survey: Analysis of the Situation and the Needs of Youth in Georgia.
- EU (2017): Review of Sector Reform Contract on Employment and Vocational Education and Training, Final Report.
- Macharashvili Nana, Ekaterine Basialai and Nikoloz Samkharadze (2017): Assessing the EU's Conflict Prevention and Peace-building Interventions in Georgia, Iv. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University.
- European Training Foundation (2018), Youth Transition to Work in Georgia, 2018.
- Langley Sarah and Clara Alberola (2018): Independent Evaluation of the Mobility Partnerships between the European Union and Cape Verde, Georgia and Moldova, Maastricht Graduate School of Management.
- UNFPA (2020): Assessing the Socio-Economic Impact of COVID-19 on Young People in Georgia (2020)
- Government of Georgia (2020): 2021-2024 Government Programme Toward Building a European State.
- Parliament of Georgia (2020): Resolution of the Parliament of Georgia – On Approval of the “Georgian National Youth Policy Concept for 2020 – 2030”, Tbilisi, 17 July, 2020.
- Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (2021): Youth Policy Implementation at the Local Level: Imereti and Tbilisi.
- EU (2022): *EU4YOUTH* Achievements Report 2022.
- EU (2023): Report on Georgia’s involvement in the youth components of the Erasmus+ Programme (2014-2020), the European Union’s FWC SIEA 2018 – LOT4 EuropeAid/138778/DH/SER/Multi “Feasibility Study to Assess Georgia’s Participation in The Erasmus+ Programme and for Relevant Capacity Building” Specific Contract N° 300030322 March 2023.

Country case study: Türkiye

1 Introduction

1.1 Context

1.1.1 Main Youth challenges

Türkiye is a country with a large youth population. Young people aged 15-29 make up 24.4% of the total population (84.7 million people), with a median age of 32.6 (EU median age is 44).²³²

Although youth literacy rate is high and reaches 99.68% for males and 98.81% for females,²³³ education remains a challenging topic in *Türkiye*, with some small yet insufficient improvements over the years. The net enrolment rate in higher education saw a slightly upwards trajectory in previous years and rose from 43.4% in 2019/20 to 44.4% in 2020/21.²³⁴ In 2021, almost a quarter (24.7%) of youth between 15 and 24 years were neither unemployed, nor in education or training.²³⁵ The youth unemployment rate in 2021 was 22.6%, a decrease compared to 24.9% in 2020.²³⁶ Interest in political participation among young Turks is marked by the mistrust in political elites, with even 42% of young Turks considering that their government does not care about them, placing them next to Saudi Arabia (43%) and far below the average of 68%.²³⁷ Despite this, the youth turnout in elections remains high, with 88.18% of the population voting in the 2018 elections and only a few percentages lower in previous years.²³⁸ This is seen as reflective of youth participation as well.

Syrian refugees are shown to be among the most vulnerable groups in *Türkiye*, with up to 1.7 million young refugees aged between 15 and 30,²³⁹ facing various challenges related to general safety and social life, health, education, and employment. Despite some efforts of the Turkish government, more than 400,000 school-aged refugee children do not have any access to education and are more susceptible (than Turks) to school dropout.²⁴⁰ Regarding the social inclusion of refugees, several reports show that, especially Syrian refugees are exposed to discriminatory treatment, as incidents in Mardin, Istanbul, and Hatay confirm.²⁴¹

Irregular migration in 2014-2015, terrorist attacks in 2015, an attempted coup in 2016 and a subsequently imposed a state of emergency until 2018, created an insecure environment for citizens and destabilised already complex political situation in *Türkiye*. Terrorist attacks in 2015 by Kurdistan Workers' Party and Da'esh resulted in an extensive anti-terror military and security campaign. However, Turkish authorities notably exceeded their authorisations, resulting in disproportionate countermeasures, arrests, and removal from duties of multiple elected executives.²⁴² A similar scenario was repeated in the following years.

1.1.2 Policy framework and main actors

The youth policies' legal framework is defined in the National Youth and Sports Policy Document,²⁴³ and the main national-level authority is the Ministry of Youth and Sport.²⁴⁴ Other critical actors include the Youth Centres affiliated with the Ministry and functioning as the youth-related activities implementation hubs at the national level. On a regional level, the South-Eastern Anatolia Project and the Regional Development Administration deal with sustainable development, regional disparities, improving living standards, and reducing income gaps among youth.²⁴⁵ At local level, municipalities, Provincial

²³² EU (2023): EU YouthWiki, Türkiye: Overview: Youth Policy in Türkiye, p.99.

²³³ Countrymeters (2023): Türkiye Population: Life expectancy.

²³⁴ TURKSTAT (2022): Youth in Statistics.

²³⁵ European Commission (2021): Country Report Türkiye, p.101.

²³⁶ European Commission (2022): Country Report Türkiye, p.101.

²³⁷ International Youth Foundation (2017): The Global Youth Wellbeing Index, Türkiye.

²³⁸ EU (2022): YouthWiki Türkiye: Participation: Youth Participation in Representative Democracy.

²³⁹ UNFPA Türkiye (2021): UNFPA Türkiye Empowers Young Refugees with the Support of the Government of Japan.

²⁴⁰ European Commission (2022): Country Report Türkiye, p.20.

²⁴¹ Asylum Information Database (2023): Country Report: Türkiye: Housing.

²⁴² European Commission (2016): Country Report Türkiye, p.6.

²⁴³ Türkiye Ministry of Youth & Sports (2013): The National Youth and Sports Policy Document.

²⁴⁴ EU (2023): EU YouthWiki, Türkiye: Overview: Youth Policy in Türkiye, p.99.

²⁴⁵ EU (2017): Country Sheet on Youth Policy in Türkiye, 2017; p.7.

Directorates of Youth Services and Sports, and Provincial Directorates of the Ministry of National Education are in charge of youth issues in 81 cities of *Türkiye*.²⁴⁶ Relevant non-public actors include Youth Councils, which ensure young people's direct participation in youth-related policies; Youth Welfare Services, which organise voluntary social welfare and social services; and National Networks for Knowledge on Youth which link policymakers, researchers, youth and youth NGOs.²⁴⁷ Besides, the Youth Organisations Forum (*Go-for-Youth*) was established by 29 youth organisations that came together to become *Türkiye's* National Youth Council, also supported by the EU. *Go-for-Youth* gained its legal status in 2015 and is an umbrella organisation with 66 member organisations.²⁴⁸

İŞKUR, the Turkish Employment Agency, ensures job opportunities, improves youth skills and offers consultancies.²⁴⁹ Specifically on entrepreneurship, the SME Development Organisation provides educational and financial (grant) support to young entrepreneurs and runs Technical assistance and financing schemes. *Türkiye* is a part of the EU *programme* for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and SMEs, the *Erasmus* for Young Entrepreneurs and the Enterprise Europe Networks and has expressed interest in participating in the Single Market Programme. *Türkiye* does not have a legal framework for volunteering but is currently working on drafting one and the first consultations took place in November 2023. Vocational Qualifications Authority is leading the implementation of the National Qualification System concerned with the overall challenges in technical and vocational education training area and monitoring the implementation of the Turkish Qualifications Framework.²⁵⁰ In 2021 *Türkiye* adopted the *National Youth Employment Strategy and Action Plan (2021-2023)* built around three main pillars: i) Reinforcing the link between education and employment; ii) Increasing employment of young people NEETs; iii) Preparing for future job.²⁵¹

The main policies on youth health are accommodated within the framework of National Youth Policy, and the most important public actors concerned with youth health policies are the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Health.²⁵² *Health Transformation Programme* (2003), aimed at transforming health services, contributed to the ratio of addicted young people falling from 46.3% in 2000 to 37.5% in 2011.²⁵³ In addition, the National Tobacco Control Programme and Action Plan was implemented aimed at raising awareness among the public, primarily children and young people, to protect them from the harmful effects of alcohol.²⁵⁴

The key actor in the Turkish government responsible for migration management is the Ministry of Interior's Directorate-General of Migration Management. With the EU financial assistance and technical support of the International Organisation for Migration/IOM, *Türkiye* prepared the Strategy Document and *National Action Plan on Irregular Migration 2019-2025*.²⁵⁵ Regarding the legal status of *Syrian* refugees, they received a specific refugee status under the Temporary Protection Regulation and in 2016 legal right to apply for work permits.²⁵⁶ On schooling, *Türkiye* ensured the formal education for approximately 742,000 refugee children by December 2021, a significant improvement of 82 thousand more pupils compared to the previous academic year.²⁵⁷

1.1.3 EU-Türkiye Cooperation on Youth Issues

The EU financial assistance priorities for the period 2014-2020 in support to *Türkiye* on its path to accession were set out in the Indicative Strategy Paper,²⁵⁸ which translated political priorities set out in the enlargement policy framework into key areas where financial assistance was most beneficial to meet the accession criteria. This Indicative Strategy Paper – initially adopted by the EC with decision C(2014)5998 of 26 August 2014 – was revised and updated at mid-term in accordance with Article 6.4 of the IPA II Regulation.²⁵⁹ The Indicative Strategy Paper envisaged the financial assistance under IPA II to pursue the following four specific objectives: i) support for political reforms; ii) support for economic,

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ GoFor (n.d.): Youth CSOs and COVID-19.

²⁴⁹ EU (2023): YouthWiki Türkiye: Overview: Youth Policy in Türkiye.

²⁵⁰ EU (2022): Progress Report Türkiye, p.107.

²⁵¹ Ibid, p.68.

²⁵² EU (2023): YouthWiki Türkiye: Overview: Youth Policy in Türkiye.

²⁵³ EU (2020): YouthWiki Türkiye: Health and Well-Being: General Context.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ European Commission (2021): Country Report Türkiye, p.47.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, p.50.

²⁵⁷ European Commission (2022): Country Report Türkiye, p.20.

²⁵⁸ European Commission (2018): Revised Indicative Paper 2014-2020 for Türkiye.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

social and territorial development iii) strengthening the ability of the beneficiaries to fulfil the obligations stemming from Union membership by supporting progressive alignment with, implementation and adoption of, the Union acquis, iv) strengthening regional integration and territorial cooperation.²⁶⁰ The IPA II Regulation foresaw that the financial assistance should address five policy areas: i) reforms in preparation for Union membership and related institution-and capacity-building; ii) socio-economic and regional development; iii) employment, social policies, education, promotion of gender equality, and human resources development; iv) agriculture and rural development, and v) regional and territorial cooperation.²⁶¹

The most relevant tools through which the EU support offers support to the most vulnerable groups, including the youth in *Türkiye*, include the IPA, the CSF, the EIDHR, the Trust Fund for the Response to the Syria Crisis/ Madad Trust Fund and the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRIT).²⁶² Under the IPA II (2014-2020), the EU support addressed youth employment, targeting young NEETs (including work-related skill development and improvement of vocational and technical education), strengthening the national vocational qualifications system and enhancing the implementation of the Turkish Qualifications Framework.²⁶³ Under the 2021 IPA Action Plan, under IPA III, the EU assistance focussed on industry of 4.0²⁶⁴ and digitalisation skills, supporting domestic institutions at municipal level involved in VET.²⁶⁵ IPA engagement in 2022 was planned regarding new preventive and responsive programmes for young NEET, including foreign language courses.

EIDHR is the instrument that provides support to the rights of (children, youth and women) refugees, asylum seekers, IDPs, and migrants in general. Due to migration challenges, the *Facility for Refugees* acting as the EU's prime financial assistance to refugees totalling EUR 6 billion, was mobilised in two tranches: the first one funding project that ran until mid-2021 and the second tranche funding projects which run until mid-2025 latest.²⁶⁶ A flagship project in the area of support to young Syrian refugees' education was *Promoting Integration of Syrian Children into the Turkish Education System/PICTES* (2019), worth EUR 300 million.

Regarding youth education and training, it is notable to mention the country's renewed membership in the *Erasmus+* and *European Solidarity Corps programmes* for 2021-2027.²⁶⁷ *Türkiye* goes through a preparation phase for utilising *the European Social Fund*.²⁶⁸ The country also participates in the *Jean Monnet Scholarship Programme/JMSP* aimed at successful young graduates, private and public sector employees, ensuring they can study EU-related subjects in EU countries. *Türkiye* benefited from other sector-relevant programmes as well. One such is the *IPA Rural Development/IPARD programme* which supports SDG2 by promoting sustainable and resilient farming through stakeholder funding, including small farmers, women and young entrepreneurs. In 2021, the EUD organised *Mobility Week and Climate Diplomacy Week* events to promote a Green Deal, which brought together 18 youth climate activists who had the opportunity to talk to leaders participating in COP26. These efforts were further replicated locally across the country.²⁶⁹

Some significant regional initiatives include: i) *ENI Black Sea Basin Cooperation programme* aimed at sustainable growth and joint environmental protection in the region;²⁷⁰ ii) *Interreg – CBC Bulgaria – Türkiye Programme*, working closely, among other actors, with women and youth organisations, cross-border associations, cultural, research and scientific organisations. Other relevant donor initiatives include *the EC – World Bank Partnership Programme for Europe and Central Asia Programmatic Single-Donor Trust Fund*, aimed at improving employment opportunities for sensitive social groups, including Syrians under Temporal Protection (SuTP) with a special quota for women and youth (16-25).²⁷¹

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² EC (n.d.): EU Support to Refugees in Türkiye.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ New technologies deployed in modern times are widely referred as Industry 4.0

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ European Commission (2023): The EU Facility for Refugees in Türkiye.

²⁶⁷ European Commission (2022): Türkiye Country Report, p.106-107.

²⁶⁸ European Commission (2022): Türkiye Country Report, p.102.

²⁶⁹ EU Delegation to Türkiye (2021): Internal Reporting, p.40. 2021.

²⁷⁰ European Union (2023): ENI CBC Black Sea Basin Programme 2014-2020.

²⁷¹ World Bank (2017): Partnership Programme for Europe and Central Asia Programmatic Single-Donor Trust Fund (No. TF072780) Donor Reference for the Republic of Türkiye: Employment Support for Syrians under Temporary Protection and Host Communities, p.4-5.

1.2 Focus of the case study

This country case study examines EU support to youth areas in *Türkiye* in a targeted manner. Like the other case studies, they should not be equated to a full-fledged assessment of all dimensions of EU support to youth. Case studies, like the present one, are mainly there as background documents to feed the overall strategic evaluation of EU support to Youth in the three regions covered. They go by deeper into country-specific factors that influenced the design of programmes and interventions to support youth needs and priorities, their implementation and the results achieved. Despite the adoption of a sample approach to the EU's interventions, the analysis seeks to cover the diversity of EU support to the youth in *Türkiye* in terms of types of programmes, themes, modalities and channels (National Government, UN & development agencies, EU MS, (International) NGOs and private sector).

Data collection and analysis are structured along the Evaluation Questions (EQs). Questions related to the policy framework and responsive programming (EQ 1), choice of methods, channels and instruments (EQ 2), and partnerships (EQ 3) were examined by looking at the whole portfolio. Thematic issues, including those related to the effects on youth engagement (EQ 4), Economic Integration (EQ 5), Social Cohesion and Inclusion (EQ 6), were examined within the sample of EU-funded interventions identified by the evaluation team for a more in-depth analysis. The sample of interventions considered three dimensions: i) a mix of interventions with different levels of youth targeting;²⁷² ii) programmatic variance considering a mix of implementation modalities and channels; and iii) thematic variance considering the EQs.

Table 9 Main bilateral contracts sampled in *Türkiye*

Year	Intervention/ Contract title	Cris ref.	Contracting party	Planned amount (EUR)
2015-2020	Education and training	D-31882		
2015-2020	Multi-annual Action Programme for Türkiye on Employment, Education and Social policies	C-383607	Republic of Türkiye	275.100.000
2015	Special Measure on the contribution to the European Union Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian crisis, Madad Fund	D-38188		
2015	Madad Trust Fund: Contribution to the EU Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian crisis	C-364692	Madad EU Trust Funds	18.000.000
2016	Second Special Measure on the contribution to the European Union Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian crisis	D-39441		
2016	Second Special Measure on the contribution to the European Trust Fund (EUTF) in response to the Syrian crisis	C-374026	Madad EU Trust Funds	55.000.000
2016	Education Infrastructure for Resilience Activities in Türkiye	C-382614	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD)	150.000.000
2016	Education for all in times of crisis II	C-381265	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW)	50.000.000
2016	Promoting Integration of Syrian Children into Turkish Education System (PICLES)	C-377536	Republic of Türkiye	300.000.000
2017	Special Measure on Education, Health, Municipal Infrastructure and Socio-economic Support to Refugees in Türkiye	D-39804		
2017	Contribution to the European Union Regional Trust Fund in response to the	C-387313	Madad EU Trust Funds	225.000.000

²⁷² The methodology considers three levels of youth targeting in EU intervention: i) Youth targeted interventions: where youth or youth sectors are the primary target; ii) Youth Significant Objective: where youth are one of multiple target groups or the sector partially targets youth (Y-SO); and iii) Mainstreamed: where youth indirectly benefit from support to a sector or where you would expect their interests to be mainstreamed.

Year	Intervention/ Contract title	Cris ref.	Contracting party	Planned amount (EUR)
	Syrian crisis (EUTF) from 3rd Special Measure EU-Türkiye Facility			
2017	Employment Support for Syrians under Temporary Protection and Host Communities	C-386311	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD)	50.000.000
2017	Strengthening Economic Opportunities for Syrians under Temporary Protection and Host Communities in Selected Provinces	C-394635	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD)	5.000.000
2017	Education for all in times of crisis II	C-388425	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW)	205.000.000
2019	Civil Society Facility and Media – Action 3 allocation 2018 (2018-2019CSF)	D-40646		
2019	Civil Society Facility (CSF) 2018: Sivil Düşün IV	C-411037	Weglobal Danismanlik Anonim Sirketi	6.098.450
2020	CSF and media – Action 2 allocation 2019 (2018-2019CSF)	D-40647		
2020	Go-For Youth – Strengthening representation and participation of youth in Türkiye	C-414970	Association Of Youth Organisations' forum	325.275
2020	Dialogue for Change through Art and Culture	C-421391	GSM-Youth Services Centre Association	1.996.968
2019	Special Measure under the Facility for Refugees in Türkiye EU Budget	D-41974		
2019	Improving the employment prospects for the Syrian refugees and host communities by high-quality VET and apprenticeship in Türkiye (VET4JOB)	C-411615	Expertise France	12.000.000
2020	Agricultural Employment Support for Refugees and Turkish Citizens through Enhanced Market Linkages Project	C-417740	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD)	10.043.550
2019-2020	Enhancement of Entrepreneurship Capacities for Sustainable Socio-Economic Integration (ENHANCER)	C-411568	The International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)	29.134.192
2020	Social and Economic Cohesion through Vocational Education – II	C-419299	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW)	75.000.000
2020	Support for Transition to Labor Market Project	C-417830	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD)	80.000.000
2021	Annual Action Programme/AAP 2020 EIDHR Country-Based Support Scheme NEAR	D-42665		27.800.000
2021	Empowering University Youth for Furthering Human Rights of Young People from Vulnerable Groups	C-427459	GSM-Youth Services Centre Association	596.091

2 Findings

2.1 Policy framework and responsive programming (EQ1)

The EU's strategic and analytical documents offer a comprehensive analysis of primary challenges for both the Turkish and migrant youth, highlighting regional and local challenges and proposing relevant solutions. The Indicative Strategy Paper 2014-2020, annual country reports, and policy dialogue reports reveal the EU's recognition of core youth issues and tailored approaches. In Türkiye, these encompass gender inequality, unemployment, education-to-labour market transitions, obstacles to political participation, and challenges faced by migrant youth. In response, EU strategic programmes like IPA I Component IV Human Resources Development Operational Programme, benefited young people and disadvantaged individuals. Additionally, the EU aided refugee youth through the Technical assistance to Support the Monitoring of Actions financed under the FRIT, providing education and employment assistance. Instruments like EIDHR, *Jean Monnet*, *Erasmus*, and CSF furthered civil society efforts for social inclusion and rights promotion.

