

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Study Group Regional Stability in South East Europe (RSSEE SG)

“The Key Role of the Young Generation for the Consolidation of South East Europe”

42nd RSSEE SG Workshop
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Reichenau/Rax, Austria



PFP Consortium of Defense
Academies and Security
Studies Institutes



Executive Summary of Recommendations

With Regard to Strategic Goals

- **EU:** The WB-6 should be offered a staged accession process with the full access to the single EU market and EU transfers before full membership.
- **EU:** Against the backdrop of the current geopolitical crisis the strategic cooperation with the WB should be intensified, in particular with regard to the “Energy Community”.

With a View to Supporting the Young Generation in the WB

- **WB governments:** To keep human capital in the region “policies for a good life” are necessary, including trustworthy and functional institutions, investments in housing, education, health care and public transport.
- **WB governments/EU MS:** To reduce the gap between “brain drain” and “brain gain” a flexible common labour market and the recognition of qualifications are required.
- **WB governments/EU:** Establish “Diaspora Investment Funds”, “Research and Development Centres” and “Translation Infrastructure” to increase opportunities for high-skilled youth jobs in the WB.
- **EU:** Oppose stabilitocracies in the WB, as they hinder emancipated democratic engagement.
- **EU/WB governments:** Facilitate the exchange of students within the region and between the EU and the WB.
- **WB governments:** Include youth issues into policy making through a Regulatory Impact Analysis.

Situation Analysis

Recent developments in South East Europe (SEE), in particular in its Western Balkan (WB) region, have been characterized by regression rather than progress in improving socioeconomic conditions and promoting democratization as well as the rule of law. Regional relations continue to be strained by unresolved legacies from the wars of the 1990s and current conflicts over political status issues. The latter are manifested above all in the separatist aspirations of the Bosnia and Herzegovina entity Republika Srpska. Furthermore, conflict potential is indicated by the lack of progress in the normalization dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina and by the dissatisfaction of the Croatian national party in Bosnia and Herzegovina regarding the political status of its ethnic group, which has also led to a deterioration in relations between Zagreb and Sarajevo.

Additionally, the new European and global security situation resulting from the intensification of Russia’s war against Ukraine since February 2022 could decisively influence the consolidation of SEE and, inevitably, the general security situation in the region. Geopolitical conflicts between the West and Russia are also becoming more tangible in the WB. As a result, it is increasingly difficult for regional politicians to sit on several chairs in terms of foreign and security policy, which is particularly true for Serbia.

It seems obvious that established politicians and other decision makers, whose careers date back at least in part to the wartime or immediate post-war period, are unable or unwilling to positively address the political, social and economic challenges in terms of regional consolidation. The strengthening of kleptocratic, clientelistic and authoritarian power structures is evident.

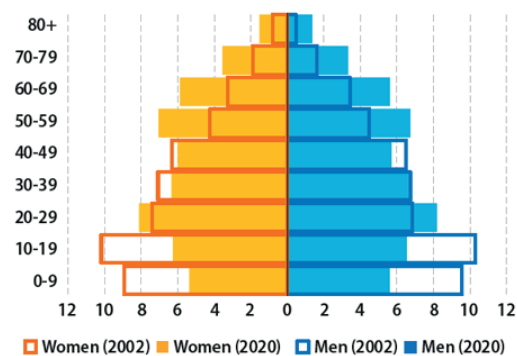


Against this backdrop, hopes for positive social and political change rest on the young generation in the WB. According to UN data from 2020, the age group of 15-34 years constitutes about 26 % of the approx. 17.5 million inhabitants of the WB. This indicates a younger population than in the EU-27 (22.9 % on average). However, the greatest demographic changes in the WB are also taking place in this age group.

In response to the non-improving living conditions, hundreds of thousands of mostly well-qualified and young citizens have left the WB countries in the past ten years, mainly for the West. Some countries in the WB are more affected by population loss, whereas the population in other WB states stagnates in terms of numbers. There, lower emigration movements can be observed at present. However, the general regional trend shows shrinking populations.

Albania

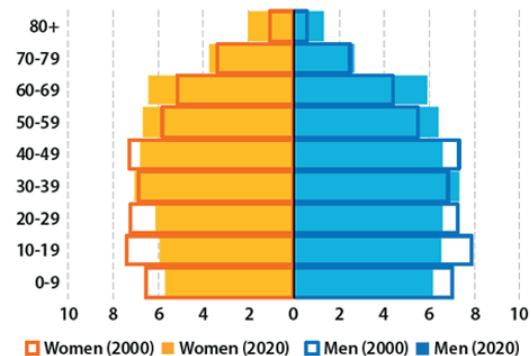
Population by age group, 2002 and 2020
(% of total population, 1 January)



Source: European Union, "Demographic developments in the Western Balkans and Turkey - factsheets" (2021 ed.).

