

MOST YOUTH-FRIENDLY EUROPEAN REGION

MYFER AWARD 2024

APPLICATIONS

These applications were received from applicants to the AER's MYFER Award 2024. After completing the eligibility check, they are submitted to the jury of the AER'S MYFER Award 2024, for the winners to be selected.

The jury is composed of:

- Nordland County Council and their Youth Advisory Board, as host region of the AER Summer Academy 2024
- Donegal County Council, as winner of the MYFER Award 2014
- The Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, as winner of the MYFER Award 2017
- The Youth Regional Network

#1 KRAPINA ZAGORJE COUNTY | REGIONAL YOUTH AND YOUTH SECTOR DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2023-2027

Region where the initiative takes place: Krapina Zagorje County, Republic of Croatia

Website: <https://kzz.hr/dokumenti/zupanijski-program-djelovanja-za-mlade/>

Brief description of the initiative:

Krapina Zagorje County (KZC) prioritises youth well-being, actively promoting healthy lifestyles among children and young adults. Establishing the County Commission for Drug Abuse Prevention, County Council for Prevention in the Local Community, County Council for the Civil Society Development and County Youth Council underscores its commitment to this cause. Through various projects and collaborations with civil society associations, the county remains dedicated to enhancing youth opportunities and fostering their active involvement in community life. A key initiative that will be implemented for youth in collaboration with the Youth Council is drafting and implementing the Regional Youth and Youth Sector Development Strategy 2023-2027 (Youth Strategy) with the main goal of ensuring students and other young individuals to stay living in KZC by providing them a more suitable lifestyle in the region. The entity responsible for drafting of the Youth Strategy is KZC through their Administrative department for Health, Social Policy, Veterans, Civil Society and Youth. In addition, County Youth Council

will have a key role in the Strategy implementation. Monitoring of implementation will be conducted by regional coordinator, Zagorje Development Agency.

The Regional Youth and Youth Sector Development Strategy 2023-2027 is coherent with other strategic documents on regional level:

- 1) The KZC Development Plan 2021-2027
- 2) The KZC Human Resources Strategy 2021-2027
- 3) The KZC Civil Society Development Strategy 2023-2027
- 4) The KZC Economy Masterplan till 2027
- 5) The KZC Digital Transformation Strategy. The methodology described in the Strategy and lessons learnt are transferable to other regions and the work of KZC Youth Council was recognised as a best practice example in 2023 by the Croatian Central Office for Demography and Youth.

Impact and regional dimension of the initiative:

Krapina Zagorje County Regional Youth Strategy and Development of the Youth Sector 2023-2027 is a strategic document crafted by the region and members of the working group appointed by the region, to address the most pressing issues concerning young people in Krapina Zagorje County. Despite the inception of the first youth programme in 2007, which has undergone 3 revisions since, the ongoing depopulation of youth in the County underscores the necessity for systematic and coordinated efforts in working with young individuals. Specifically, focus areas include deinitialization of work, promoting quality leisure activities, fostering potential and skill development and enhancing access to additional education opportunities. According to Census 2021, a total of 19.856 individuals aged 15-29 live in KZC and this Strategy ensures benefits from all of them. The Strategy represents a step forward in KZC Youth policies since its goal is to prevent depopulation of youth from the County and to ensure better quality of life for young people in order for them to stay in the rural areas. Also, unexpected results of the Strategy were a number of projects and initiatives created by young people that received EU and national funding, including projects that impacted entire local communities e.g. app for volunteer firefighters to receive and respond when fire occurs.

Involvement of youth in the process of development and management of the initiative:

When Krapina Zagorje County (KZC) embarked on designing a new regional youth strategy, it assembled a working group comprising pertinent stakeholders, including youth representatives. The Working Group comprised eight members: 1 appointed by the KZC Youth Council, 1 from the KZC Civil Society Development Council, 2 from the Zagorje Development Agency, 1 from the Coordination of Associations for People with Disabilities in KZC, 1 from the KZC Council (who also represented youth), 1 from the Entrepreneurial Center of KZC, and 1 member from the KZC institution.

Representatives from the County Youth Council emphasised the necessity of developing the new Youth Strategy to align with their needs, advocating for a clearer and more systematic delineation of specific measures based on research conducted prior to defining the youth program. The Youth Council members spearheaded the entire process of strategy development, from inception to implementation. During the development phase, a total of 437 young individuals participated in survey research, aimed at identifying the needs of various stakeholders in the youth sector, including civil society organisations, institutions, and youth. Two workshops were conducted to ensure a participatory approach. Following the stakeholder

mapping and definition of their roles, identified issues and challenges were translated into goals and activities, culminating in a proposed strategy.