Despite these endeavours, challenges persist in creating a cohesive and impactful youth-centred approach within the EUD's structure in *Türkiye*. While a youth focal point and informal youth group were established, they lack consistent coordination and influence, hindering effective youth-centred programming.

2.1.1 Policy frameworks and strategies take into account regional and national specificities (JC 1.1)

The EU's strategic and analytical documents offer an in-depth analysis of primary youth challenges, highlighting national nuances and presenting relevant solutions to many of these issues. (I-1.1.1, I-1.1.2). The review of EU's strategic documents (Indicative Strategy Paper 2014-2020; Annual Action Programmes/AAPs, etc.) and analytical studies or reports (annual country reports, internal EU reports, policy dialogue reports, etc.) provides evidence of EU's efforts/recognition of core youth challenges and national specificities. According to reviewed documents in *Türkiye*, these include gender inequalities, unemployment, the missing link between education and the labour market, challenges in the political participation of the youth in policy dialogue or social affairs, and challenges encountered by migrant youth (refugees and migrants living in refugee camps and their integration in local communities, as well as access to education and employment, etc.) as discussed in the context section above. Evaluation found that EU has supported several strategic programmes and interventions responding to these needs.

For instance, the EU targeted youth employment and entrepreneurship issues under the IPA I Component IV Human Resources Development Operational Programme, supported active labour measures and entrepreneurship support, which benefited 27,000 young people and 73,000 people with disadvantages in 2019 alone. Besides, through the FRIT, the EU provided very relevant support to refugee children and youth in accessing education, employment and integration in local communities, as found in document review and confirmed in stakeholder interviews. An illustrative example is the EU's support to language courses, needs and merit-based scholarships, and measures to increase their employability following graduation (e.g. placement programmes, seed funds for start-ups, entrepreneurship training and guidance) through a number of projects in the total volume of EUR 57 million.²⁷³ Under the Multi – Annual Action Programmes/AAP for *Türkiye* on Employment, Education and Training, the EU included a number of operational programmes targeting the youth over the reference period covering various core challenges, notably employment, entrepreneurship, and education. Under the Employment, Education and Social Policies Sectoral Operational Programme, a Renewable Youth Energy Operation was implemented to support the job-creating capacity in the renewable energy sector in *Türkiye*.²⁷⁴

The EU implemented numerous initiatives to support youth engagement on climate issues. For instance, in 2021, the EU supported Mobility Week and Climate Diplomacy week activities to support the Green Deal, bringing together 18 youth climate champions from an equal number of cities across *Türkiye* to deliver a message to leaders participating in COP26. The EU Information Centres replicated this event locally using material translated from the original Green Deal factsheets with localised information.

Other measures explicitly referencing youth include instruments such as the EIDHR, *Jean Monnet*, *Erasmus* and CSF or regional instruments such as CBC (e.g. *Türkiye-Bulgaria*). These instruments included a range of grant possibilities for civil society to tackle human rights, social inclusion or social mobilisation initiatives. For instance, the CSF Action Document 2018-2019 for *Türkiye*²⁷⁵ focussed on the development of a vibrant civil society, more active democratic participation in policy and decision-making processes and the promotion of a culture of fundamental rights and dialogue. Specifically, lot 3: Children and Youth provided a framework to support youth organisations. This framework included support to the youth organisations, notably the support to the Youth Organisations Forum in *Türkiye*. Interviewed civil society stakeholders emphasised that these instruments are in many cases one of a few funding sources for youth organisations to network and organise and better coordinate their policy participation and engagement efforts.

2.1.2 Enabling Institutional environment (JC 1.2)

A youth focal point and a dormant informal youth group are in place within the Delegation; however, these structures have yet to create a robust environment for consistent and prominent youth-centred programming (I-1.2.1, I-1.2.2, I-1.2.3). The EUD has a youth focal point that was appointed to coordinate youth-related activities within the Delegation. This focal point invited relevant programme managers who lead sector-specific activities (e.g. Education and employment, civil society, etc.) to join an informal youth action coordination group. However, coordination of different activities

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ EU (2020): Renewable Youth Energy Operation (RE-YOU) (TREESP2.3.RE-YOU) (2020).

²⁷⁵ EU Delegation to *Türkiye* (2019): Civil Society Facility and Media Programme-2018-2019.

within EUD was cited by relevant stakeholders as an ongoing challenge in general. From that perspective, stakeholders considered the appointment of a focal point as a step in the right direction. However, the focal point is not a programme person, which makes it difficult to coordinate and oversee/diverse set of activities that may take place. The establishment of an informal youth coordination group was also an attempt to promote coordination, though this group met in total two times since early 2022 (e.g. within the Year of Youth initiatives in 2022, UN agencies came to EU to present their work with the youth and the informal group was gathered to participate in such meeting), as emphasised by interviewed members. Per stakeholder feedback, both the focal point and the youth coordination groups have not had sufficient incentives or leverage to promote more coherent youth-centred approaches.

The evaluation found that there are very minimal resources being shared internally (e.g. from DG NEAR or most senior officials) on key aspects of relevance for youth mainstreaming. There is no specific drive for youth mainstreaming either top down, so the youth mainstreaming is almost a personal/portfolio matter rather than institutional initiative. In *Türkiye*, it is particularly difficult as well since the programming is led by national institutions, so EUD's role is less visible, despite the fact that all programming documents are subject to the approval of the EU services (EUD and DG NEAR). EUD does receive the knowledge and data from available national statistics, research studies and reports, including the annual country reports.

Monitoring of EU results regarding youth programmes follows general intervention level monitoring procedures. EU supported interventions report on a number of indicators, which are often disaggregated (gender, age, social status, etc.) depending on type of interventions. It may mean (but not necessarily so) that interventions sometimes collect youth related statistics. As noted in other parts of this report, young people are often included as one of (many) beneficiary groups, so youth-specific data is not readily available all the time. There are no specific or additional monitoring procedures in place specifically for youth.

2.2 EU choice of delivery methods, channels and instruments promote responsive, cost-effective and timely support (EQ2)

Document review shows that the EU has supported the youth needs through different channels and instruments, notably in education and employment. The types of support included grants and service contracts to a range of implementing partners under the wider operational programmes or instruments (e.g. CSF, EIDHR, *Jean Monnet*, *Erasmus*, CBC, etc.). Modalities and partners are chosen in consultation with the government and development partners, with limited input from youth. Besides, evaluation did not find cases in which EUD considered specific ability of the implementing agency to apply youth-centred approaches. While this aligns assistance with government priorities, it overlooks vulnerabilities like youth (political) participation and empowerment, which is a shortcoming.

Synergies between EU sector portfolios are scarce, as shown by document review and stakeholder input. Cross-sector collaboration for youth-focussed initiatives is limited due to compartmentalised government approaches and a lack of youth-centred approaches within the EUD. Furthermore, the EU's engagement with youth representatives through consultations or information sharing is limited. While events like youth forums and informational sessions are organised, they lack consultative nature and meaningful youth inclusion.

Regarding flexibility, the EU adjusts its instruments and methods to address emerging challenges such as COVID-19, migrant crises, and economic downturns. Mitigation measures like no-cost extensions and shift to online formats have been employed. Despite these adaptations, the EU's ability to leverage opportunities for youth empowerment remains constrained.

2.2.1 Responsiveness of modalities (JC 2.1)

No use of budget support in Türkiye.

The government is in the lead of programming in Türkiye for most of sector interventions (except the FRIT and civil society support instruments) which limits EU's direct influence in selection of priorities. Selection of modalities and implementing partners is done in consultation with the government and development partners, though consultations with the youth are limited and inconsistent. (I-2.1.2, I-2.1.3, I-1.2.4). The EU acts as a singular donor but works in consortium with other bilateral and multilateral actors (as shown in EQ3), mainly using grants and service contracts. Evidence indicates that the selection of the modalities at intervention or sectoral level basis was based on government's prioritisation, which was seen by interviewed stakeholders as positive to increase relevance of assistance to government priorities, though a downside is the fact that some vulnerabilities (e.g. youth participation, empowerment) are left out. This is considered as understandable taking into account Türkiye's EU accession standing point but also as a shortcoming by interviewed stakeholders.

There is only limited evidence of synergies between EU sector portfolios. Document review did not reveal evidence of cross-sector synergies or joint approaches to the youth. Stakeholder interviews corroborated this, citing that cross-sector synergies are not encouraged when it comes to the youth as

target group. As noted by interviewed stakeholders, this is due to rather compartmentalised approaches by government that reflect in sector-specific programmes and interventions. Another reason as cited by stakeholders lays with a lack of youth-centred thinking or approaches at the EUD, which further diminishes such prospects.

However, the evaluation found that the EU does not embark on or maintain structured forms of consultations with the youth (representatives), which is also partly due to lack of national youth structures (I-1.2.1). Evaluation did not find consistent EU's efforts to organise or include the youth in consultations or information sharing. For instance, document review revealed some events, such as youth forums, youth informational events, and other thematic events organised by EU Information Centres Network in *Türkiye*. Such events focussed on information sharing and exchanges, but were not consultative in nature, as corroborated by stakeholders. Consultations that take place within programming of EU assistance to civil society gather a range of organisations, albeit without efforts to include youth organisations specifically. According to stakeholder feedback, in cases where a young person/leader does participate, they participate as a representative of a CSO and not necessarily a youth organisations. Civil society stakeholders cited this as a shortcoming. One of the challenges is the absence of national youth structures which could be utilised for such efforts.

2.2.2 Flexibility of instruments and delivery methods (JC 2.2)

The EU has been able to flexibly adjust its mix of instruments and methods to the arising issues or conditions (e.g. COVID-19, natural disasters), but not so flexible in terms of responding to new windows of opportunities or backlashes affecting youth empowerment (I-2.2.1 and I-2.2.2). The EU interventions in *Türkiye* were affected by a number of factors, including the recurrent migrant crises, COVID-19 pandemic but also economic downturns and challenges, necessitating swift adaptations in strategy and implementation. The EU mitigation measures included no-cost extensions or shifting activities online in response to the COVID-19 disruptions. To respond to influx of migrants, specific programmes, such as the FRIT, have included flexibility in planning and implementation of assistance. Evaluation found evidence that interventions, including those that supported the youth, were flexibly adapting to arising challenges (technical, resource-related, political, migration-related or COVID-19). For instance, the Technical assistance for Renewable Youth Energy Operation encountered challenges regarding the availability of training providers, while the ROM reports for *go for Youth* Project indicated significant challenges related to COVID-19 restrictions. The reports indicated the mitigation actions for such risks, noting the level of flexibility of EU-supported interventions. Also, within Education for Resilience Infrastructure Project, several implementation delays and adaptations occurred throughout the project implementation period 2017-2022 due to COVID-19 or any other aggravating circumstances. For instance, in 2018, based on the revised work plan and disbursement projections, World Bank granted the 18-month-long “no-cost time extension”, postponing the implementation completion.²⁷⁶

2.3 Partnerships are enhanced and EU-added value maximised (EQ3)

The EU engages in partnerships with EU MS and international organisations in education, employment, and migration interventions, applying principles of Team Europe approaches. EU collaborations with UN agencies, development banks, and others have extended the coverage of youth-related issues and adopted integrated approaches. Such examples include initiatives like FRIT I and II, partnerships with various development partners that have been fostered to enhance employability, particularly in vocational training. Collaborations with organisations like the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW), UNDP, and GIZ led to synergies in offering language and entrepreneurship courses. However, few projects addressed the needs of formal VET systems and labour demand. EU interventions facilitated the transfer of knowledge and expertise to national actors, particularly through engagements with UN agencies and KfW. Furthermore, a lack of coherent and systematic youth-centred partnership strategies by EU hinders the promotion of wider range of effective partnerships in other spheres.

Country-specific, intra-regional, and cross-border interventions supported by the EU have included youth as beneficiaries. While various instruments like CSF, CBC, Youth in Action, *Jean Monnet*, and *Erasmus+* provide opportunities for exchanges between *Türkiye* and neighbouring countries or EU MS, the majority of these interventions do not primarily target youth. This lack of focus on youth as the main beneficiary group limits the understanding of the transformative potential of these programmes.

2.3.1 Partnerships with EU MS and other actors and sharing expertise and knowledge on youth (JC 3.1, 3.2, 3.3)

The EU partners with EU MS in education and employment interventions and migration response, applying a Team Europe approach (I-3.1.1, 3.1.2, I-3.3.2 and I-3.3.3). EU has engaged in partnerships with UN Agencies, EU MS and their international cooperation agencies or development

²⁷⁶ EU (2018): Education Infrastructure for Resilience Project, Progress Report, p.7.

banks in various interventions, notably under VET, education, employment and migration response. For example, EU cooperated with KfW on *Social and Economic Cohesion through Vocational Education – II Programme* and liaised with the World Bank, to improve the capacity of the competent Turkish institutions (Turkish Employment Agency (İŞKUR), Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services,²⁷⁷ the SME Development Organisation, and Ministry of Industry and Technology) to address the challenges of the Syrian refugees to find legal economic opportunities (formal employment and self-employment) on the market. Joint actions of EU and UN agencies, KfW and the World Bank, have effectively extended the coverage of youth issues, adopted integrated approaches, and mobilised expertise, which was commended by interviewed stakeholders. According to the stakeholder feedback, however, more coherent and systematic youth-centred partnership approaches would have been warranted. Interviewed stakeholders cited that this mainly comes from the fact that the EU does not have a coherent or elaborated youth strategies or clear guidelines on how to approach youth programming.

In the broader sense, FRIT I and II have promoted partnerships with other development partners to enhance employability. For instance, within the framework of FRIT I, a number of language courses, entrepreneurship courses, etc. were implemented in synergy between different implementing partners. Few projects also addressed the needs of the formal VET system and the labour demand side. Through its interventions and partnerships (with UN or other implementing partners), EU has provided good institutional mechanisms and capacities for transfer of knowledge and expertise. Document review shows that the selection of UN agencies, KfW, effectively reached out and transferred knowledge and expertise to national actors. For instance, EU assistance provided through UNDP and other UN agencies in interventions supporting the Syrian refugees to access education and employment opportunities was considered effective.²⁷⁸ These interventions were considered as positive by interviewed stakeholders from the point of aid effectiveness but also for sharing European knowledge and practices. However, some stakeholders from civil society raised the need for partnering more closely with civil society (youth) organisations, which is now missing as civil society representatives emphasised.

2.3.2 Exchanges with youth actors (JC 3.4)

Country specific, Intra-regional and cross-border interventions and exchanges supported by EU have included the youth as one of beneficiary groups, though a limited number of such interventions included the youth as main target group. (I-3.4.1 and 3.4.2). Various instruments and programmes, including CSF; CBC; *Youth in Action*; *Jean Monnet* or *Erasmus+* provide opportunities for exchanges between *Türkiye* and countries in the region or EU MS. However, as evidenced in the document review and as corroborated by stakeholder interviews, various interventions and projects do not necessarily engage youth as their main target groups, which makes it difficult to understand the transformative potential of such instruments or programmes.

2.4 Effects on Youth Engagement (EQ4)

Throughout the reference period, the EU has demonstrated limited dedicated support for youth-related initiatives in Türkiye. Evaluation findings indicate that the EU did not sufficiently consider various avenues to support youth empowerment and political/policy participation in Türkiye. Due to this limited engagement in the youth civic sphere, the EU's contribution to broader transformative outcomes is lacking. The youth's civic participation was occasionally incorporated into civil society projects funded through instruments like the CSF or the EIDHR, or other civil dedicated society programmes. However, the CSO landscape in Türkiye often divided organisations into specific sectoral lines, leading to isolated efforts on particular issues such as LGBTIQ rights or youth concerns. The recently introduced call under CSF, allocating EUR 5.5 million equally between Social Cohesion and Youth lots, represented a gamechanger for youth organisations. Despite this, interventions were limited and fragmented, failing to create substantial transformative effects. One positive example is the Go for Youth project, where the EU support for youth civic participation and organisation contributed to enhancing the networking among youth leaders and helped enhance youth representation, leading to the Youth Council's affiliation with the European Youth Forum. **However, there was no evidence of consistent EU country-specific approaches to strengthen policy, legislative frameworks, or institutional support for youth in Türkiye.** The EU's engagement with youth directly within its external actions or assistance programming was also not apparent. Interviewed stakeholders confirmed the preliminary desk finding that **the EU's decision to shift from Indirect Management with the Beneficiary Country to Direct Management by the EU was a positive move, in light to the shrinking space for civil society.** This shift allowed the EU to reach a more diverse group of CSOs, although not necessarily youth-focussed ones. **However, inconsistent efforts by the EU to promote dialogue on youth and encourage cross-sectoral collaboration further hampered transformative potential.** Document review and stakeholder consultations

²⁷⁷ At the time of finalisation of this report, this ministry was restructured into the Ministry of Labour and Social security and the Ministry of Family and social services

²⁷⁸ United Nations Development Cooperation Strategy (2020): UN in Türkiye Evaluation.

indicated that youth were often considered as just one among several beneficiary groups, without truly youth-centred approaches. Lack of incentives for cross-sector synergies in interventions hindered broader transformative potential.

2.4.1 Political and institutional space for youth and youth organisations (JC 4.1)

During the reference period, the EU has provided limited dedicated support to the youth. At the time of the evaluation, a call for youth organisations was in final stages of preparation at the time of the evaluation, marking the first specific effort in that direction. Due to its limited engagement in the youth civic sphere, the EU did not contribute to wider transformational results (I-4.1.1, I-4.1.2 and I-4.1.3). Evaluation findings suggest that the EU has not considered different needs or avenues for supporting youth empowerment and political/policy participation in *Türkiye*. Youth civic participation was included under civil society projects funded through CSF or EIDHR, or specific programmes in support to civil society, including *Sivil Dusun*, *Etkiniz Project*, *Youth Services Centre/GSM*, etc. Notably, there was a shift in light of the shrinking space for civil society from Indirect Management by Direct Beneficiary to Direct Management by EU. According to the document review and as corroborated by stakeholder interviews, this helped reach out to more diverse group of CSOs, albeit not necessarily youth organisations. The only project specifically youth civic participation and youth organising in focus was the *Go for Youth* project. The Project aimed to expand youth representation and participation by supporting the National Youth Council to become a full member of the European Youth Forum. This project supported capacity strengthening of youth organisations, members (and non-members) of Go-For (an autonomous Youth Organisations' Forum) and provided grant support for creation of cooperation channels and representation of the youth at local level. Despite the fact that the Go-For was only funded for a very short period by the EU (through two projects; one in early 2000s and the recent one), stakeholder interviews revealed that this initial support helped leverage further donor support for the development of this youth network.

On a more general level, the EUD in *Türkiye* has typically supported civil society through the EIDHR or CSF instrument, focussing on protection of human rights. However, the CSO landscape in *Türkiye* often involves divisions along specific sector lines, such as organisations concentrating solely on issues like LGBTIQ rights or youth matters. Under CSF, the EU recently introduced a call for proposals with allocated EUR 5.5 million, equally divided between two lots, Social Cohesion and Youth respectively. The new call, set to conclude and distribute funds by December 2023, will support approximately seven contracts under the youth lot, although not all of them will involve sub-granting schemes. This call was considered as a gamechanger for the youth organisations, representing an important milestone for recognition of youth priorities. However, these interventions were too limited, too fragmented, or too scarce to create wider transformative effects as found by this evaluation. In particular, civil society stakeholders noted that the lack of consistent EU youth-centred approaches in a very complex and shrinking civic space in *Türkiye* has been diminishing the EU's positioning as supported of civil society in the country. This is considered by interviewed CSO stakeholders as a shortcoming. Besides, interviewees cited a lack of EU's more vocal advocacy re. youth civic participation or lack of consultative platforms as a shortcoming in light of the shrinking space for civil society in *Türkiye*.