Montenegro

Population by age group, 2000 and 2020
(% of total population, 1 January)

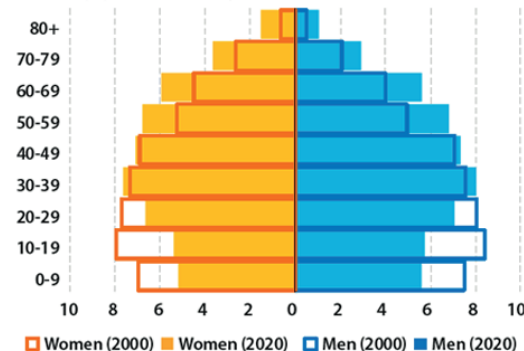


Source: European Union, "Demographic developments in the Western Balkans and Turkey - factsheets" (2021 ed.).

In order to slow down youth emigration and promote return migration it is necessary to improve the general living conditions. However, this will be difficult in the context of the expected recession in Europe as a result of the Russian attacks on Ukraine, as it will particularly affect the economically weaker, unstable countries like in the WB.

North Macedonia

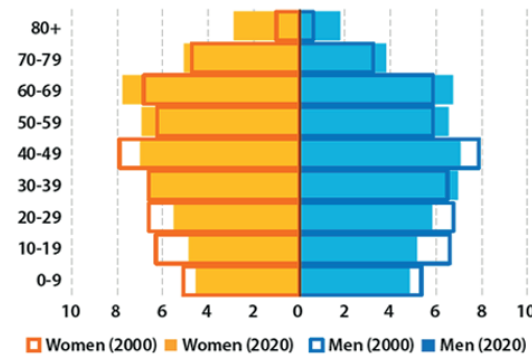
Population by age group, 2000 and 2020
(% of total population, 1 January)



Source: European Union, "Demographic developments in the Western Balkans and Turkey - factsheets" (2021 ed.).

Serbia

Population by age group, 2000 and 2020
(% of total population, 1 January)



Source: European Union, "Demographic developments in the Western Balkans and Turkey - factsheets" (2021 ed.).

The primary requirements to motivate the WB-6 youth to stay in (or return to) their home countries are European standard educational levels and qualified jobs with a sufficient income. The reduction of travel and work barriers as well as a close exchange in the field of education are also important elements in order to reduce negative prejudices and to establish cooperation. In Serbia, more than half of the under 18-years old have never crossed the state borders, and the situation in the other WB countries is not much different. Due to the inability to travel, young people are becoming increasingly isolated and adopt beliefs and attitudes in line with the views of the political extremes with growing nationalism.

On the other hand, experience in recent years has shown that close cross-border cooperation between young citizens in the WB is possible, especially on environmental and human rights issues as well as in connection with the culture of remembrance of the victims of the Yugoslav disintegration wars.

Young citizens are represented in the political structures, but partly they follow patronage interests of established politicians. There is a need for stronger political support in the WB for the genuine concerns of young people (housing shortage, etc.). The implementation of UN's "Youth, Peace and Security Agenda" from the year 2015 in the WB countries would be an important step towards the implementation of such a proactive youth policy.

Policy Recommendations

With Reference to the EU Integration Process

- **EU:** The WB-6 should be offered a staged accession process taking into account their progress. This would mean, above all, access to all economic programs of the EU, even before official and full political accession. In particular, a full access to the single EU market and more importantly to EU transfers would be included here.
- **EU:** Given the negligible size of the WB in terms of GDP, EU transfers as a share of the local economic activity in the order of 3-4 % could make a notable difference and help to stabilize the region that is facing multiple and permanent crises, while at the same time imposing no particular financial burden on the EU. This is in the interest of both the WB as well as the EU, given both geostrategic and geo-economic considerations.
- **EU:** Against the background of the new geopolitical crisis caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine the EU should consider intensifying integration of the WB in as many areas of EU-wide strategic cooperation for dealing with the expected economic and social setbacks as possible. One important area is energy security, which is on the agenda of the “Energy Community” since 2006 but has become a “Sleeping Beauty”.
- **EU:** Early integration measures in administrative terms should be implemented in order to include the WB-6 in various programs, initiatives, frameworks, agencies and institutions of the EU as observers. This will help to prepare for membership by getting accustomed to operations and procedures as well as gaining access to public policy cycles and will thus improve policy planning within the accession process and alignment with EU legislation and functional practices.

With Reference to Demographic Developments

- **WB governments:** Given the gloomy demographic prospects in the WB, the overall aim must be to keep human capital in the region and in addition to attract new one. Besides a guaranteed rule of law and political stability, this can be achieved by a set of “policies for a good life”. They include substantial investments in the areas of i) social housing, ii) comprehensive education, iii) universal health coverage, and iv) public transport.
- **WB governments and EU:** Cross-cutting topics focussing on in these investments should include both environmental as well as youth issues. The main investors will need to be sub-national actors at the municipality level – particularly the cities and the suburban surroundings. The national level needs to provide them with the respective funding needed. The main source of these funds, however, should come from the EU.
- **WB governments:** National strategies aimed to improve demographic profiles of their countries, particularly in terms

of the share of young need to account for strong subnational differences in human development between urban and rural areas, and in-migration and out-migration districts.