2.4.2 Dialogue and cross-sectoral collaboration (JC 4.2)

There is a lack of EU's consistent efforts to promote dialogue on youth or to promote cross-sectoral collaboration (I-4.2.1, I-4.2.2 and I-4.2.3). Extensive document review and stakeholder consultations reveal that most sectoral interventions include youth mainly as one of many beneficiary groups (e.g. women, children, migrants, or other vulnerable groups), with only limited evidence of truly youth-centred approaches. The EU does not create incentives for sector interventions (e.g. education, employment, etc.) to promote cross-sector synergies, which diminishes the wider transformational potential.

2.4.3 Policy, legislative and institutional frameworks (JC 4.3)

There is no evidence of consistent EU country-specific approaches to strengthen policy, legislative or institutional frameworks in support to the youth in *Türkiye* (I-4.3.1, I-4.3.2). Besides, there is no evidence of EUD's efforts to engage with the youth directly in EU external action or programming of EU assistance (I-4.3.4).

2.5 Effects on Economic Integration (EQ5)

The EU has made significant strides in addressing youth employment and entrepreneurship challenges in *Türkiye*, collaborating with various national partners such as the Ministry of Labour (and İŞKUR) and development partners such as development banks, UN agencies, and other international actors. These collaborative efforts have led to a range of projects aimed at enhancing the capacity of Turkish institutions to support both local and refugee populations in terms of education, employment, and entrepreneurship. The

initiatives encompass educational and employment services, active labour market programmes, job creation, and entrepreneurship, with a specific focus on empowering female-led business models through social enterprise pilots. These activities have been pivotal in improving employability, skills development, VET services, and creating a conducive environment for business growth but also social cohesion.

The Employment, Education, and Social Policies Sectoral Operational Programme/EESP SOP 2014-2018 has served as a crucial framework for addressing youth employment issues, with substantial budget allocation. Additionally, the EU has supported the development of the "National Youth Employment Strategy and Action Plan," aligning skill development and capacity building with future labour market needs.

The EU's support for Syrian refugees, including education, employment, and entrepreneurship initiatives, has been instrumental in addressing the needs of vulnerable youth, both refugees and locals. These efforts have facilitated access to education, employment, and entrepreneurship opportunities for refugees, with a specific focus on language training, scholarships, employability programmes, and vocational education. The approach of providing support to both host communities and refugees has been lauded for promoting social cohesion.

Efforts to strengthen Turkish institutions' capacity in addressing economic challenges for refugees, particularly in formal employment and self-employment, have been evident through various projects.

Projects aimed at enhancing the capacity of Turkish institutions, such as the İŞKUR, to address the economic needs of both Turkish youth and Syrian refugees have been successful. However, there are concerns about the sustainability of these projects due to frequent changes in government personnel.

However, the absence of an established system for aggregating data on specific interventions and assessing their effectiveness remains a limitation. This gap hinders a comprehensive understanding of the EU's overall contributions and achievements in addressing vulnerabilities.

2.5.1 Relevance of implementation approaches (JC 5.1)

The EU's assistance in the realm of youth employment and entrepreneurship has demonstrated a wide-ranging, diverse and notably successful approaches (I-5.1.1, I-5.1.2). The EU engaged strongly in supporting youth employment and entrepreneurship, in response to challenges that the youth both from host communities and migrants encounter in *Türkiye*. Interviewed stakeholders noted that, while the term "employability" has been commonly used, there is a desire to shift the narrative towards creating more job opportunities, including non-standard employment forms and involvement of the private sector and government. The EU was encouraged to invest in mapping new economic prospects and fostering a better understanding of social protection and taxation among young people, which was considered as very good direction. The EU support to local and refugee populations integrated concrete employability and entrepreneurship support activities, as well as investment in VET and Active Labour Market measures. The most relevant framework under which youth employment issues was tackled is the *Employment, Education and Social Policies Sectoral Operational Programme/EESP SOP 2014-2018*, with a total budget of EUR 323 million, including an EU contribution of EUR 275 million. The programme included three interventions targeting youth: i) *Labour Market Support Programme* for NEETs; ii) Promoting Youth Employment in TRC3 Region; and iii) *Renewable Youth Energy/RE-YOU*. According to the 2019 data, the IPA II *Employment, Education and Social Policies Sectoral Operational Programme/EESP SOP* contracting rate observed a significant increase and reached 38% with a total number of 12 contracts, amounting to EUR 122.5 million. Under this framework, for instance the *Renewable Youth Energy/RE-YOU* project was led by the GIZ and implemented by the South Marmara Development Agency, young and unemployed people are provided training, certification, career guidance and job placement in the renewable energy sectors. Curriculum based on the specific needs of the sector is also developed in cooperation with Balıkesir University and Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University. The EU also supported the "National Youth Employment Strategy and Action Plan" policy-making process, through thematic meetings and workshops. This support was provided under the Promoting Decent Future of Work Approach with a Focus of Gender Equality Operation" which supported the establishment of the "Future of Work" commission. The Human Resources Development Operational Programme that was completed by the end of 2017, continued in close cooperation with Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, where more than 800,000 people benefited from various activities carried out with EU funds. According to available EU data from 2019, 11,800 women, 27,000 young people and 73,000 people with disadvantages benefited from active labour market measure and entrepreneurship support. More than 560,000 secondary school students received conditional cash transfer top-ups, and 41,000 university students with low income benefited from scholarship schemes. Engaging young people in thematic knowledge building and awareness campaigns, particularly regarding social security, entrepreneurship, and taxation, was considered essential by interviewed stakeholders. This is mainly due to the fact that there is a lack of clarity among youth on these subjects, and EU support was relevant in this regard. The EU's substantial investment in (VET since the early 2000s played a critical role in the revision of curricula within the VET sector. Despite the inherent challenges within the Ministry of Education, VET has consistently proven to be a receptive and successful area for support. However, a challenge persists in garnering interest among young people to pursue VET programmes, as these pathways do not typically lead to university

education. Additionally, the Turkish education system grapples with a shortage of technical staff in VET schools. These areas were considered by interviewed stakeholders as important.

Interviewed stakeholders also confirmed the relevance and effectiveness of this support noting the importance of the support for both enhancing institutional capacities but also the direct support to the youth. However, reservations were raised by some stakeholders knowledgeable of the support, that the support in many interventions are continuing the same models, without much innovation. For instance, the evaluation found that the EU primarily directed its funds towards public institutions, such as İŞKUR, with a focus on strengthening their capacity to address youth employment and entrepreneurship, particularly for NEETs. Almost all operations with the İŞKUR included a grant component; under which call for proposals were launched. Consequently, various grant projects were implemented by the NGOs, local institutions, chambers of trade and/or industry, universities, VET schools, etc. However, there is a perception that İŞKUR lacks innovation in its approach to engage young people effectively, which was also the limitation for EU support to make wider transformational results. The EU support was found to support İŞKUR's outreach efforts, including the establishment of youth clubs. Still, stakeholders cited low awareness among youth about the services offered by İŞKUR as a limitation. They also highlighted the need for the EU support to focus more on modernising İŞKUR's operations, increasing accessibility, and supporting localisation efforts. One of the challenges in institutional capacity strengthening efforts that interviewed stakeholders emphasised relate to frequent changes in government personnel and the subsequent loss of technical knowledge and experience. The success of projects often depends on the personalities involved. This raises concerns about sustainability and discontinuation of successful models.

Besides, as revealed through document review and corroborated through stakeholder interviews, the EU does not collect aggregate data on the support across different beneficiary groups, which makes it hard to grasp the effectiveness and contribution of the support to transformational results beyond individual programmes.

The EU support to Syrian refugees implemented under the FRIT included extensive support interventions targeting youth education, employment and entrepreneurship, which reached out to both refugee and local populations, as discussed under JC 5.2 below.

2.5.2 Integration of vulnerable and marginalised youth (JC 5.2)

The EU's support played a pivotal role in addressing the pressing needs and challenges faced by the most vulnerable youth, particularly refugees, by facilitating their access to education, employment, and entrepreneurship opportunities (I-5.2.1). The EU has continuously supported and addressed issues of the refugee population in *Türkiye*, which also included quite focussed support to integrating refugee children and youth into the education system and employability. For instance, the EU addressed the issue that Turkish universities' financial and institutional challenges faced with increasing numbers of Syrian applicants through six projects with a total volume of EUR 57 million to support Syrian students through Turkish language training, need and merit-based scholarships, measures to increase their employability following graduation (e.g. placement programmes, seed funds for start-ups, entrepreneurship training and guidance). Besides, in efforts to address challenges for Syrian refugees stemming from their prolonged stay in *Türkiye*, the EU allocated substantial amounts to support refugees' resilience and integration into the host communities, increasing employability, employment/job creation and self-employment/entrepreneurship. These included on-the-job and vocational training, job and vocational counselling, job placement for adults, and the (formal) vocational education for adolescents (14-18 years old).

Regarding other efforts regarding refugee employment, within the *Support for Transition to Labour Market Project*, one component, worth EUR 58.8 million focussed on support for counselling services and employment support, while a second one, worth EUR 16.2 million, aimed at supporting delivery of employment services.²⁷⁹ In addition, the project *Promoting Integration of Syrian Children into the Turkish Education System/PICTES* supported young Syrian refugees' education worth EUR 300 million. As per EUD data, such efforts resulted in a reduction of children registered in Temporary Education Centres for 15%, but the increase from 56% to 85% of those children enrolled in Turkish public schools. According to stakeholder feedback, the EU assistance to refugees has been of critical importance to underpin national efforts, but also to provide direct assistance to those most in need. The approach whereby the support was provided to both the host communities and refugees was considered as a good approach to promote social cohesion.

The EU has also funded activities improving the capacity of the competent Turkish institutions (İŞKUR, Ministry of Labour and Social security and the Ministry of Family and social services, including the labour

²⁷⁹ EC (2022): Support for Transition to Labor Market Project. Facility for Refugees in Türkiye, Progress Report, p.9.

Inspectorate) to address the challenges of the Syrian refugees to find legal economic opportunities (formal employment and self-employment) on the market. One of the most relevant projects to this matter is *Strengthening Economic Opportunities for Syrians under Temporary Protection and Turkish Citizens in Selected Localities*, which worked specifically with the İŞKUR to capacitate it to assess employers' demands and promote job creation and entrepreneurship in communities with a high number of refugees. Moreover, it developed a Social Enterprise Pilot focussed on female-led business models.²⁸⁰ Similarly, "Employment Support Activities for Syrians under Temporary Protection and Turkish Citizens (earlier Host Communities)" provided support in the same area, with Component 1: Employment Services and active labour market programme for Syrians under Temporal Protection and Host Communities and Component 2: Institutional Support for the Delivery of Employment Services and active labour market programmes.²⁸¹ A number of partners engaged in the implementation of interventions supporting refugees, including, but not limited to Expertise France, International Centre for Migration Policy Development, World Bank, and KfW. The activities planned aim to increase the employability and skills development of refugees and host communities, improve services provided in relation to VET, market supply and demand matching, and create a conducive environment for business growth, registration and expansion. Activities target refugees and host communities to spur social cohesion and fight stereotypes leading to social tensions.

Under the overall support framework, EU has targeted young people more generally, but there was no specific data regarding other most vulnerable groups, such as other national or sexual minorities. Hence, this evaluation could not find concrete evidence or insights in how the assistance empowered these groups specifically.

2.5.3 Ownership through improved data and dialogue (JC 5.3)

The EU interventions encompassed elements dedicated to fostering dialogue among national entities and development partners, as well as conducting research to generate evidence and situational analyses regarding youth employment challenges, though comprehensive aggregate data on EU-wide contributions was lacking (I-5.3.1; I-5.3.2). The evaluation found evidence of specific components under EU interventions that aimed at facilitating dialogue among national entities and development partners, as well as conducting research to generate evidence and situational analyses regarding youth employment challenges. For example, studies on NEET were conducted within the framework of the *Labour Market Support Programme* for NEETs. Furthermore, the EU engaged in broader interactions with social partners through a EUR 2.5 million project co-implemented by the ILO, the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services, and the social partners. This 30-month project effectively promoted well-functioning social dialogue mechanisms between employees and employers at all levels, involving over 1,000 participants from social partners, public institutions, and provincial employment and vocational boards. Within the project's scope, interactive seminars were organised for more than 2,000 university students across *Türkiye* to foster a culture of social dialogue.²⁸² However, as indicated by the document review and affirmed during stakeholder interviews, numerous EU employment-focussed projects incorporated awareness-raising initiatives and endorsed dialogue; however, their efficacy was deemed weak by interviewed stakeholders. This was attributed by interviewed stakeholders primarily to the outdated methodologies still adhered to by key national partners, which fail to account for evolving communication preferences among youth (such as social networks), coupled with a general absence of innovation in effectively engaging NEET individuals. A good example was found to within the NEET project, which reportedly reached 316 persons who participated in the awareness-raising activities during the first reporting period, of which 31% person was women but in the second reporting in the awareness raising activities, 614 persons participated of which 45.8% person was women.²⁸³

2.5.4 Impact and sustainability of youth economic integration (JC 5.4)

Evaluation found a notable absence of comprehensive aggregate data concerning the broader EU-wide contributions in the field of employment and entrepreneurship (I-5.3.1 and I-5.4.1). Internally, EU projects collect beneficiary data, offering insights into outreach. However, there is no established programme or system at the EUD level for comprehensive data aggregation based on the types of interventions. This limitation hinders the ability to assess the extent to which the EU has

²⁸⁰ EC (2017): *Strengthening Economic Opportunities for Syrians Under Temporary Protection and Turkish Citizens In Selected Localities*, Progress Report No.10 2023; p.8.

²⁸¹ EC (2022): *Employment Support Activities for Syrians Under Temporary Protection and Turkish Citizens*, Progress Report, p. 1.

²⁸² EU Delegation to Türkiye (2019): *Internal Reporting*. 2019.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

achieved its objectives or contributed to addressing vulnerabilities, as emphasised by interviewed stakeholders.

2.6 Effects on Social Cohesion and Inclusion (EQ6)

The European Union has made significant investments in education, with a particular focus on supporting Syrian refugees in Türkiye. These investments have proven effective in addressing the challenges faced by refugee children and youth, such as enrolment in the Turkish education system, retention, and transitioning to employment. Notable initiatives include Turkish language training, need and merit-based scholarships, measures to enhance employability post-graduation (e.g. placement programmes, start-up seed funds, entrepreneurship training), and collaborations with national institutions to improve engagement at various education levels. For instance, the "Social and Economic Cohesion through Vocational Education – II" project facilitated the procurement of workshop equipment for vocational institutions, aiming to reduce dropout rates among refugee children and disadvantaged Turkish adolescents.

Additionally, the EU has played a crucial role in improving school infrastructure through projects like "Education Infrastructure for Resilience Activities in Türkiye". These efforts have included the construction, equipping, and furnishing of educational facilities, benefiting both host and refugee communities. Stakeholders have generally responded positively to the EU's contributions to education, acknowledging the relevance and effectiveness of the investment in educational infrastructure, particularly in disadvantaged regions with significant refugee populations.

Despite these successes, challenges persist, notably in the realm of youth mobility and access to EU programmes like Erasmus+. Evaluation found that the Erasmus+ offered opportunities for cohorts of young people to gain new experiences through exchanges and non-formal education opportunities. However, since April 2022, some organisations have had their Erasmus+ accreditations revoked without explanation, resulting in the closure of numerous entities that relied heavily on this funding source. Some stakeholders have expressed concerns about the transparency and management of Erasmus+ funds, noting perceived favouritism toward politically aligned organisations and raising questions about programme neutrality. Stakeholders have raised concerns about the bureaucratic complexities of the visa process, considering it not only a practical issue but also a human rights concern. These mobility issues have consequences beyond practical limitations, affecting Turkish youth's motivation to engage with other countries and potentially diminishing support for EU accession.

The *Jean Monnet* program, aimed at increasing EU-acquis specific knowledge in Türkiye and promoting European integration, has primarily focussed on academia. While evaluations have highlighted its impact on professional development, intercultural dialogue, and contributions to Türkiye's political, social, and economic development, many stakeholders were unaware of this programme due to its limited scope beyond academic circles.

The EU has had only some fragmented interventions in the realm of youth and culture. One such example is the "Dialogue for Change through Art and Culture" project. This initiative includes small grants to youth organisations and individual artists, seeking to mitigate polarisation and foster inclusivity among young individuals through various cultural activities. However, while these grants are seen as positive, some stakeholders consider them insufficient to meet the needs of young people in this area.

In terms of health, the evaluation did not find evidence of structured EU investments in youth mental health or sexual reproductive health. This limitation is attributed to the fact that national institutions have the primary say in determining support priorities, limiting the EU's influence in these thematic areas.

The EU has prioritised gender and social inclusion, with a focus on young women and vulnerable groups, through grants to CSOs. These projects aim to prevent discrimination and human rights violations against young people from religious/faith, women, and LGBTIQ groups, among others. While stakeholders acknowledge the positive impact of these initiatives, they emphasise the need for a more vocal EU stance and advocacy for the rights of these marginalised groups, particularly in cases where they face persecution by national authorities.

2.6.1 School retention and non-formal education (JC 6.1)

The EU's investments in enhancing access to education, notably for Syrian refugees, coupled with its contributions to non-formal education through Erasmus+, have yielded significant results (I-6.1.1, I-6.1.2, I-6.1.3). Evaluation found extensive evidence of effective EU's support to the integration/retention of refugee children (and youth) in education, notably through assistance frameworks such as FRIT. The support addressed the challenges that children (and youth) encounter in enrolling into the educational system in Türkiye, retention and transition from education to employment. The EU's support interventions included but were not limited to Turkish language training, need and merit-based scholarships, measures to increase their employability following graduation (e.g. placement programmes, seed funds for start-ups, entrepreneurship training and guidance) and other support activities. Within the FRIT interventions, activities also included working with national institutions to strengthen or introduce different mechanisms and measures to engage with right holders across different levels of education. For instance, a project such as – *Social and Economic Cohesion through Vocational Education – II* Activity included activities aimed at the procurement and installation of workshop equipment for at least 50 VET Institutions in 15 provinces, awareness-raising activities as well as provision of support packages to increase enrolment and reduce dropout rates of refugee children

but also disadvantaged Turkish adolescents.²⁸⁴ Also, to ensure a quality learning environment, EU supported school infrastructure betterment and within *Education Infrastructure for Resilience Activities in Türkiye* Project engaged in constructing education facilities, providing equipment and furnishing. Under this endeavour, 55 schools and one education centre were under construction.²⁸⁵ Stakeholder feedback was positive on EU's contributions to the promotion of access to education for children and youth from both host and refugee communities. In particular, the investment in educational infrastructure was seen as relevant and effective from the fact that most refugees were located in already poor or disadvantaged regions in *Türkiye*; hence this support expanded and improved the educational network.

Besides, *Türkiye* has been beneficiary of *Erasmus+* and *Jean Monnet. Erasmus+* Programme for *Türkiye*, which offers young people the opportunity to participate in youth activities based on education, training, internship, professional development and non-formal learning abroad. The programme also provides space for young people to volunteer, work or network on projects that benefit society in *Türkiye* or abroad, while promoting their personal, educational, social, civil and professional development. The evaluation found that the opportunities provided by *Erasmus+* have been highly beneficial for young people, but there are significant challenges, especially related to mobility and travel limitations for Turkish youth due to difficulty to obtain visas. The visa challenge has persisted for years and stakeholders cited that it only gets more difficult to obtain, making it difficult for young people and organisations to take full advantage of *Erasmus+* opportunities. The bureaucratic and operational complexities of the visa process pose a significant challenge. Civil society stakeholders emphasised that the mobility issues are not only a practical concern but also a human rights problem limiting the youth mobility but also diminishing the desire of Turkish youth to visit other countries, leading to social distance, decreasing EU accession support among this demographic and lack of motivation to learn languages, etc.

Despite these challenges, interviewed stakeholders mentioned that many young people have managed to improve their social and other skills through participation in *Erasmus+*. According to the official data, Turkish projects in *Erasmus+* received EUR 740 million over the period between 2014 and 2020. More than 36,500 Turkish organisations participated in the programme and 315,000 students, trainees, staff and teachers had a mobility experience abroad. Besides, under the European Solidarity Corps, 350 volunteering projects and 150 solidarity projects were supported by the programme between 2018-2020.²⁸⁶ *Erasmus+* has been a major source of funding for youth-related projects many of which focussed on non-formal education, but some of the interviewed stakeholders raised concern that since April 2022, many organisations have had their accreditations cancelled without explanation, leading to closures of many organisations that depended on *Erasmus+* as main source of funding. The EU should investigate this matter as it falls outside the purview of the evaluation. The *Jean Monnet* programme offers grants to selected scholars to do research or postgraduate studies in a university or equivalent institution in the EU member countries for a period of at least 3-12 months. *Jean Monnet* scholarships are allocated to studies on EU-related issues within the framework of *Türkiye's* EU harmonisation process. The programme has been running since 1990 to increase EU-acquis specific knowledge in *Türkiye* to promote European integration of the country. According to internal EU reports in 2017, the programme could not be implemented in the academic year 2017/2018, for reasons linked to the State of Emergency. The report states that the EUD achieved to get the programme back on track and to give Turkish citizens the possibility to benefit from the programme again in 2018/2019.²⁸⁷ The relevant calls for applications were published in December 2017. On this, from 2022 to 2024 EU implemented "Technical assistance for the *Jean Monnet Scholarship Programme/JMSP*" Project, providing support to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Directorate for the EU Affairs in the implementation of the Programme.²⁸⁸ When it comes to utility of, in particular the *Jean Monnet Scholarship Programme/JSMP*, a study conducted by the EU shows that the highest impact of the Programme has been in the area of professional development, but also regarding "intercultural dialogue" and "contribution to the political, social and economic development of *Türkiye*".²⁸⁹ As for the most relevant personal impacts, ex-scholarship participants noted "specialised knowledge", "professional career", "personality", "better understanding of EU" and "networking".²⁹⁰ Most interviewed stakeholders were not aware of the *Jean*

²⁸⁴ EC (2022): Social and Economic Cohesion through Vocational Education II (2022): Second progress Report, Part A – Technical Progress Report, p.3.

²⁸⁵ EC (2019) Verification of an Action entitled "Education Infrastructure for Resilience Activities in Türkiye (2019): Final Report, p.15.

²⁸⁶ EC (2023): Erasmus+.

²⁸⁷ EU Delegation to Türkiye (2017): Internal Reporting, p.10.

²⁸⁸ EC (2022): Jean Monnet Scholarship Programme, Inception Report, p.5.

²⁸⁹ EC (2023) Jean Monnet Scholarship Programme (2023), Online Survey Report Activity 6.0, p.38.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

Monnet, mainly due to its narrow focus on academia, so the documentary evidence could not be corroborated by stakeholder interviews.

2.6.2 Youth as producer of culture (JC 6.2)

The EU's support to youth culture projects was limited, but the more recent investment in youth and culture through a specific project is a step in the right direction (I-6.2.1, I-6.2.2). Mostly ad-hoc or limited outreach initiatives were found over the reference period in the youth and culture domain. These spanned various events, such as celebrations of the International Women's Day, Europe Day, Youth Forum gatherings, World Refugee Day, Climate Action Week, and environmental actions such as beach clean-up initiatives, etc. Other notable events include the 8th EU Human Rights Film Festival and Short Film Contest,²⁹¹ as well as the celebration of the European Year of Culture, which spanned across the entire country²⁹² or the "Tell me Your Story," event which took place from December 20 to 22 and involved a workshop and film screening with students from Bilkent University and Syrian youth. This three-day event was primarily shared on Instagram, with the films being showcased on the EUD's YouTube channel.

However, more recently a substantial allocation of funds has been dedicated to cultural initiatives as part of IPA II within the broader framework of the CSF. These initiatives often revolve around the restoration and revitalisation of historical sites and landmarks, integrating a significant element of civil society participation. An illustrative example includes the conversion of a former prison into a dynamic cultural centre, emphasising the profound connection between culture and civic engagement. Another significant initiative is the *Dialogue for Change through Art and Culture* programme, implemented over the period from 2021 to 2024, included small grants to both youth organisations and individual artists.²⁹³ The project's primary objective is to mitigate polarisation and foster inclusivity among young individuals through art and culture. Activities within this project encompass a wide array of events, such as art exhibitions, the development of a digital gallery featuring visual and performing arts, music and dance performances, cultural festivals, joint celebrations of religious and secular holidays, the creation of short films, media campaigns, and more. According to document review and stakeholder feedback, these grants represent valuable opportunities to promote and sustain small-scale initiatives within the domains of arts, culture, and the preservation of local cultural heritage. However, interviewed stakeholders considered this support as positive yet insufficient to address the needs of young people within this domain.

2.6.3 Access to mental health, sexual, reproductive rights and services (JC 6.3)

Evaluation did not find evidence of EU's structured investment in youth mental health or sexual reproductive health (I-6.3.1, I-6.3.2). According to stakeholder feedback, one of the reasons may be linked to the fact that the national institutions are in the lead of prioritisation of areas of support, so the selection of priorities remains with them. Stakeholders noted that this is a limitation for EU, as they can only comment on proposed areas of support and do not essentially have much influence over thematic priorities.

2.6.4 Space of dialogue on discrimination, gender and social inclusion (JC 6.4)

The EU assistance with focus on gender and social inclusion, with implicit targeting of young women and most vulnerable groups. EU's assistance to the most vulnerable youth groups (e.g. LGBTIQ, minorities, etc.) was provided through civil society and human rights facilities but not mainstreamed into sector-specific assistance (I-6.4.1 and I-6.4.2). Within the reference period, EU provided grants to civil society through EIDHR, CSF and other country-specific grant schemes for projects addressing human rights and fundamental freedom. For instance, within *Empowering University Youth for Furthering Human Rights of Young People from Vulnerable Groups* CSOs were empowered to prevent discrimination and human rights violation against young people from religious/faith, women, and LGBTIQ groups. So far, several activities have been implemented, including roundtable meeting with CSO representatives, a human rights civil society network "Haklar Ağı" for civil society actors and activists coordination was established, modules based on learning management system technology were developed, and four themes are identified as: "women's rights, gender-based violence, and child marriages", "human rights of LGBTIQ persons and hate crimes", "human rights of vulnerable religious/faith groups and hate speech" and "networking, monitoring, and advocacy for policy change", policy monitoring centre for digital policy monitoring was established, youth monitoring workshops

²⁹¹ Ibid, p. 10.

²⁹² Ibid, p. 10.

²⁹³ EC (2019): *Dialogue for Change through Art and Culture, Civil Society Facility and Media Programme* (2019), p.7.

organised, etc.²⁹⁴ Interviewed civil society stakeholders noted that EIDHR, CSF or country-specific schemes do provide good, albeit not sufficient support to the most vulnerable groups, which face persecution by national authorities in many cases. More vocal stance for advocacy for rights of these groups by EU would have been important as emphasised by interviewed stakeholders.

2.7 Effects on Peace and Security (EQ7)

The evaluation has identified a lack of comprehensive and consistent EU-supported initiatives focussed on youth engagement in peace and security efforts and the limited attention given to empowering youth as change-makers in Türkiye. No projects specifically focussing on conflict prevention, peace-building, or counterterrorism were found.

The EU efforts in empowering youth as change-makers have been inconsistent and limited. Financial assistance provided through the CSF or EIDHR did fund projects engaging with youth, but these initiatives faced limitations, including short durations, limited funds, and a lack of follow-up mechanisms. The only identified initiative addressing the empowerment of youth as change-makers was the "Go-For Youth – Strengthening representation and participation of youth in Türkiye" project funded under CSF 2018-19. This project aimed to establish a dialogue between authorities and youth representatives to influence policy-making and enable youth participation in policy development. While the Go-for-Youth project has made some progress, it faced challenges, including difficulties in cooperating with municipalities due to political reasons. Regarding consultations, while civil society representatives who happened to be youth leaders were included in some consultations, this was often seen as a coincidence rather than an intentional effort. Stakeholders expressed concern about the absence of deeper EU-specific investments in building skills and empowering young people and youth leaders to play a more prominent role as change-makers in Türkiye.

2.7.1 Adoption of youth-lens in peace and security strategies (JC 7.1)

The evaluation did not find evidence of Türkiye-specific EU-supported interventions focussing on peace and security strategies through youth lenses were found. No projects addressing youth involvement in conflict prevention, peace-building or counterterrorism were found either (I-7.1.1, I-7.1.2 and I-7.1.3).

2.7.2 Empowering youth as changemakers (JC 7.2)

No consistent EU efforts were found when it comes to empowering youth as change makers. (I-6.4.1 and I-6.4.2). Youth political participation of youth leadership per se were not considered as priority by the EU in programming or implementation of assistance, despite the increasing need in light of shrinking civil society or political space in *Türkiye* over the reference period as emphasised by interviewed stakeholders. The EU did include civil society representatives who might have happened to be youth leaders in some consultations, but this was not a result of intentional effort as emphasised by interviewed stakeholders, but rather a coincidence. Regarding financial assistance, the CSF and EIDHR grants included a number of projects that engaged with the youth, though these had their limitations (short duration, limited funds, no follow up) which hindered their wider transformative potential as noted by interviewed civil society actors. A general lack of deeper EU country-specific investment in building skills and empowering young people/youth leaders to undertake more prominent changemaker role in *Türkiye* was considered as a shortcoming by interviewed stakeholders. The only initiative that intervened in the empowerment of the youth as changemakers was found to be the *Go-For Youth – Strengthening representation and participation of youth in Türkiye (Go-for-Youth)* project funded under CSF 2018-19. This project aimed to influence policy-making by establishing a dialogue between the authorities and youth representatives, that would enable participation and inputs into policy development. The *Go-for-Youth* currently gathers 70 members, and it became a member of European Youth Forum, representing *Türkiye* in this EU body. However, as found in document review and corroborated by stakeholder interviews, this project did not succeed to establish or maintain cooperation with municipalities as planned due to political reasons. As noted in the ROM report, *“Evidently, there is a need for youth to participate in decision-making process at all levels, and the current intervention through the series of activities is tackling the issue to some extent, but irrespective of the activities being performed there will be no such outcome. Instead, the outcome being the continued existence of the CSOs and without the support of the EU programme there would be no CSOs and there would be no potential for civil society to engage in the democratic process.”*²⁹⁵ Stakeholder interviews revealed a number of challenges that Go For encounters in its interactions with national authorities or representative bodies in EU events, including lack of support, political differences between official Turkish youth bodies and *Go-for* members, obstructions of their work, etc.

²⁹⁴ EC (2022) Empowering University Youth for Furthering Human Rights of Young People from Vulnerable Groups (2022), p.2-3.

²⁹⁵ EC (2022): Go-For Youth, ROM Report, p. 10.

3 Conclusions

Overall conclusion: While the EU has made commendable strides in certain sectors within *Türkiye*, particularly education and employment, there are notable gaps and challenges in areas related to youth mobility, programme management, and empowerment of youth as change agents. The EU has proactively curated tailored strategies based on a thorough understanding of the multifaceted challenges confronting both native Turkish and migrant population, including the youth, spanning issues from gender inequality to political participation hurdles. However, there remains an evident gap in the focus and extent to which young people are intentionally targeted. The structural limitations within the EUD in *Türkiye*, exemplified by the inconsistent coordination and diminished influence of the youth focal point and informal youth group, curtail the potential for a cohesive and impactful youth-centric approach. This dichotomy between comprehensive analytical insights and practical execution constraints emphasises the need for strengthened operational mechanisms to fully realise strategic goals.

The EU support to education and employment in Türkiye yielded positive results for the youth. The EU's investments in the Turkish education system, and in particularly EU support to integrating Syrian youth into the educational system and providing other types of education opportunities, have yielded significant positive results. By focussing on initiatives like Turkish language training, scholarships, and employability measures, the EU has effectively addressed challenges related to enrolment, retention, and employment transition for refugees. Additionally, the infrastructure investments through projects such as "Education Infrastructure for Resilience Activities in *Türkiye*" have not only catered to the needs of refugees but also bolstered the educational infrastructure of the host communities, particularly in disadvantaged regions. Some programmes, like *Erasmus+* have brought significant results for youth non-formal education over time, though in the most recent period it has faced transparency and neutrality challenges, particularly with revoked accreditations for some youth organisations and concerns of political favouritism. One of the most significant obstacles for youth educational mobility are bureaucratic hurdles in visa processes, which consequently limit their personal and professional growth. These challenges have implications beyond just programme participation; they could potentially influence Turkish youth's perceptions about the EU and its integration efforts.

The EU's extensive collaboration with national and international stakeholders in Türkiye has yielded substantive advancements in youth employment and entrepreneurship, especially emphasising the integration of both local and refugee populations. Through frameworks like *Employment, Education and Social Policies Sectoral Operational Programme/EESP SOP 2014-2018* the EU has strategically aligned its interventions with *Türkiye's* broader developmental goals. This holistic approach, which spans education, job creation, and entrepreneurship with a particular emphasis on empowering women and facilitating Syrian refugees' inclusion, has fostered both economic growth and social cohesion. However, despite these commendable strides, the absence of a consolidated data aggregation system impedes a thorough evaluation of the EU's impact, coupled with concerns about project sustainability due to governmental shifts.

The EU has had sporadic interventions in the realms of youth, culture, and health. The *Jean Monnet* program, despite its impact, has limited visibility beyond academic circles, despite the fact that public institution staff and young graduates also used it. In the health domain, there's a discernible gap in structured EU investments, particularly in areas like youth mental health. Furthermore, while there are interventions like the *Dialogue for Change through Art and Culture* project, stakeholders believe they aren't sufficient to address the broader needs of the youth. This suggests that while the EU is active in some sectors, there are others where their engagement is fragmented or minimal.

Inconsistent programming youth empowerment initiatives, diminishes EU's potential to empower Youth as Change-makers. The EU's approach to fostering youth as influential actors in *Türkiye's* social and political landscape appears inconsistent. Although there are initiatives such as the *Go-for-Youth* project aiming at fostering youth participation in policy development, these are individual initiatives and not part of a bigger framework of support. The lack of more consistent approaches limits the EU space for supporting youth organisations to overcome various challenges, including political barriers and narrow operational space and building a larger critical mass of youth leaders across different fields of relevance in youth realm. The absence of comprehensive EU investments in skill-building and the empowerment of youth leaders indicates a missed opportunity to establish the youth as proactive agents of change in *Türkiye*.

4 Annex

4.1 List of persons consulted

<i>Name</i>	<i>Organisation</i>	<i>Position</i>
EUD		
CANBAY, Feyhat	EUD (Türkiye)	Project Officer – Facility for Refugees in Türkiye – Socio – Economic Development
DEMİR, Mehmet Caner	EUD (Türkiye)	Programme Manager – Social Policy and Human Resources Development
DUZENLI, Selda	EUD (Türkiye)	Communication Officer – EU Youth focal point
FALLAVOLLITA, Laura	EUD (Türkiye)	Programme Officer – Civil Society, Fundamental Rights, and Home Affairs
GÜRAYS, Melahat	EUD (Türkiye)	Programme Manager – Human and Social Development
KARAN, Ahmet	EUD (Türkiye)	Programme Manager – <i>Jean Monnet</i> Scholarship Programme (Erasmus Focal Point)
ERTUKEL, Dilek	European Union Sivil Düşün (Think Cıvcl)	Team Leader
Implementing Partners		
ATAS, Gokmen	International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)	Grant Management Lead – Western Balkans and Türkiye
HAMMIT, Metlem	International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)	Portfolio Manager – Western Balkans and Türkiye
TATAR, Onur	International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)	Technical Team Lead – Western Balkans and Türkiye
YAPANOĞLU, Pınar	International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)	Portfolio Manager – Migration and Development, Western Balkans and Türkiye
KARSLI, Gizem	International Labour Organisation (ILO)	Programme Officer – Employment and Education
Gizem Karsli	International Labour Organisation (ILO)	Programme Officer – Employment & Education
ÇADIRCI, Melih	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW)	Deputy Country Director
OGUZ, Julide	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW)	Senior Project Coordinator
UTKU, Cil	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW)	Local Coordinator at Ankara Office
KARAARSLAN, Arzu	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	Coordinator – Local Economic Development Projects
YURDUPAK, Mustafa Ali	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	Portfolio Manager – Inclusive and Sustainable Growth
Government		
DUR, Valor	Ministry of Labour and Social Security (İŞKUR)	Deputy Director General at İŞKUR, the Agency of Employment
OZKEN, Gokce	Ministry of Labour and Social Security (İŞKUR)	Manager of EU Projects
ASLAN, Emirhan	Turkish National Agency	Head of Youth Mobility Unit
Youth Organisations, CSOs		
EVLIYAOĞLU, Ela	GoFor	Civil Society Expert
ERBAŞ, Ersel	GSM (Youth Services Center)	Project Manager – Dialogue through Arts and Culture
YENİLMEZ, Çağlar	Toy Gençlik Derneği (Toy Youth Association)	Founding Board Member

4.2 List of documents

EU Strategy Programming

- EC (2016): Joint communication to the European Parliament and the Council: Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations.
- EU (2017): Country Sheet on Youth Policy in Türkiye, 2017; p.7.
- EC (2018): Revised Indicative Paper 2014-2020 for Türkiye.
- EC (2019): Dialogue for Change through Art and Culture, Civil Society Facility and Media Programme (2019), p.7.
- EU (2020): YouthWiki Türkiye.
- EC (2022) Empowering University Youth for Furthering Human Rights of Young People from Vulnerable Groups (2022), p.2-3.
- EC (2023): Erasmus+.
- EC (n.d.): EU Support to Refugees in Türkiye.

EU Reporting

- EU (2014): Progress Report Türkiye.
- EU (2015): Progress Report Türkiye.
- EU (2016): Progress Report Türkiye.
- EU (2017): Progress Report Türkiye.
- EU (2018): Progress Report Türkiye.
- EU (2019): Progress Report Türkiye.
- EU (2020): Progress Report Türkiye.
- EU (2021): Progress Report Türkiye.
- EU (2022): Progress Report Türkiye.
- EUD Türkiye (2014): Internal Reporting.
- EUD Türkiye (2015): Internal Reporting.
- EUD Türkiye (2016): Internal Reporting.
- EUD Türkiye (2017): Internal Reporting.
- EUD Türkiye (2018): Internal Reporting.
- EUD Türkiye (2019): Internal Reporting.
- EUD Türkiye (2020): Internal Reporting.
- EUD Türkiye (2021): Internal Reporting.
- EUD Türkiye (2022): Internal Reporting.

Project documentation

The team reviewed the available project documentation (action fiches/TAPs, grant contracts, implementation and monitoring reports, evaluations, etc.) of the projects presented in the tables in section 1.2.