- **WB governments:** Although “brain drain” is not negligible in the WB, the main concern of policy makers in this region regarding recent and expected migration outflows from their countries should be focused on reducing the huge wage gap in particularly sought-after but rather poorly paid professions between the sending and receiving countries.
- **WB governments and EU MS:** The gap between “brain drain” and “brain gain” can be reduced by a flexible common labour market of the EU and the WB. Facilitating the recognition of qualifications and diplomas would be an important step in this direction. Furthermore, this should include mutual co-operation in job mobility. In this regard, the visa liberalization for Kosovo which has been recommended by the EU Commission since 2018 should finally be implemented.
- **WB governments and EU:** By establishing “Research and Development Centres” and “Translation Infrastructure” (for turning business ideas into commercial products) the environmental conditions for the creation of new youth jobs could be substantially improved.



- **WB governments:** In addition to financial incentives the removal of administrative and informal obstacles (e.g. recognition of diplomas, clientelistic preference for internal job candidates etc.) is key for the return of the academic diaspora and their employment in the higher education and research sector.
- **EU Commission:** A comprehensive study should be commissioned to examine the root causes of youth migration from the WB-6 beyond education and jobs (e.g. absence of true democracy/state capture, clientelism, dysfunctional institutions etc.). This could help the EU Commission to better adjust their projects directed toward the WB youth.

With Reference to the Political Inclusion of the Young Generation

- **EU:** In order to enable democratic progress by the young generation, European policy-makers should put an end to what academics and experts have called “stabilitocracy”, the prioritization of stability and trade at the expense of democratization and the rule of law. To achieve this, European policy-makers should cooperate more closely and visibly with the proven supporters of a liberal-democratic development and EU accession.
- **WB governments:** Political parties should establish internal policies promoting a culture of dialogue, tolerance and antidiscrimination, promote the rule of law and democratic practices, good governance as well as implement anti-corruption preventive measures. In addition, particular attention must be focused on elimination of patronage systems and cronyism practices when it comes to promotions.
- **IC:** Political foundations, bilateral donors, international development agencies and relevant international organisations (e.g. Council of Europe, Inter-Parliamentary Union) are encouraged to support the commitment of youth in political processes and organizations.
- **WB governments:** Political institutions in the WB countries are encouraged to enable the full inclusion of youth representatives in political processes, thus ensuring that youth interests are properly considered, e.g. on official websites and media platforms.
- **WB governments:** Consider operationalising the “Youth, Peace and Security” agenda, established by UNSCR 2250 (2015), on a national and regional level and promote youth participation in the peace and security context, thus further supporting existing regional initiatives such as the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO).
- **WB governments:** Consider integrating youth issues into policy making through a Regulatory Impact Analysis, such as “Austrian Jugendcheck”. Youth checks provide a tool to tailor policy outcomes to youth concerns, anticipate possible negative implications, hence, reduce the risk of unwanted effects and ultimately foster more youth-friendly societies and economies.
- **WB governments and IOs:** Invest in and enable more research and evidence gathering on the role of young women and men in peacebuilding and conflict resolution.
- **Bilateral donors and IOs:** Consider increasing funding the work on active citizenship as well as the organisational development of youth-led and youth-serving civil society organisations (CSOs).
- **EU:** CSOs led by young people are frequently natural allies of the EU in supporting a European and WB Green Deal. This important issue is of pan-regional significance and should be promoted in the WB, also with the aim of intensifying areas of regional cooperation. Therefore, encourage the political commitment of WB youth, e.g. through projects linked to a necessary WB Green Deal, human rights issues and democratic challenges.

With Reference to International and Regional Initiatives

- **EU, US and WB governments:** Improving mobility among the youth in the region is of utmost importance to overcome narrow-minded nationalistic thinking. The EU and US should consider a two-track scholarship program to facilitate the exchange of students among WB universities as well as possibilities to study at universities in the EU and US.

The respective scholarships for studying in the EU should concentrate on disciplines of major importance for the region such as technical, economic, law and medical studies.

A well-balanced offer of grants and credits, combined with return obligations to the respective home countries in case of financing study opportunities in the EU, will have positive effects for target-oriented flexible migration and improvement of educational standards.

- **WB governments:** In order to promote reconciliation in the WB and to prevent new generations from growing up with negative stereotypes about their neighbours, the educational curricula should be renewed in order to establish a multi-perspective approach towards history. The young generation should thereby be encouraged to reflect more critically on their common past and shared future.

These policy recommendations reflect the findings of the 42nd RSSEE workshop on “The Key Role of the Young Generation for the Consolidation of South East Europe”, convened by the PfP Consortium Study Group “Regional Stability in South East Europe” in Reichenau, Austria, 5-8 May 2022. They were prepared by Predrag Jureković (Austrian National Defence Academy, Vienna) on the basis of the proposals submitted by the participants. Valuable support in proofreading and layouting came from Sara Milena Schachinger (Austrian National Defence Academy, Vienna).