Other evaluations and studies

- Türkiye Ministry of Youth & Sports (2013): The National Youth and Sports Policy Document.
- International Youth Foundation (2017): The Global Youth Wellbeing Index, Türkiye.
- World Bank (2017): Partnership Programme for Europe and Central Asia Programmatic Single-Donor Trust Fund (No. TF072780) Donor Reference for the Republic of Türkiye: Employment Support for Syrians under Temporary Protection and Host Communities.
- United Nations Development Cooperation Strategy (2020): UN in Türkiye Evaluation.
- United Nations Development Cooperation Strategy (2020): UN in Türkiye Evaluation
- UNFPA Türkiye (2021): UNFPA Türkiye Empowers Young Refugees with the Support of the Government of Japan.
- TURKSTAT (2022): Youth in Statistics.
- Asylum Information Database (2023): Country Report: Türkiye: Housing.

- Black Sea CBC (2023): ENI CBC Black Sea Basin Programme 2014-2020.
- Country meters (2023): Türkiye Population: Life expectancy.
- Go-for-Youth (n.d.): Youth CSOs and COVID-19.

Country case study: Tunisia

1 Introduction

1.1 Context

1.1.1 Main Youth challenges

Young people under 35 years old represent 57% of the population in Tunisia, with a total population of 11.7 million. The age group 0-29 years is estimated to be at 5.5 million in 2021 and will be over six million in 2026.²⁹⁶ Despite these figures, youth in *Tunisia* does not constitute a homogeneous or politically coherent group, and gender, regional affiliations, class, and values are important dimensions to consider to understand the dynamics at play regarding youth challenges.

In the course of the last decade (and specifically the period covered by the evaluation 2014-2021), the Tunisian context was marked by political instability (changes in government positions), difficult social and economic conditions (caused by the lack of structural reforms, conjectural factors such as the regime crisis in *Syria* after 2011, terrorist attacks affecting the tourist sector in *Tunisia* in 2015, and the Corona pandemic) as well as persistent regional and gender disparities.²⁹⁷ Furthermore, in July 2021, the president interrupted the democratic transition by gradually restoring an autocratic and populist regime without meaningful checks and balances.²⁹⁸ The economic and social situation has continued to deteriorate, compounded by the absence of a deal with the International Monetary Fund.

In this context of structural crisis, the first challenge for youth concerns economic integration. Economic adversity and democratic transition challenges during the last decade have resulted in an increasing number of young people who are NEETs. The numbers have increased from 25.2% (2010) to 32% (2019) for the age group 15-24. In this same age group, 70% of individuals are outside the labour force (with a higher rate for women, reaching 79%) and activity rates remain at less than 30% in 2019.²⁹⁹ In rural areas, half of young women are NEETs (50.4%) compared with one in three young men (33.4%) for the age group 15-29.³⁰⁰ It is reported that the majority of young people work in the informal sector (55.4% in urban areas and 71.9% in rural areas), which often equals very poor working conditions (no contract, low income, low productivity, precariousness, and no social protection).³⁰¹

The second challenge for youth concerns education, training, and employability. While *Tunisia* benefited from an important growth in enrolment rates (96.9% enrolled children in primary education and 70.65% in secondary education in 2018), school dropout rates are still high. Half of enrolled young Tunisians leave school before obtaining a secondary school degree: completion rates for the 2nd cycle of secondary education reach only 48.7%. This last figure drops to 29.6% in rural areas and to 24.2% for the poorest quintile.³⁰² Another important concern is the share of vocational students in secondary education: it is very low and decreased from 13.9% before 2011 to 9.1% in 2016, confirming the lack of attractiveness of VET, especially for girls (6.2%).³⁰³ Besides, the quality of learning in Tunisian schools is still weak, and the *Programme for International Student Assessment/PISA* 2015 ranking on quality, efficiency, and equity of school systems ranks *Tunisia* at the 65th position (out of 70 countries). Schools and universities in *Tunisia* fail to provide essential skills demanded by young people to access the labour market and pursue an active public life. Meanwhile, the Internet became the main medium to access information for education (about 50% of all Internet users use the Internet for education).³⁰⁴

Another challenge concerns gender disparities, which pertain to persistent social and gender norms in Tunisian society. For instance, in 2019, only 20.6% of Tunisian women were employed in a formal job, compared to almost 60% of Tunisian men. It is reported as well that wages of young women are one-quarter lower than wages of young men at the national level. There are three sub-groups of vulnerable young women in *Tunisia*: i) unemployed women with low levels of education; ii) women working in the

²⁹⁶ European Training Foundation (2021): Skills and migration Country Fiche Tunisia.

²⁹⁷ World Bank Group (2014): Breaking the barrier to youth inclusion.

²⁹⁸ Freedom House Website (2023): Freedom in the World 2023, Tunisia.

²⁹⁹ European Training Foundation (2021): Skills and migration Country Fiche Tunisia.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ World Bank Group (2014): Breaking the barrier to youth inclusion.

³⁰² République Tunisienne, Institut National de la Statistique (2018): Enquête par grappes à indicateurs multiples (MICS).

³⁰³ European Training Foundation (2020): Country Fiche 2020 Tunisia.

³⁰⁴ World Bank Group (2014): Breaking the barrier to youth inclusion.

informal sector with low income and no social protection; and iii) young adolescents and girls from poor families with low levels of education.³⁰⁵

Finally, the engagement of young people in public life constitutes another challenge. Since the 2011 Revolution, levels of trust in government have fallen dramatically, dropping from 62% in 2011 to just 20% in 2018. The lack of trust in national institutions and the lack of prospects for inclusion are major push factors for emigration. This trend exhibited a temporary reversal in 2021, rising to 41% of Tunisians who are confident in the government, following the “coup de force” of the newly elected president who dissolved the parliament and gradually extended its powers. Surprisingly, an overwhelming majority of Tunisians (83%) report that they trust the new President Saïed in 2022, which is largely due to his anti-establishment and anti-corruption stance. However, youth ages 18-29 are somewhat less trusting, with only 45% saying they trust the president.³⁰⁶ In the last decade, few young Tunisians were active in political parties, as they preferred participating in more spontaneous forms of political actions like demonstrations. It should be noted nonetheless that the number of young people (18-21 years old) registered to vote for the municipal elections (2018) has increased by around 28%.³⁰⁷ Reports from the early days of the democratic transition recognised that youth engagement in civil society activity was on the rise, and nine out of ten young Tunisians consider volunteering in CSOs to contribute to their communities.³⁰⁸ A more recent figure shows that 534,915 people participated in the National Youth Consultation between January and March 2022 out of a total of 7,065,628 voters registered in the electoral roll and a total of 2,946,628 voters in the 2019 presidential elections. 46.3% of participants in this consultation were aged between 30 and 50, while participation was open to young people aged 16 and above.³⁰⁹

Besides, according to youth consultations on peace and security, violence is part of everyday life for the youth.³¹⁰ When consulted about peace and security challenges, adolescents and youth mainly refer to physical and psychological violence experienced at school, in the neighbourhood and the family, while older youth refer to structural violence related to regional, class, and gender disparities. The same survey demonstrates that young people can respond to their experience of various forms of structural violence (primarily linked to poverty, exclusion and marginalisation) with alcohol and drug abuse, but also self-harm, joining collective violent activities or violent extremist groups.³¹¹ Tunisian radicalised youth tend to be between the ages of 24 and 37 and come from poor communities. Through the Islamist group Ansar al-Sharia, many fought in *Syria* for al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State. At the same time, others stayed in North Africa to fight for offshoots of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and the Islamic State. In 2015, at least 17 terrorist acts took place in *Tunisia*. The country has the largest number of foreign fighters per capita in the world (around 6,000 to 7,000).³¹² According to another figure, about 8% of the Tunisian population finds acts of violent extremism morally justified. However, this number is still far larger than the one applicable to young people who actually participated in violent acts.³¹³

1.1.2 Policy framework and main actors

Since the 2011 revolution, largely led by Tunisian youth, *Tunisia* adopted in 2014 a new Constitution establishing a normative framework conducive to the inclusion of young people in political processes and the economy, as they are mentioned in Article 8 as an “active force in the service of nation building”. The five-year Development Plan 2016-2020 sets, in its five areas of intervention, objectives relating to the economic, political, and social inclusion of young people.

On the sectoral side, the Ministry of Youth and Sports has initiated the formulation of a national youth policy by developing a *Sectoral Vision on Youth in Tunisia*. The vision was declined in an operational plan for the period 2018-2020. However, these documents were not signed by the government and the various ministries involved. In 2022, the presidency has set up a new inter-ministry committee for the formulation of a new national youth policy. According to the interviews conducted during the field mission, the national youth policy is being developed in the course of 2023, but with little implication of the youth themselves.

³⁰⁵ *ibid.*

³⁰⁶ Arab Barometer (2022): Tunisia Country Report.

³⁰⁷ GIZ Tunisie (2021): La participation des jeunes à la vie publique locale.

³⁰⁸ World Bank Group (2014): Breaking the barrier to youth inclusion.

³⁰⁹ Zargouni L. for Arab Reform Initiative (2022): Youth participation in Tunisia’s elections: Some possible solutions

³¹⁰ Search for common ground (2017): Youth Consultations on Peace and Security.

³¹¹ *ibid.*

³¹² EU (2017): The Role of the Sub-National Authorities from the Mediterranean Region in Addressing Radicalisation and Violent Extremism of Young People.

³¹³ Maghreb Economic Forum (2019): Tackling Youth Radicalisation through Inclusion in Post-Revolutionary Tunisia. The Research Literature Review.

Notable youth-related laws were passed in the period 2014-2022 at the national level, like Law No. 2016-58 on the Promotion of Youth Employment and Law No. 2017-58 on the Fight against Terrorism and Money Laundering in 2017 (including provisions to prevent young people from being recruited by terrorist groups). At the international level, *Tunisia* ratified 2014 the Convention No. 182 of the ILO, which calls for the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour.

Beside the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Education, the main institutional actors for the youth in *Tunisia* are: i) the National Youth Observatory (a governmental body that focusses on youth-related research, analysis, and data collection); ii) the National Agency for Employment and Self-Employment (which plays a crucial role in addressing youth unemployment and promoting employment opportunities for young Tunisians); iii) the municipal councils and local authorities,³¹⁴ which would be disbanded by the president in 2022; iv) CSOs (various CSOs in *Tunisia* focus on youth-related issues and work towards their inclusion, empowerment, and participation); and v) higher education institutions such as Universities.³¹⁵

1.1.3 EU-*Tunisia* cooperation framework

The European Union and *Tunisia* established a Privileged Partnership in 2012, which translated into the 2013-2017 Action Plan to increase the links between the EU and *Tunisia*. Both partners also adopted a Mobility Partnership in 2014. The EU's commitment to supporting *Tunisia* in achieving its ambitions was further underlined in 2016 with the Joint Communication *Strengthening EU support for Tunisia*. In December 2016, the EU and *Tunisia* launched the *EU-Tunisia Youth Partnership* to promote education, employment, economic growth, regional development, and mobility for the youth. In the context of the revised European Neighbourhood Policy, EU-*Tunisia* Strategic Priorities were adopted at the EU-*Tunisia* Association Council in 2018 (Decision No 1/2018 of the EU-*Tunisia* Association Council of 9 November 2018 adopting the EU-*Tunisia* strategic priorities for the period 2018-2020) as well as the main guidelines for the EU-*Tunisia* privileged partnership in 2018-2020. A new memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed in July 2023 between the EU and the *Republic of Tunisia*, enhancing themes of economy and trade, people-to-people contacts, and migration and mobility, with a less important focus on youth. More specifically, the 2023 MoU highlights the continuation of the implementation of the 2016 Youth Partnership and EU-supported programmes in the fields of research, education, culture and youth, including skills development and mobility.³¹⁶

Bilateral assistance was determined for the period 2014-2021 through the EU Action Plan for *Tunisia* 2013-2017, the SSF 2014-2015 and the SSF 2017-2020. Due to the political situation following the disruption of the democratic process, the new Multiannual Indicative Programme 2021-2027 (under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument-Global Europe) is still to be adopted for *Tunisia*.

1.2 Focus of the case study

This case study provides an in-depth analysis of a sample of EU actions targeting youth in *Tunisia* (see Table 10 and Table 11). This analysis does not constitute a full-fledged evaluation of EU support to youth in *Tunisia*. It is conceived as an illustration, a country-specific background document that contributes to the overall evaluation by zooming in on key aspects of EU support to youth (at the bilateral and regional level) and main lessons learnt in the process.

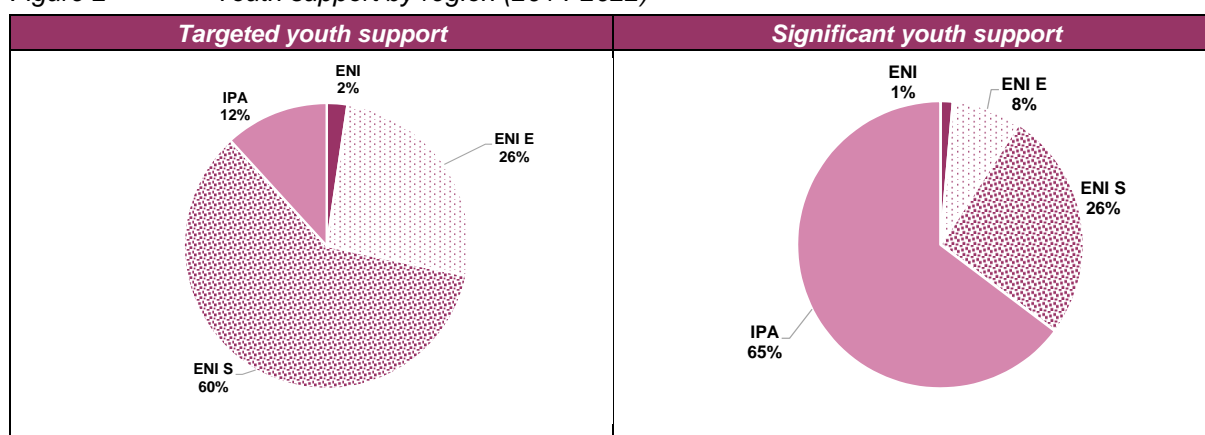
The *Neighbourhood South region* receives some of the highest funding for targeted support to youth (see Figure 2), with *Tunisia* receiving most of the funds during the period under review (see Figure 3). The case study will cover thematic areas from EQ 4 to EQ 7 but with a particular focus on EQ 5 and EQ 6 (economic integration and social cohesion). These two thematic areas were of special interest for EU support in *Tunisia* in 2014-2021, according to our review of EU strategies, decisions, and interventions in *Tunisia* for this period. The interventions selected for review are sampled across modalities of intervention (see tables below for the core interventions retained) and the sample was elaborated in collaboration with the EUD.

³¹⁴ The new electoral law for the local elections of 2018 provided a set of rules and measures encouraging the participation of young people and their representation in municipal councils)

³¹⁵ GIZ Tunisie (2021): La participation des jeunes à la vie publique locale.

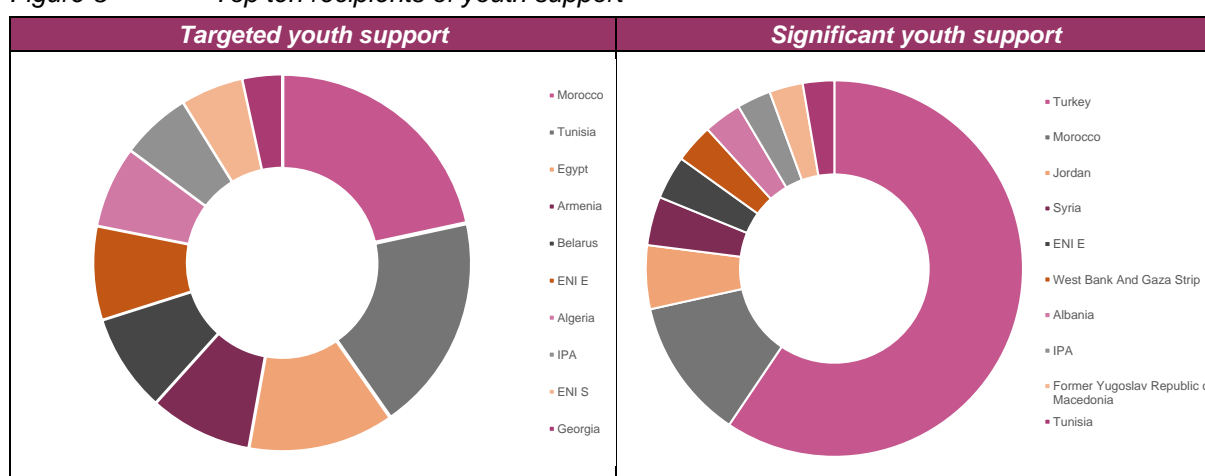
³¹⁶ EC (2023) : Memorandum of Understanding on a strategic and global partnership between the European Union and Tunisia, Press release, Tunis, 16 July 2023.

Figure 2 Youth support by region (2014-2022)



Source: Particip

Figure 3 Top ten recipients of youth support



Source: Particip

The case study builds on the data collected from: i) strategic and policy documents provided by DG NEAR; ii) political economy analyses on *Tunisia* and the region; iii) intervention-level documents provided by DG NEAR and the EUD staff (action documents, evaluations, monitoring and progress reports and any other relevant documents); and iv) interviews and focus group discussions with youth, civil society stakeholders, EU staff, government and other actors involved. A more detailed description of the methodology can be found in the Inception Report. The country case studies included a four-day mission to meet key stakeholders.

Table 10 Main bilateral contracts sampled in Tunisia

Year	Intervention/ Contract title	CRIS ref.	Contracting party	Planned amount (EUR)
2018	EU4YOUTH – Programme d’appui à la jeunesse en Tunisie	D-41142		60.000.000
2019	JEUN’ESS – Promotion de l’économie sociale et solidaire et création d’emploi décent pour la jeunesse Tunisienne	C-408330	International Labour Organisation	9.200.000
2022	IRADA4YOUTH – Programme de soutien au développement économique durable local pour l’emploi des jeunes	C-432935	Commissariat Général au Développement Régional	5.000.000
2021	FAILA – Politique jeunesse et participation des jeunes dans les politiques publiques en Tunisie	C-423050	International Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG)	7.200.000
2021	MAGHROUM’IN – Participation et inclusion des jeunes tunisien(ne)s à travers la création, l’accès à la culture et au sport au niveau local	C-429529	Spanish Agency for International Development/AECIDCoo	9.000.000

Year	Intervention/ Contract title	CRIS ref.	Contracting party	Planned amount (EUR)
			peration (AECID) and British Council	
2016	EMORI – Programme d'appui à l'éducation, la mobilité, la recherche et l'innovation en Tunisie	D-39506		50.000.000
2016	Erasmus + – Mesure spéciale Erasmus+ pour la mobilité	C-39771	Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture/EAC; Erasmus+ National agency in Tunisia	10.000.000
2020	Appui à l'inclusion sociale en Tunisie	D-41860		90.000.000
2021	Pour une réponse intégrée aux violences fondées sur le genre	C-428588	United Nations Population Fund	2.300.000
2017	Ebni – Prévenir la radicalisation par l'insertion	C-393100	Fondation Agir contre l'Exclusion (FACE) Tunisie	531.632
2016	Programme d'appui au secteur de la culture en Tunisie	D-38415		6.000.000
2016	TFANEN – Appui au renforcement du secteur culturel tunisien	C-373015	The British Council Royal Charter	4.600.000

Table 11 Main regional contracts sampled in Tunisia

Year	Intervention/ Contract title	CRIS contract ref.	Contracting party	Planned amount (EUR)
2016	Programme Euro-Mediterranean (EUROMED) Jeunesse IV	C-373115	Republic of Tunisia	223.850

2 Findings

2.1 Policy framework and responsive programming (EQ1)

During the period 2014-2021, **EU strategies were relevant to the youth context in Tunisia**, which was marked by political instability and adverse economic conditions. The EU Action Plan 2013-2017, the SSF 2017-2020, and the EU-*Tunisia* Strategic Priorities 2018-2020 developed strategic priorities on youth employment, mobility, and participation. **The EU-*Tunisia* Partnership on Youth launched in 2016 represents the main political milestone promoting a specific EU agenda on youth in Tunisia.** This partnership led to the development of a youth-focussed programme *Programme d'appui à la jeunesse Tunisienne/EU4YOUTH* (signed in 2018) with a budget of EUR 60 million. **However, implementation delays, partly due to political and institutional factors, impacted EU's responsiveness to youth challenges (with a few projects starting implementation only in 2021-2022).**

Besides, the EUD response to youth would profit from strengthening its programmatic coherence across the delegation. Youth are targeted in various interventions and areas of work of the EUD (education, economic support, gender, and health sections of the EUD) without overall coherence and mutual learning, which leads to an atomisation of interventions. **Synergies need to be strengthened and developed more formally to enhance EUD's institutional response towards youth in Tunisia.**

Finally, the new memorandum of understanding signed in July 2023 between the EU and the Republic of Tunisia puts forward themes of economy and trade, people-to-people contacts, and migration and mobility, shifting attention away from youth strategies.

2.1.1 Policy frameworks and strategies take into account regional and national specificities (JC 1.1)

During the period 2014-2021, **EU strategies were timely and relevant to the youth context in Tunisia**, which was marked by rapid institutional change (following the 2011 revolution), political instability, and adverse economic conditions. Based on a review of EU policies and strategies in Tunisia,³¹⁷ the EU has shown strong determination in accompanying the Tunisian institutions for the democratic transition, as *Tunisia* became a "privileged partner" of the EU as a result of the 2014 Association Council.

The EU Action Plan 2013-2017, the SSF 2017-2020, and the EU-*Tunisia* Strategic Priorities 2018-2020 based their priorities on the 2016-2020 *Tunisia* Development Plan, indicating a

³¹⁷ EU Action plan for Tunisia 2013-2017, SSF 2014-2015, SSF 2017-2020, Decision No 1/2018 of the EU-Tunisia Association Council of 9 November 2018 adopting the EU-Tunisia strategic priorities for the period 2018-2020.

mainstreaming of youth challenges (as described in the context section of this case study), developing strategic priorities on youth employment, mobility, and participation, in particular in local initiatives. The EU-*Tunisia* strategic priorities also put forward the central issue of reforming education, creating linkages with the private sector for better employability, and promoting youth innovation in technology and culture. Besides, **a partnership on mobility, adopted in 2014, offered an adequate framework for the setting-up of the Erasmus+ programme** from 2014, which led to a significant increase in youth mobility between the EU and *Tunisia* (in 2017, 1781 mobility projects were approved for *Erasmus+*).

The EU-*Tunisia* “Partnership on Youth” launched in 2016 represents the main political milestone promoting a specific EU agenda on youth in *Tunisia*. The decision of the EU-*Tunisia* Association Council of 2018 develops the priorities set in the “Partnership on Youth” concerning youth employment and employability, mobility, and increased participation of young people in public life and politics. This partnership led to the development of a youth-focussed programme *Programme d’appui à la jeunesse Tunisienne/EU4YOUTH* (signed in 2018), with a budget of EUR 60 million.

However, based on the field mission, **only a few EU-supported interventions** in the course of the period covered by this evaluation (2014-2021) **could be qualified as youth-centred**, meaning that youth were included in the decision-making and planning processes of the programmes themselves (thus putting the youth in the driving seat). Nonetheless, programmes like *Participation et inclusion des jeunes tunisien(ne)s à travers la création, l’accès à la culture et au sport au niveau local/ MAGHROUM’IN*, were standing out by following an approach promoting youth leadership and ownership, with the support of the expertise of the British Council in youth engagement. For instance, before the launch of the intervention, the implementing partner organised workshops and forums with a large number of youth from all regions of *Tunisia* to engage them in the program. During the sessions, the youth presented their views and expectations in the area of culture and sport and discussed how this EU-supported programme could respond to these challenges.

Besides, according to the desk review and interviews, several key projects under this programme were delayed (with projects starting actual implementation in 2021-2022 only), due to multiple political and institutional factors: political factors, with the Brexit in 2020 that led to the withdrawal of the British Council as main implementing partner in the project *Participation et inclusion des jeunes tunisien(ne)s à travers la création, l’accès à la culture et au sport au niveau local/ MAGHROUM’IN*, and institutional factors, as several implementing partners selected showed a lack of capacity in starting implementation, like in the project “Politique jeunesse et participation des jeunes dans les politiques publiques en Tunisie” implemented by the International Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities/VNG. The delays in the implementation of the *EU4YOUTH* programme affected EU’s flexibility in programming to respond to youth challenges in *Tunisia*.

The new memorandum of understanding signed in July 2023 between the EU and the Republic of *Tunisia* puts forward themes of economy and trade, people-to-people contacts, and migration and mobility, with a less important focus on youth-centred strategies. Interviews with stakeholders during the field mission reflected the importance of sustaining political dialogue on youth issues with the Tunisian government to push forward youth policies in a coherent and sustained manner in the long term. Recent orientations focussing on migration, peace, and security are the result of a series of political changes in the agenda of the EU (intensification of migration as a political issue) and Tunisian level (new government in 2022 with less focus on youth empowerment and youth strategies).³¹⁸

2.1.2 Enabling Institutional environment (JC 1.2)

As demonstrated in the “Partnership on Youth” signed in 2016 and the *EU4YOUTH* programme signed in 2018 *Tunisia*, there was strong political commitment within the EUD and EU HQs for the development of youth-targeted interventions during the period covered by the evaluation. According to interviews, this political support to youth within the EUD was backed by DG NEAR during this period (support for the design stage of *EU4YOUTH*, guidance for youth consultations as part of the EU’s year for youth in 2022).

Despite this political support, the EUD in *Tunisia* had difficulties in developing a fully formed response to youth challenges. Interviews with stakeholders during the mission confirmed that the EUD response to youth would profit from **strengthening its programmatic coherence across the delegation**. Youth are targeted in various interventions and areas of work of the EUD (education, economic support, gender and health sections of the EUD), which leads to an atomisation of interventions and results concerning youth. The *EU4YOUTH* programme in *Tunisia* (2018-present), first designed to unify EU’s support to

³¹⁸ Mémorandum d’entente sur un partenariat stratégique et global entre l’Union Européenne et la République Tunisienne (2023); interviews with key stakeholders.

youth in *Tunisia* in various areas (economic integration, participation, culture, etc.) is still scattered across different sections of the delegation with few synergies between interventions.

The EUD focal point coordinates with the various sections of the delegation to monitor results under the *EU4YOUTH* programme and other interventions targeting youth and facilitate the inclusion of youth in initiatives like the EU Coffee Talks. However, synergies between interventions need to be structured and developed more formally to enhance EUD's institutional response towards youth in *Tunisia*.

The monitoring of results of EU-supported youth programmes followed the standard monitoring procedures for EU interventions, with the theory of change/intervention logic frameworks providing different levels of outcomes/outputs and indicators for each level, generally broken down by age, gender and geographical area. For instance, the intervention "Promotion de l'économie sociale et solidaire et création d'emploi décent pour la jeunesse Tunisienne (JEUN'ESS)" provides the product 1.1 "ESS businesses run by young people set up and operational in seven target governorates", which is informed by indicator 1.1.1 "Number of ESS projects run by young people supported with the support for the intervention financed by the EU, disaggregated by sex and geographical area" (98 projects)". After a review of progress reports for interventions like the JEUN'ESS and "Politique jeunesse et participation des jeunes dans les politiques publiques en Tunisie", it is possible to confirm that M&E systems for youth-targeted programmes are mainly focussed on outputs and quantitative data. M&E systems for the youth would increase their learning potential (or "learning curve") by collecting qualitative data more formally and regularly (for instance, for the JEUN'ESS project: reasons for the successes and failures of youth entrepreneurship projects, "business cases" and youth entrepreneurial paths, what worked and not worked in terms of support to youth entrepreneurs, etc.).

The documentation reviewed at a strategic and programmatic level shows mixed evidence of EU's investment in political economy analyses to develop engagement strategies for youth. Internal EU reports for 2014-2021 provide detailed information on political and economic instability, the lack of clear national strategies in Tunisia, and the lack of institutional capacity of Tunisian partners, but nothing specifically on youth. According to the stakeholders interviewed, **EU support in Tunisia would benefit from formal political economy analyses in developing a more structural response to youth**. This analysis would target national reforms in strategic areas like education, labour conditions, and entrepreneurship finance while developing pilots and experimenting with support mechanisms at the intervention level. According to interviews with EUD managers, the investment in a multiplicity of interventions targeting youth must not replace a sustained policy dialogue focussing on developing structural conditions for the youth to thrive at the national and community levels. However, it is important to note that the unstable political conditions in *Tunisia* during the period covered did not facilitate the adoption of political economy and structural approaches.

2.2 EU choice of delivery methods, channels, and instruments promotes responsive, cost-effective, and timely support (EQ2)

Indirect management and budget support were the main delivery method for EU support to youth in Tunisia. It is possible to confirm that budget support was responsive to youth issues in their design. However, the country's political and institutional instability did not promote key youth reforms related to youth engagement and economic integration (innovation, entrepreneurship). Delegation agreements were cost-effective and responsive enough, and the advantages of this method were evidenced. They carried a smaller burden on EUD's human resources, while enabling implementing agencies with demonstrated expertise and partner agencies, like the British Council, which showed expertise in promoting youth leadership and participation. However, resorting too often to this channel makes EU external action dependent on the institutional capacity of implementing agencies and critical interventions for the youth like "Politique jeunesse et participation des jeunes dans les politiques publiques en Tunisie" were delayed due to the limited capacities and expertise of partners. Therefore, a careful selection of the implementing partner is critical for the success of this delivery method, and mistakes can significantly affect the cost-effectiveness and timeliness of this channel. Besides, there is no evidence of complementarities between regional (like EUROMED), bilateral and thematic programmes focussing on youth.

In addition, EU support to youth has demonstrated good flexibility and timely adjustments in programming. Interventions like "Ebni – Prévenir la radicalisation par la réinsertion" avoided administrative blockages in coordination with the EUD by working directly with CSOs and centres managed by the Ministry of Social Affairs.

Finally, EU programming was responsive enough to the COVID-19 context in Tunisia and calls for proposals targeting youth groups and organisations increasingly allowed to provide rapid and proportionate support to small actions.

2.2.1 Responsiveness of modalities (JC 2.1)

While there is evidence that budget support was carefully designed to support national reforms, including reforms concerning youth (e.g. in the education domain), policy/political dialogue on relevant youth reforms did not achieve clear results. For instance, the budget support contract under

Programme d'appui à l'éducation, la mobilité, la recherche et l'innovation en Tunisie/EMORI provided a good analysis of the political context in Tunisia, designed tranches to push forward the dialogue on the education reform, and provided complementary support measures and relevant indicators. In addition, the review highlights that in 2020, an active and lively sectorial dialogue took place, particularly regarding the Global Partnership for Education, involving the EUD as the main coordinator of development partners in the education sector, the Ministry of Education (MoE), and civil society. Nonetheless, according to the interviews conducted, political and institutional instability in the country did not facilitate the achievement of reforms for youth related to innovation and entrepreneurship, for instance. However, as discussed earlier (EQ1), the strength of the policy/political dialogue on youth issues may have diminished in recent years, as reflected in the current MoU (2023) between the EU and *Tunisia*. Finally, the delay in preparing the programming strategy for the MoE covering the period of 2021-2027 seems to have led to a lack of regular and structured dialogue with development partners.³¹⁹

During the period covered, indirect management (delegation agreements, grant agreements) was the main method of delivery for EU support to youth in *Tunisia*.³²⁰ Based on interviews, delegation agreements were always designed carefully and in complementarity with other delivery methods. This method's advantages were evidenced during implementation, according to stakeholders. These included a smaller burden on human resources for the EUD, while enabling implementing agencies with demonstrated expertise to lead implementation. Partners agencies like the British Council (Interventions "Appui au renforcement du secteur culturel tunisien" and *Participation et inclusion des jeunes tunisien(ne)s à travers la création, l'accès à la culture et au sport au niveau local/MAGHROUM'IN*) showed expertise in promoting youth leadership and participation, demonstrated by the extended consultation processes at the design stage and the engagement a large panel of youth partner organisations in the implementation of both interventions.³²¹ Other partners, like the International Labor Organisation (ILO), demonstrated a capacity to develop innovative ways to finance vulnerable youth by developing Funds managed directly by Tunisian youth-led organisations like Enactus.³²²

However, resorting too often to this method of delivery makes EU external action dependent on the institutional capacity of implementing agencies, which can prove to be limited in some cases. Strategic interventions targeting youth, like the *EU4YOUTH* intervention "Politique de jeunesse et participation des jeunes dans les politiques publiques en Tunisie" and *Participation et inclusion des jeunes tunisien(ne)s à travers la création, l'accès à la culture et au sport au niveau local/MAGHROUM'IN* were delayed due to the limited capacities and expertise of partners in developing youth-led initiatives. On the one hand, according to interviews with EUD managers and the progress reports reviewed, the partner, the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation/AECID, does not have a project office in *Tunisia* and failed to recruit the personnel dedicated to the project because of administrative blockages. On the other hand, the International Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities/VNG showed a lack of expertise in developing youth-led approaches. Therefore, EUD managers, during the interviews, agree that a **careful selection of the implementing partner by the EUD, based on a critical review of its capacities and expertise, is critical for the success of this delivery method.**

Finally, while the EUD in *Tunisia* manages an important portfolio of interventions targeting youth at various degrees, there is no evidence, from the field missions and the documentation reviewed, of complementarities between regional (EUROMED), bilateral and thematic programmes focussing on youth.

2.2.2 Flexibility of instruments and delivery methods (JC 2.2)

Based on the interviews and the monitoring reports, it is possible to confirm that **EU support to youth has demonstrated good flexibility and timely adjustments in programming.** For instance, a good example is redesigning the intervention "Ebni – Prévenir la radicalisation par la réinsertion," after the government refused to allow this CSO to work inside the prisons with vulnerable youth. The implementing partner, Fondation Agir Contre l'Exclusion/FACE, avoided this blockage in coordination with the EUD by targeting youth at risk of radicalisation in the "Centres de défense et d'intégration sociale", centres where ex-prisoners can benefit from a series of services delivered by the ministry of social affairs.

³¹⁹ EU Delegation to Tunisia (2020-2021): Internal Reporting.

³²⁰ EU Delegation to Tunisia (2014-2021): Internal Reporting.

³²¹ EU Delegation to Tunisia (2019) : Note de dossier, 3ème rapport intérimaire. Appui au renforcement du secteur culturel tunisien.

³²² ROM review of the intervention "Promotion de l'économie sociale et solidaire et création d'emploi décent pour la jeunesse Tunisienne".

Data collected from ROM report of the intervention “JEUN’ESS” confirms as well that the implementing partner developed timely adjustments in order to enhance the design of the funds targeting youth: during the implementation of the “Re-fund”, the implementing partner was able to observe a slight conflict of interest between financial and training aspects within incubator organisations, because technical training is more lucrative for incubator organisations than financial support. As part of the Social Innovation Fund, it was decided, with EU support, that the Banque Tunisienne de Solidarité, a public funding agency, would be responsible for managing purchases and financial support for youth enterprises, and incubators were responsible for training and coaching aspects.

The interviews revealed that **delays related to administrative aspects of EU instruments affected the cost-effectiveness of interventions**. For instance, the delays in revising technical and financial reports created time gaps that can hinder the next-year financial programming for partner organisations like the UNFPA (e.g. payment of salaries). In addition, according to interviews with national partners and implementing partners, delays in reviewing contract amendments can force the programmes to pause and have led to costly time gaps (as human resources are projectised).

EU programming was responsive enough to the COVID-19 context in Tunisia. Calls for proposals targeting youth groups and organisations increasingly allowed to provide rapid and proportionate support to small actions. Based on a review of 2020 and 2021 internal EU reporting and interviews, the EUD has redirected several activities under ongoing programmes to meet the needs of the youth population during COVID-19, in particular, an emergency fund to support the cultural sector (within the programme *Appui au renforcement du secteur culturel tunisien/TFANEN* and an urgency solidarity fund for youth initiatives in the social and solidarity economy sector (within the *JEUN’ESS* programme).

2.3 Partnerships with EU MS and EU-added value (EQ3)

On partnerships with EU MS, there is evidence of increasing joint analysis and complementarity in overall thematic issues with EU MS and non-MS, but not on youth specifically.

Concerning EU-added value, interventions like JEUN’ESS or IRADA4YOUTH demonstrate good examples of mechanisms for transferring expertise to national and regional actors through their direct implication in programming. It is also worth mentioning that *Tunisia* was the first African country to join the European Research and Innovation Programme, which benefited university students and young researchers in *Tunisia*. Besides, EU flagship exchange programmes like *Erasmus+* and the *Mobility Scheme for Doctoral and Post-doctoral Students (MOBIDOC)* have evidenced EU added value for Tunisian youth in terms of the number of participants (with a strong increase in mobility project) and the outcomes achieved, demonstrating high impact on personal and professional development. South-South and intra-regional exchanges (with *Türkiye, Tunisia, Morocco*, and countries in sub-Saharan Africa, for instance) would also benefit the Tunisian youth by developing south-south economic mobility and fostering political and cultural integration.

2.3.1 Partnerships with EU MS and other actors (JC 3.1 and 3.2)

During the period covered by this evaluation, there is evidence of increasing joint analysis and complementarity in overall thematic issues with EU MS, but not on youth issues specifically. For instance, the SSF 2017-2020 formulation process has included consultations and exchanges with EU MS, technical and financial partners, civil society, and the population to improve the visibility of European aid. However, despite the setting up of a donor coordination platform in 2016, aligned with the axes of the 2016-2020 Tunisian development plan, there was no specific coordination on youth issues between the EU and other donors and non-MS in the period covered by this evaluation.

2.3.2 Expertise and knowledge on youth (JC 3.3)

The interventions reviewed demonstrate **the quality of transfer of knowledge mechanisms, either through the involvement of local public partners in programming or the development of direct partnerships with national partners** (grant agreements) like the partnership with the Commissariat Général de Développement Régional. Thus, interventions like JEUN’ESS or IRADA4YOUTH demonstrate good examples of mechanisms for the transfer of expertise through the implication of national, regional, and local actors. Transfer of knowledge and expertise to national authorities is generally impeded by the limited capacity of absorption and institutional capacity of national partners (ministries) and the fluctuating human resources in charge of projects and EU partnerships.

Some evidence from the internal EU reports and interviews demonstrates that **European policies can positively influence EU support to youth in Tunisia**. For instance, *Tunisia* was the first African country to join the European Research and Innovation Programme and Innovation *Horizon 2020* (H2020), a programme benefiting university students and young researchers in *Tunisia*.

2.3.3 Exchanges with youth actors (JC 3.4)

Evidence from the desk review demonstrates an **increase in exchanges between youth in flagship exchange programmes like Erasmus+, MOBIDOC, and EUROMED** (in 2017, 1,781 mobility projects

were approved for *Erasmus+*, a result above the target of 1,500 that year, and three times more than previous years). The interviews with stakeholders (including beneficiaries of *Erasmus+*) evidenced **the quality and relevance of these programmes**. For instance, in a group interview with programme participants, one beneficiary reported positive experiences from participating in volunteering work with refugees in Europe through the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (*Erasmus+*), which they viewed as culturally enriching. They noted that the experience had a demonstrated impact on building their professional career. Another beneficiary reported developing his language and cultural skills after his university exchange as part of *Erasmus+*.

The programmes would gain attractiveness by developing financial facilities for internal travel (to obtain a visa in the capital city for instance) and at the start of the exchange (currently, beneficiaries only receive the scholarship after two months of exchange), to avoid excluding vulnerable youth from participating in *Erasmus+*.

Based on stakeholder interviews, **exchanges between youth like *Erasmus+* and *MOBIDOC* are mainly between Europe and *Tunisia* and are less intra-regional**. Better structured programmes for intra-regional exchanges (between *Türkiye*, *Tunisia*, *Morocco*, and countries in sub-Saharan Africa, for instance) would benefit the Tunisian youth by developing south-south economic mobility, exchanges between youth-led political organisations and cultural exchanges enhancing tolerance, peace and security.

2.4 Effects on Youth Engagement (EQ 4)

EU interventions have demonstrated **efforts in understanding the political economy conditions for youth engagement and have engaged various stakeholders, including youth**. EU interventions have also invested in **developing youth leadership with an array of approaches, but the quality and impact of youth support activities vary**. Some programmes effectively involved youth, while others initially followed ineffective top-down approaches, emphasising **the importance of expertise in implementing agencies in youth engagement**.

EU interventions in this area have effectively engaged various youth categories, including the most marginalised. Specific results in the ***EU4YOUTH* programme on policy dialogue processes and youth CSOs strengthening are being implemented but have faced several delays**. Capacity-building activities for youth leadership have been successful in programmes like *EUROMED IV* and *Appui au renforcement du secteur culturel tunisien/TFANEN*.

The development of Tunisia's **national youth policy is primarily top-down. However, there have been efforts to involve ministries through technical committees, and the consultation of youth is planned (via workshops) after the formulation**. Peer-to-peer exchanges occurred in programmes like *EUROMED Jeunesse IV* but didn't lead to formal regional policy processes. **Platforms like the EU Coffee Talks are starting to engage Tunisian youth in EU external action and policies**.

2.4.1 Political and institutional space for youth and youth organisations (JC 4.1)

Based on a review of the documentation and interviews with stakeholders, there is evidence that EU interventions have invested in political economy approaches, analysing the conditions for youth participation and engagement in relevant policy processes. First, the documents of the EU SSF 2017-2020 and interviews demonstrate that the formulation process of the previous EU SSF has included consultations and exchanges with EU MS, technical and financial partners, civil society, and youth on political economy aspects of youth participation.

Furthermore, in 2022, on the occasion of the European Year of Youth, the EU ambassador in *Tunisia* organised a consultation with youth actors to discuss youth challenges that should be reflected in the next programming. At the intervention level, EU interventions have invested in analyses of the political economy conditions of youth participation at the design and implementation phases to find concrete solutions to blockages (e.g. the dissolution of municipalities directly impacted the activities of the project "Politique jeunesse et participation des jeunes dans les politiques publiques en Tunisie").

Interviews with stakeholders demonstrated that EU interventions supported youth groups to push forward their own agendas and develop skills as change makers. However, the quality and impact of these activities are reported to be variable. Based on interviews and a review of the documentation, the component of the intervention *Participation et inclusion des jeunes tunisien(ne)s à travers la création, l'accès à la culture et au sport au niveau local/ MAGHROUM'IN*, led by the British Council, organised workshops, forums and activities dedicated specifically to engage the youth, and this before the official launch of the intervention. For instance, in the course of 2022, 170 youth participated in the Youth Voices Forum, organised as part of this intervention, which allowed the youth from all the regions to convene, discuss and present their expectations and views in the area of culture and sport as a tool to face youth exclusion and vulnerability. Besides, 21 regional workshops gathered around 470 youth with CSOs for the same purpose. According to implementing partner interviews, this allowed the creation of an extended network of youth in the country's seven regions. However, the interviews with

implementing partners reported that the intervention *Politique jeunesse et participation des jeunes dans les politiques publiques en Tunisie* followed an ineffective top-down approach at the beginning of the programme before changing its trajectory in January 2023 to focus on participatory approaches.

Various programmes supported by the EU have invested in participatory governance and the inclusion of youth CSOs. The interventions Programme *EUROMED Jeunesse IV, Appui au renforcement du secteur culturel tunisien/TFANEN, Pour une réponse intégrée aux violences fondées sur le genre* and more recently, *Politique jeunesse et participation des jeunes dans les politiques publiques en Tunisie* and *Participation et inclusion des jeunes tunisien(ne)s à travers la création, l'accès à la culture et au sport au niveau local/MAGHROUM'IN* have specific components on the promotion of youth leadership at the municipal and national level, as well as for the development of youth-led CSOs. For instance, according to monitoring reports, the intervention *Appui au renforcement du secteur culturel tunisien/TFANEN* has organised training courses in project proposal development and make available a pool of 14 mentors to provide technical support to approximately 282 youth-led organisations in the cultural sector, convened a series of two “Labs” per region in order consolidate the skills and foster collaboration between youth groups, before launching a call for proposals. According to the reports, this approach was successful and allowed the development of several cultural and artistic projects led by the youth in various regions of the country.

2.4.2 Dialogue and cross-sectoral collaboration (JC 4.2)

The EU in Tunisia has successfully engaged various categories of youth in its intervention, ensuring the inclusion of the most discriminated youth. In the most recent interventions focussing on youth engagement (*Politique jeunesse et participation des jeunes dans les politiques publiques en Tunisie* and *Participation et inclusion des jeunes tunisien(ne)s à travers la création, l'accès à la culture et au sport au niveau local/MAGHROUM'IN*), poor and vulnerable governorates were intentionally targeted, based on a regional multidimensional development indicator. This indicator measures the availability of infrastructures, access to health services, poverty rates, school-related indicators, and labour market indicators to assess the development level in each *Tunisia* governorate. Interviews in the framework of the intervention *Pour une réponse intégrée aux violences fondées sur le genre* indicate specific attention towards young vulnerable women and LGBTIQ minorities and their inclusion in the events and activities of the program. For the intervention *Promotion de l'économie sociale et solidaire et création d'emploi décent pour la jeunesse Tunisienne/EU4YOUTH* launched in 2019, the ROM review also confirms the inclusion of discriminated youth groups in the program, particularly rural young women.

Specific results in the EU4YOUTH programme on policy dialogue processes and youth CSOs strengthening are being implemented but have faced several delays. The *EU4YOUTH* programme formulates a specific result on the participation of youth in policy dialogue processes and the co-production of policies with youth and authorities. Results 3.1 and 3.2 of this programme provide a framework for youth participation in local and national public policy-making through a series of innovative approaches (development of local development plans at the municipality level, formulating specific youth actions with youth organisations, and financing of a series of action within each plan for instance). However, these components were delayed by the dissolution of the municipalities and the government instability during 2022-2023. To continue the work despite the municipal council dissolution, the implementing partners found innovative ways to pursue implementation, working with members of the civil society or civil servants at the local level. For instance, the partner for the intervention *Politique jeunesse et participation des jeunes dans les politiques publiques en Tunisie*, the International Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities/VNG, facilitated, with the help of the governors (Ministry of Interior) the setting-up of steering committees at the municipal level.

Based on the documentation and the interviews, interventions like the regional *EUROMED IV* and *Appui au renforcement du secteur culturel tunisien/TFANEN* programme have demonstrated **good results in capacity-strengthening activities for youth leadership**. As presented in 2.4.1, this intervention developed an innovative leadership mentoring approach in the cultural sector. Based on the progress reports, more than 350 young persons were trained in a series of 12 “Exchange and Learning Labs” in all the country's regions, and 19 mentorship missions were organised to benefit youth cultural projects. The young artists that participated in this project have underlined that this programme was very beneficial for career development in their cultural sector.

The intervention *Politique jeunesse et participation des jeunes dans les politiques publiques en Tunisie* has also started in 2022 to organise **individual leadership training to form a group of young leaders, promote the intervention, and expand the network of youth CSOs involved in the project**. Among other capacity-strengthening activities, eight “Forums des territoires” were organised around geographical identities with the youth.

Concerning the capacity development of duty bearers, as presented in EQ 3, interventions like *JEUN'ESS* or *IRADA4YOUTH* demonstrate that the implication of local authorities and decentralised ministries directly in the implementation of the project, as part of a steering committee or support

committee and as members of jury in the selection of candidates (as in *JEUN'ESS* and *IRADA4YOUTH*) is essential to transfer new ways of working with youth to duty bearers at the local and regional level. The ROM report for the intervention *JEUN'ESS* and interviews with implementing partners indicate that local civil servants (a part of the ministry of agriculture and ministry of economy) have reported to have learned new methods to work with youth (call for proposals, selection of candidates, bottom-up approaches engaging the youth in different stages of the competitions, etc.).

2.4.3 Policy, legislative and institutional frameworks (JC 4.3)

EU support has fostered the establishment of policy, legislative, regulatory and institutional frameworks in the field of youth at the national level. Support also **instituted mechanisms to ensure structured engagement of the youth in regional dialogue processes** and EU external action.

The *Programme d'appui à la jeunesse en Tunisie/EU4YOUTH* (results 3.1 and 3.2) provides a framework for the development of a national youth policy and the promotion of youth participation in local and national public policy, as part of the intervention *Politique jeunesse et participation des jeunes dans les politiques publiques en Tunisie*. However, interviews with national partners state that the national youth policy is being developed with little engagement from the implementing partner and a top-down approach. According to the field mission, after the appointment of the Minister for Youth and Sport (after the government change in 2022), a decision was taken to set up technical committees and a strategic office at the ministry to lead the formulation of the National Youth Policy. Its first draft is being developed using the document on the youth vision developed in 2016 and a survey conducted with more than 10,000 young Tunisians. Youth consultation workshops will be organised once the draft is ready, as the interviews report.

EU interventions, like the Programme *EUROMED Jeunesse IV*, included activities with cross-border peer-to-peer exchanges but not in the framework of formalised regional policy processes. For instance, youth groups participated in the International Symposium on challenges related to youth employment, the Regional Meeting of *EUROMED Youth IV* Units in *Jordan*, and an inter-regional seminar with youth groups from diverse European countries like *Germany, Austria, and Poland*. In addition, youth civil society workers and institutions received various trainings on civic engagement, including training on the European Voluntary Service. However, these activities did not lead to further formalised regional policy processes. Besides, as presented in section 2.3.3 and based on interviews, **the *Erasmus+* initiative and particularly the volunteer exchange programmes have contributed to fostering a shared sense of community across borders**, especially by placing young Tunisians and Europeans in CSOs promoting civil rights for vulnerable groups.

The platform “EU coffee talks” **for including Tunisian youth in EU external action was initiated in 2022.** EU coffee talks will gather the EU Ambassador to *Tunisia* with youth groups annually for structured exchange sessions (in Tunis and regions). This first Coffee Talk aimed to provide a platform for open discussions around the EU-*Tunisia* partnership and existing joint initiatives on education, training, capacity building, mobility, social inclusion, and entrepreneurship support. Special attention was given to the challenges faced by the youth in *Tunisia* and the opportunities the EU offered them. As this is a quite recent initiative, it is too soon to assess what this platform can achieve more concretely regarding youth inclusion in EU external action.

2.5 Effects on Economic Integration (EQ5)

Youth economic integration is a top priority in EU strategies for Tunisia, emphasised in the EU-*Tunisia* 2018-2020 Strategic Priorities and the *EU4YOUTH* programme. Various contracts under *EU4YOUTH* have indicators related to youth economic integration. **EU programmes for youth economic integration in Tunisia have primarily targeted youth**, including young rural women in the informal sector and youth from the most vulnerable areas in the country. However, **entrepreneurship support for youth remains limited compared to the needs, and it faces sustainability challenges.** More comprehensive national-level responses are needed for broader youth economic integration.

Evidence shows that the **inclusion of vulnerable youth groups was guaranteed during project implementation, and the youth working in the informal sector have also been supported by the creation of formal structures.** However, there is no evidence of the EU fostering employment analyses at the national level and social dialogue on youth economic integration specifically. Nonetheless, it is reported that EU's support in *Tunisia* has contributed to **labour market reforms, including upgrading employment policies and modernising employment agencies.** Additionally, it has played a role in **education reform, supporting the development of preschool classes and curriculum improvements.**

2.5.1 Relevance of implementation approaches (JC 5.1)

According to the review of documentation and interviews, youth economic integration has been prioritised in EU strategies for Tunisia as a major cross-cutting policy concern. The EU-*Tunisia*

2018-2020 Strategic Priorities (Decision 1/2018 of the EU-*Tunisia* Association Council) prioritise youth employment, mobility, education, and participation as major cross-cutting policy concerns with the “Partnership for Youth” Agenda. More specifically, the 2018-2020 Strategic Priorities formulate specific measures in different sectors to promote youth employment: improvement of the business climate, development of SMEs, development of tourism sector strategy, and the development of the energy sector or transportation. These strategic orientations were translated into the *EU4YOUTH* programme, which makes economic integration a cross-sectoral concern in its interventions. Based on the documentation review and the interviews, indicators related to youth economic integration and employability have been developed for most contracts under *EU4YOUTH*.

2.5.2 Integration of vulnerable and marginalised youth (JC 5.2)

According to the reports available and the interviews conducted, **the EU has supported young people in the most vulnerable situations in its programmes, such as young rural women working in the informal sector and young men and women leaving prison.** The intervention “JEUN’ESS” is reported to be inclusive, insofar the choice of target regions focussed on the seven governorates with the lowest Regional Development Index. In addition, 297 jobs for women and 90 for men have been consolidated at the moment of the ROM review, demonstrating a very good ratio of men to women (with women being the most vulnerable within these rural regions). Furthermore, the EU-supported intervention *Prévenir la radicalisation par l’insertion/Ebni* implemented by the CSO Fondation Agir contre l’Exclusion/FACE Tunisie has achieved the reinsertion of young Tunisians leaving prison (for small offences) in five governorates in Tunisia, placing them in professional training and internships.

EU supported the transition of young people from informal sector by providing alternative formal structures, but this support remained limited. Most of grantees in the “Social Innovation Fund” in the initiative *JEUN’ESS* and *Programme de soutien au développement économique durable local pour l’emploi des jeunes/IRADA4YOUTH* were actively working in the informal sector (agriculture, services). These interventions allowed substantial numbers of young people to develop entrepreneurship projects based on local potentialities with the help of local stakeholder platforms. However, stakeholders agreed that EU initiatives aimed at economic integration can only target a limited number of young people in comparison to the immense needs of the young population in *Tunisia*. This finding indicates that more structured responses at the national level with the relevant ministries are needed. Based on the interviews, the sustainability of youth entrepreneurship projects and local platforms dedicated to supporting them is still questioned. Indeed, the grants provided remain financially limited, while access to finance to invest in their project remains risky for these categories of youth.

2.5.3 Ownership through improved data and dialogue (JC 5.3)

Based on interviews, group discussions to confirm targeted value chains **have been conducted at the project level under the intervention *Programme de soutien au développement économique durable local pour l’emploi des jeunes/IRADA4YOUTH*** to support the development of entrepreneurship projects with young people. However, this analysis on employment supported by the EU remained at project level, and no evidence could be collected on EU supported studies and data collection on employment (led by the authorities and the government).

The development of the **national youth policy includes a panel on economic integration, but the evidence does not explicitly indicate that the EU contributed to fostering social dialogue** with public and private stakeholders on issues of economic integration.

2.5.4 Impact and sustainability of youth economic integration (JC 5.4)

According to the review of the documentation and the interviews, the EU has supported **labour market reforms through the Multi-Donor Trust Fund for the *Tunisia* Governance, Financial Sector and Local Governments** (with *EU4YOUTH* funding, managed by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development), which provides Technical assistance for the reform of employment policies and upgrading and modernisation of the National Employment Agency and Self Employment. However, the mission could not assess whether the Technical assistance was effective, as this intervention was not part of the study sample.

Based on interviews and a review of the documentation, evidence shows that **EU support has contributed to an increased number of pre-school classes, revision of curricula standards, and training of teachers and inspectors.** The *Programme d’appui à l’éducation, la mobilité, la recherche et l’innovation en Tunisie/EMORI Erasmus+* Special Measure reviewed also provides a platform for the reform of the higher education system, through “structural projects” aiming at impacting reforms in *Tunisia*.

Based on interviews and the documentation, **youth mobility is being supported (volunteer exchanges, master student exchanges and PhD students exchanges) by programmes like**

Erasmus+ and MOBIDOC, which result in access to work opportunities, training, and abroad networking.

2.6 Effects on Social Cohesion and Inclusion (EQ6)

EU support in Tunisia has strengthened the education sector's institutional framework, promoting school retention through various initiatives. Reforms include the development of preschool programmes, curriculum revisions, teacher training, and vocational training. Additionally, non-formal education frameworks, such as science and creativity workshops, have been developed to benefit secondary school students.

EU support in Tunisia has largely empowered youth through cultural activities. **Initiatives like *Appui au renforcement du secteur culturel tunisien/TFANEN* facilitated cultural collaborations, youth cultural projects, workshops, and cultural leadership development.** The Erasmus+ special measure promoted intercultural dialogue and mobility for young people in the Mediterranean region. **EU's support in culture contributed to economic integration, youth participation, and social cohesion** by establishing funds, supporting cultural activities, and promoting the creation of youth-led CSOs.

Moreover, **EU support in Tunisia has enhanced the institutional framework for healthcare and social inclusion but lacks specific youth health outcomes.** Initiatives like "Elargir la Couverture Sanitaire Universelle" indirectly benefit youth mental, sexual, and reproductive health by reducing access barriers and developing family medicine (JC 6.3). Through projects like "Pour une réponse intégrée aux violences fondées sur le genre", EU support addresses **gender stereotypes and contributes to empowering youth to fight gender-based violence through educational and cultural activities.**

2.6.1 School retention and non-formal education (JC 6.1)

The documentation and interviews show evidence of EU support for strengthening the institutional framework in the education sector. Progress reports available for the budget support intervention under the *Programme d'appui à l'éducation, la mobilité, la recherche et l'innovation en Tunisie/EMORI* programme demonstrated EU-supported institutional reforms promoting school retention (e.g. development of a pre-school year, revision of primary and secondary school curricula, training of teachers and administrators, development of technical and vocational training). Interviews mention that the EU supported, through its social inclusion program, the retention of children in schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the investment in ad-hoc sanitation systems in around 300 schools (in the form of water tanks made available in the schools, to improve student hygiene during the pandemic). On another level, access of Tunisian 2020 to the programme *Horizon* (European programme for research and innovation) fostered the development of the higher education and research sector in Tunisia. Interviews with EUD managers indicate that this programme has allowed Tunisian universities to access grants and projects under the *Horizon* umbrella, facilitating research funding and researchers' mobility and fostering capacity development in research proposals.

According to interviews, several initiatives aimed at the development of institutional frameworks for non-formal education. A good example is the **initiative *Science With And For Youth/ SWAFY*, part of the EU4YOUTH program, aiming at developing science and creativity workshops and competitions within Tunisian schools** at the secondary level. This project is aimed at the most vulnerable governorates of the country.

According to progress reports available, the **EU has supported the retention of the most vulnerable girls and boys at school through the budget support intervention.** In order to include the most vulnerable girls and boys, the reform focussed on the development of the pre-primary school system (construction of 140 buildings for pre-school in 2020, development and validation of a pedagogical curriculum for pre-primary and 80% of school inspectors have been trained on the pre-school reform) and the governance of the sector (60 planning agents have been trained for the development of regional education plans). Additionally, there is a target for the setting up of mechanisms of prevention for children in difficulty within schools (750 schools to set up this mechanism). However, the report does not mention the results achieved on this indicator.

2.6.2 Youth as producer of culture (JC 6.2)

The EU has supported cultural activities adopting the youth lens and contributing to empowering the youth in the course of the period covered by the evaluation. The intervention *Appui au renforcement du secteur culturel tunisien/TFANEN* has contributed to many results in the youth cultural sector: establishment of new cultural collaborations at local, national, and international levels; contribution to the setting-up of youth cultural projects, financed by partners, which attracted a public of 67,989 people during 226 cultural and artistic demonstrations; organisation of 1,335 cultural workshops with more than 8,000 participants (these workshops covered several fields, including theatre, cinema, music, arts plastics, debates, puppets, cultural leadership and management, singing, caricatures). According to the stakeholders met during the field mission, the special measure Erasmus+ has also supported intercultural dialogue by promoting the mobility of young people and intercultural exchanges between EU and countries from the Mediterranean region.

Based on interviews and reports available for the sample of interventions, **EU support for culture has contributed well to cross-cutting goals like youth economic integration, youth participation, and social cohesion.** The intervention *Appui au renforcement du secteur culturel tunisien* has contributed to economic integration through culture by setting up three funds for youth initiatives in the cultural sector (local culture fund, creation fund, and heritage fund). Furthermore, interviews highlighted the promotion of cultural activities (in cinema, music, cultural leadership, etc.) in interventions like *Appui au renforcement du secteur culturel tunisien*, *Politique jeunesse et participation des jeunes dans les politiques publiques en Tunisie* and *Participation et inclusion des jeunes tunisien(ne)s à travers la création, l'accès à la culture et au sport au niveau local/MAGHROUM'IN*. These interventions have contributed to youth engagement in public life by helping them start their own CSOs and developing networks with public actors at the local level. Besides, it is reported in the interviews that the EU intervention *Pour une réponse intégrée aux violences fondées sur le genre* implemented by the UNFPA (2021) has promoted cultural activities (forum theatre, cinema festival) to campaign against gender-based violence.

2.6.3 Access to mental health sexual, reproductive rights and services (JC 6.3)

Based on interviews and documentation available in the framework of budget support interventions and projects on health and social inclusion, **the EU in Tunisia has supported the institutional framework (development of procedures, training of social and health care workers and CSOs, etc.) for a more effective healthcare and social inclusion as a whole, but with no specific results for youth health.** For instance, the intervention “Elargir la couverture sanitaire universelle dans le cadre de l'appui à l'inclusion sociale en Tunisie” (2021-2025) helped reduce barriers to access to services for people in situations of vulnerability and in developing family medicine, which indirectly has an impact on youth mental, sexual and reproductive health.

2.6.4 Space of dialogue on discrimination, gender and social inclusion (JC 6.4)

EU support has addressed social norms and gender stereotypes with youth through the intervention *Pour une réponse intégrée aux violences fondées sur le genre* (2021). This project developed **a structured campaign on violence against women, working with CSOs, universities, and youth actors to raise the awareness of young people** on this subject. Good examples of collaboration with youth and institutions in this project are the development of a gender master's degree in two days within a university as part of the campaign and awareness-raising workshops within secondary schools. Based on interviews, the awareness-raising campaign started in 2021 and integrated new components especially relevant to youth, like cyber gender violence. The implementing agency (UNFPA) also contributed to the development of a national strategy on gender-based violence with the help of another financial partner (not the EU).

The EU has helped empower young men and women through educational and cultural activities to take action in the spheres of gender-based violence. Based on interviews, the awareness-raising campaign part of the project *Pour une réponse intégrée aux violences fondées sur le genre* developed specific activities for young people using arts. For instance, the project promoted the production of short movies on gender-based violence in a cinema school to be presented at a women's rights cinema festival in Tunis. Furthermore, the project developed specific awareness-raising tools for young people, using videos and social networks.

2.7 Effects on Peace and Security (EQ7)

The EU has **initiated platforms for Tunisian youth inclusion in external policies, including peace and security dialogues.** For example, **EU coffee talks** with youth groups addressing various challenges, including migration and security, and **Erasmus+ volunteer exchange programmes have enabled Tunisian youth to engage in global peace and security dialogues.**

In addition, **EU interventions have supported countering violent extremism through social inclusion programmes**, such as “Ebni – Prévenir la radicalisation par l'insertion”. **The EU in Tunisia has incorporated a human rights-based approach in its sectoral support programmes**, ensuring the inclusion of vulnerable populations in various interventions. Efforts to promote dialogue between youth CSOs and public stakeholders are ongoing, although they have faced delays.

2.7.1 Adoption of youth-lens in peace and security strategies (JC 7.1)

As presented in section 2.4.3, **some platforms for the inclusion of Tunisian youth in EU external action and policies have been initiated in various areas like peace and security.** For instance, based on the interviews, the EU coffee talks gathered the EU Ambassador to *Tunisia* with youth groups in four structured exchange sessions (two in Tunis and two in regions), where youth challenges were discussed, among them issues related to migration, peace, and security. Concerning indicators 7.1.1

and 7.1.3, the sample selected (and thematic focus) for the present case study did not cover these indicators.

2.7.2 Empowering youth as changemakers (JC 7.2)

Based on interviews, **Erasmus+ volunteer exchange programmes provided interesting opportunities for young people from Tunisia to raise their awareness of peace and security matters and contribute to global dialogue** on these topics. More specifically, volunteer programmes to work with refugees hosted by European CSOs and participation in a seminar on peace and against xenophobia have been reported to be financed by Erasmus+. These programmes allowed young Tunisians to be part of global youth networks and global CSO networks that deal with issues of migration, peace, and xenophobia.

Based on interviews, the **EU4YOUTH programme supports the development of a national youth policy that will cover themes about peace and security** through the setting up of technical committees in the relevant ministries and the organisation of workshops with young people.

The **EU has positively contributed to countering violent extremism in fragile areas of Tunisia through social inclusion interventions**. Based on interviews with stakeholders, the intervention *Prévenir la radicalisation par l'insertion/Ebni* (2018-2022) has supported young people leaving prisons (at risk of radicalisation) in five governorates in Tunisia. The intervention provided “life and values” sessions to the young people targeted and helped place them in professional training and internships. The second phase of this intervention, “Nos racines” (2022) will pursue this positive work.

2.7.3 Addressing root causes of marginalisation, disengagement, and migratory drive (JC 7.3)

A human rights-based approach has been guaranteed in sectoral support programmes financed by the EU in Tunisia. For instance, based on interviews, the intervention *Elargir la couverture sanitaire universelle dans le cadre de l'appui à l'inclusion sociale en Tunisie* (2021-2025) has ensured the inclusion of vulnerable populations (drug addicts, single-parent households, unemployed young people, etc.) at the different steps of implementation. Another good example is the intervention *JEUN'ESS* which supports young people for economic integration. The ROM report of the project confirms that the intervention ensured the inclusion of rights holders with equity by implementing transparent and fair mechanisms for the selection of beneficiaries.

The interventions under *Politique jeunesse et participation des jeunes dans les politiques publiques en Tunisie/EU4YOUTH* aim at **developing innovative forms of dialogue between youth CSOs and public stakeholders at local and national levels, such as to rebuild trust of youth in public policy**. However, this component of the intervention faced several delays due to the dissolution of municipalities (and the absence of public counterparts at the local level).

Last but not least, the EU supported the *Programme d'Appui à la Gouvernance Economique/PAGE* launched in 2020 (ENI/2019/041-841) invests in several areas of governance through budget support interventions and complementary interventions (various supports to the assembly of people's representatives, the Court of Auditors, the civil society and the media), with a total budget of EUR 303 million. The second objective of the *Programme d'Appui à la Gouvernance Economique/PAGE* focusses on monitoring public policies through an inclusive debate around key development issues concerning the youth (education, economic opportunities, etc.).

3 Conclusions

During the period 2014-2021, **EU strategies were relevant to the youth context in Tunisia, which was marked by political instability and adverse economic conditions**. The EU-*Tunisia* “Partnership on Youth” launched in 2016 has led to the *Programme d'appui à la jeunesse Tunisienne/EU4YOUTH* (2018) with a budget of 60 M EUR. However, implementation delays and programmatic coherence, partly due to political and institutional factors, impacted EU's responsiveness (with some interventions starting implementation in 2021-2022). Indirect management was the main delivery method for EU support to youth in Tunisia, alongside budget support. **Budget support was designed carefully, but the political and institutional instability in the country did not facilitate the achievement of reforms**. Moreover, delegation agreements had clear advantages: smaller burden on human resources for the EUD and leveraging youth expertise of partner agencies like the British Council. Nonetheless, a careful selection of the implementing partner is critical, and evidence showed that mistakes in this process can affect the cost-effectiveness and timeliness of this channel. **There is evidence of increasing joint analysis and complementarity between EU and non-EU MS and agencies in overall thematic issues in Tunisia, but not on youth specifically**. EU flagship exchange programmes like Erasmus+ and MOBIDOC have evidenced EU added-value for Tunisian youth, in quantity (increase in mobility project) and quality (high impact on personal and professional development), and

interventions like *JEUN'ESS* demonstrate good examples of mechanisms for the transfer of expertise to national and regional actors, through their direct implication in programming.

EU interventions have invested in youth leadership with an array of approaches, but the quality and impact of youth support activities vary. Some programmes effectively involved youth (*Appui au renforcement du secteur culturel tunisien/TFANEN*), while others initially followed top-down approaches, emphasising the importance of expertise of implementing agencies (*Politique jeunesse et participation des jeunes dans les politiques publiques en Tunisie*). Specific results on policy dialogue processes and youth CSOs strengthening look promising in the *EU4YOUTH* programme, but faced several delays and administrative challenges.

Youth economic integration is a top priority in EU strategies for *Tunisia* and EU programmes have well targeted youth (*JEUN'ESS*, *IRADA Youth*), including young rural women in the informal sector and youth from the most vulnerable areas in the country. However, **entrepreneurship and economic support for the youth remains limited** compared with the immense challenges, which would need more structural responses to achieve impact.

EU support in *Tunisia* has contributed to strengthening the education sector, promoting school retention through budget support (*Programme d'appui à l'éducation, la mobilité, la recherche et l'innovation en Tunisie/EMORI*), and has **empowered the youth through cultural activities** (*Appui au renforcement du secteur culturel tunisien/TFANEN*), **addressing gender stereotypes**. EU support in *Tunisia* has as well enhanced the institutional framework for healthcare, but lacks specific youth health outcomes.

Finally, regarding peace and security, **EU interventions** like *Prévenir la radicalisation par l'insertion/Ebni* **have positively contributed in countering violent extremism** through social inclusion programmes, and are being scaled-up (nos racines).

4 Annex

4.1 List of persons consulted

<i>Name</i>	<i>Organisation</i>	<i>Position</i>
EUD		
HACK, Olivier	EUD (Tunisia)	Cooperation Attaché – EU Youth focal point – JEUN'ESS – Promotion de l'économie sociale et solidaire et création d'emploi décent pour la jeunesse Tunisienne
KHEMIRI, Rajeh	EUD (Tunisia)	Project Manager – EMORI – Mesure spéciale Erasmus+ Tunisie pour la mobilité
MARAGUTI, Francesca	EUD (Tunisia)	Gender Focal Point
NICOLAY, Anne	EUD (Tunisia)	Project Manager – Appui à l'inclusion sociale en Tunisie
ROJANSKI, Vladimir	EUD (Tunisia)	Project Manager – TFANEN – Appui au renforcement du secteur culturel tunisien
Youth Organisations, CSOs		
BARAKIZOU, Rafik	Fondation Agir Contre l'Exclusion (FACE Tunisie)	Executive Director – Ebni – Prévenir la radicalisation par l'insertion
BEN NASR, Zahra	Fondation Agir Contre l'Exclusion (FACE Tunisie)	President – Ebni – Prévenir la radicalisation par l'insertion
Anonymous	Erasmus+ Volunteer Program	Volunteer – EMORI – Mesure spéciale Erasmus+ pour la mobilité
Anonymous	Erasmus+ University Exchange Program	Student – EMORI – Mesure spéciale Erasmus+ pour la mobilité
Implementing Partners		
BEN JEBARA, Arij	International Labor Organisation (ILO)	Monitoring and Evaluation Officer – PROMESS – Promotion des Organisations et des Mécanismes de l'Economie Sociale et Solidaire
MHADHBI, Fakhreddine	International Labor Organisation (ILO)	Project Coordinator – PROMESS – Promotion des Organisations et des Mécanismes de l'Economie Sociale et Solidaire
BEN ABDALLAH, Sénim	International Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG)	Local Axis Chief – FAILA – Politique jeunesse et participation des jeunes dans les politiques publiques en Tunisie
RHAIEM, Touhami	International Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG)	Project Chief – FAILA – Politique jeunesse et participation des jeunes dans les politiques publiques en Tunisie
GRACIA BADIOLA, Francisco	Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation/AECID	Project Officer – MAGHROUM'IN – Participation et inclusion des jeunes tunisien(ne)s à travers la création, l'accès à la culture et au sport au niveau local
KALLORA-STIMPSON, Louise	The British Council	Deputy Head EU Office – MAGHROUM'IN – Participation et inclusion des jeunes tunisien(ne)s à travers la création, l'accès à la culture et au sport au niveau local and TFANEN – Appui au renforcement du secteur culturel tunisien
LOUHICHI, Ghada	The British Council	Senior Programme Manager – MAGHROUM'IN – Participation et inclusion des jeunes tunisien(ne)s à travers la création, l'accès à la culture et au sport au niveau local and TFANEN – Appui au renforcement du secteur culturel tunisien
GUEDDANA, Hela	United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)	Gender Project Manager – Pour une réponse intégrée aux violences fondées sur le genre
Government		
ABDELMOULA, Mahmoud	Commissariat Général au Développement Régional (CGDR)	Project Coordinator – IRADA4YOUTH – Programme de soutien au développement économique durable local pour l'emploi des jeunes
ABDESSALEM, Mohamed	Commissariat Général au Développement	Project Coordinator – IRADA4YOUTH – Programme de soutien au développement économique durable local pour

	Régional (CGDR)	l'emploi des jeunes
BOUSLIMI, Sihem	Commissariat Général au Développement Régional (CGDR)	Project Officer – IRADA4YOUTH – Programme de soutien au développement économique durable local pour l'emploi des jeunes
FATHOUMI, Marroubia	Commissariat Général au Développement Régional (CGDR)	Director General – IRADA4YOUTH – Programme de soutien au développement économique durable local pour l'emploi des jeunes
SOUNDES, Khemiri	Commissariat Général au Développement Régional (CGDR)	Project Officer – IRADA4YOUTH – Programme de soutien au développement économique durable local pour l'emploi des jeunes
BAKLOUTI, Nesrine	Erasmus+ Office in Tunisia	National Coordinator – EMORI – Mesure spéciale Erasmus+ pour la mobilité
BEN FKIRA, Samah	Ministry of Investment and International Cooperation (MDCI)	Director – Programme EUROMED Jeunesse IV
SANDID, Lamia	Ministry of Investment and International Cooperation (MDCI)	Director – EU Cooperation – Programme EUROMED Jeunesse IV
EL MEDDEB, Farouk	Ministry of Youth and Sports	International Cooperation Director – Programme EUROMED Jeunesse IV
EL OUNI, Foued	Observatoire National de la Jeunesse	Director – Programme EUROMED Jeunesse IV
DORAA, Mohamed	Unité de Gestion Par Objectifs Horizon Europe	Programme Manager – IRADA4YOUTH – Programme de soutien au développement économique durable local pour l'emploi des jeunes

4.2 List of documents

EU Strategy Programming

- EU (2013): Relation Tunisie-Union Européenne : un partenariat privilégié. Plan d'action, 2013-2017.
- EU (2014): Cadre Unique d'Appui pour l'appui de l'UE à la Tunisie, 2014-2015.
- EU (2015): Document de travail conjoint des services. Mise en œuvre de la politique européenne de voisinage en Tunisie. Progrès réalisés en 2014 et actions à mettre en œuvre.
- EU (2016): Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council. Strengthening EU support for Tunisia, 2016.
- EU (2017): Lettre de Décaissement. Programme d'appui à l'éducation, la mobilité, la recherche et l'innovation (EMORI)/ Première tranche fixe de la Convention de financement N°ENI/2016/039-506.
- EU (2017): Cadre unique d'appui UE-Tunisie 2017-2020.
- EU (2017): Lettre de Décaissement. Annexe 1. Evaluation de l'éligibilité au titre de la politique publique.
- EU (2017): The Role of the Sub-National Authorities from the Mediterranean Region in Addressing Radicalisation and Violent Extremism of Young People.
- EU-Tunisia Association Council (2018): Decision No 1/2018 of the EU-Tunisia Association Council of 9 November 2018 adopting the EU-Tunisia strategic priorities for the period 2018-2020.
- EU (2019): Note de dossier. Préparation d'un cadre de concertation pour le programme *EU4YOUTH*.
- EC (2023): Mémoire d'entente sur un partenariat stratégique et global entre l'Union Européenne et la République Tunisienne.

EU Reporting

- EUD Tunisia (2014): Internal Reporting.
- EUD Tunisia (2015): Internal Reporting.
- EUD Tunisia (2016): Internal Reporting.
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- EUD Tunisia (2018): Internal Reporting.

- EUD Tunisia (2019): Internal Reporting.
- EUD Tunisia (2020): Internal Reporting.
- EUD Tunisia (2021): Internal Reporting.
- EU (2015) : Coopération de l'Union européenne en Tunisie : Rapport 2015.
- EU (2019): Note de dossier 3ème rapport intérimaire « Appui au renforcement du secteur culturel tunisien » ENI/2015/038-415.
- EU (2019): Rapport sur l'état des relations UE – Tunisie dans le cadre de la Politique européenne de voisinage révisée 2018-2019.

Project documentation

The team reviewed the available project documentation (action fiches, grant contracts, implementation, and monitoring reports, evaluations, etc.) of the projects presented in the tables in section 1.2.

Other evaluations and studies

- World Bank Group (2014): Breaking the barrier to youth inclusion.
- République Tunisienne – Ministère de la Jeunesse et du Sport (2016) : Unité EUROMED Jeunesse IV. Devis programme de clôture.
- Search for common ground (2017): Youth Consultations on Peace and Security.
- République Tunisienne – Institut National de la Statistique (2018): Enquête par grappes à indicateurs multiples (MICS).
- British Council (2019): Tfanen – Tunisie Creative / Appui au renforcement du secteur culturel tunisien. Rapport d'avancement 2019.
- Maghreb Economic Forum (2019): Tackling Youth Radicalisation through Inclusion in Post-Revolutionary Tunisia The Research Literature Review.
- European Training Foundation (2020): Country Fiche 2020 Tunisia.
- European Training Foundation (2021): Skills and migration Country Fiche Tunisia.
- GIZ Tunisie (2021): La participation des jeunes à la vie publique locale.
- République Tunisienne – Ministère de l'Education (2021): Rapport 2020 sur le progrès de la mise en œuvre de la réforme sectorielle par le ministère de l'Education : Une Revue Sectorielle. Préparé dans le cadre du programme d'appui à l'éducation, la mobilité, la recherche et l'innovation en Tunisie/EMORI.
- Arab Barometer (2022): Tunisia Country Report.
- Zargouni L. for Arab Reform Initiative (2022): Youth participation in Tunisia's elections: Some possible solutions.