Aspects of Social Inclusion and Gender Equality:

Participatory approach, appointments of different stakeholders to a working group in charge of crafting the Strategy and namely, young people and a representative of association of people with disabilities, ensures social inclusion. Gender equality was also achieved through involvement of women in conducted survey research (out of total 437 individuals 61,3% were female, and 3 individuals haven't identified their gender). Significant target groups were individuals aged 15 to 19 (60,9%), then 21,1% aged 25 to 30 (21,1%) and 18% aged 20 to 24. The Strategy was initiated by the KZC Youth Council in 2020 and according to Census 2011 data, KZC had a total of 25.020 young individuals aged 15-29 and according to Census 2021, the number of young people decreased and is now 19.856. This clearly indicates depopulation of young people. This is the main reason why KZC Youth Council initiated creation of the Youth Strategy based on information gathered directly from the young people and that measures be defined in accordance with specific needs of youth in KZC.

Duration of the initiative:

The implementation of the Krapina Zagorje County Regional Youth and Youth Sector Development Strategy 2023-2027 started in 2023 and is still ongoing (till 2027). The Strategy defines result indicators to monitor the implementation of the Strategy according to specific areas (education and mobility, labour, employment and entrepreneurship, health and sport, democratic citizenship, human rights and youth culture.

Tell us in three key points: why do you think your submitted initiative should receive the MYFER Award?

Strategy aims to ensure measures that will motivate and include them in decision-making at the local level. While young people often express their desires, it frequently remains only words without real initiatives. Therefore, this Strategy enables the realisation of these desires. All previous strategies have ensured the implementation of measures and activities for young people, but this new Strategy also seeks ways to retain young people in rural areas and reduce depopulation.

Name of your organisation / company / public body: Krapinsko-zagorska županija (Krapina Zagorje County)

Type of entity: Regional authority

#2 KRAPINA-ZAGORJE COUNTY | BALTAZAR 7

Region where the initiative takes place: Krapina-Zagorje County

Website:

<https://zip.com.hr/najave-i-dogadanja/uskoro-se-ocekuje-festivalcic-kruna-provedbe-projekta-baltazar/>

Brief description of the initiative:

The project aims to provide support to students with developmental difficulties in regular and special primary and secondary schools within the Krapina-Zagorje County (KZC) during the 2023/2024 school year. Specifically, it focuses on employing 77 teaching assistants to assist a total of 95 students with special needs. By providing teaching assistants, the project aims to improve conditions for social inclusion and integration of students with developmental difficulties in their local schools. It directly contributes to enhancing their educational achievements. Long-term support from teaching assistants fosters students' confidence and assertiveness in socialising with their peers and promotes their independence.

The project is a long-standing example of good practice of encouraging social inclusion and integration of students with disabilities in primary and secondary schools in their place of residence. Through its activities, the project continues to nurture and promote tolerance, friendship and inclusion in society, and especially contributes to encouraging children to be as independent as possible and to show their talents and opportunities. This creates conditions for improving their educational achievements and emotional functioning and integrating them more successfully into the social environment with the support of a sensitised public. The project is in line with the KZC Development Plan 2021-2027 and the KZC Human Resources Strategy 2021-2027.

Impact and regional dimension of the initiative:

As the project lead, Krapina-Zagorje County is the founder of a total of 29 elementary schools, the Krapinske Toplice Education Center and 9 secondary schools, and as part of its regular activities, it takes systematic care of the construction and maintenance of educational infrastructure in accordance with the legally prescribed guidelines of the state pedagogical standard in primary and secondary schools. Funds for the implementation of the project are continuously provided from the European Social Fund (today ESF+) and the county budget.

The project has an economic effect because the project creates new jobs, but the social effect is more significant because there is an improvement in the quality of life for students with developmental disabilities, there is an increase in the social inclusion of vulnerable groups in society, and the level of inclusion and participation of the community increases.

The Baltazar project was recognized by the European Commission and the project is the winner of the audience award in the category FAIR Europe: Fostering inclusion and anti-discrimination (Regiostars 2021). The Baltazar project promotes tolerance, respect for diversity and inclusion, which directly contributed to equal opportunities for students with developmental disabilities who absolutely need the support of teaching assistants and professional communication intermediaries.

Involvement of youth in the process of development and management of the initiative:

Involvement of young people in the development, management, and implementation of initiatives is crucial for their success and relevance. In addition to children with difficulties, the target group in this

project is young unemployed people who want to become active on the labour market and thus want to influence structural unemployment of young people.

Since the implementation of the project, the total number of children involved in the project is 620, while 512 assistants/professional communication intermediaries were involved.

Young people with developmental difficulties were provided with support through education through the project in order to more easily focus on educational achievements, socialisation and overcome physical and emotional obstacles. The implementation of the project created prerequisites for easier inclusion of students with developmental disabilities in the environment, easier mastering of the teaching process, socialisation and development.

Teaching assistants provide immediate support to students with developmental disabilities during the educational process in tasks that require communication, sensory and motor activity of students, in movement, when taking food and drinks, in performing hygiene needs, in daily teaching, extracurricular and out-of-classroom activities.

Every year, partner schools throughout the Krapina-Zagorje County are involved in celebrating the International Day of Persons with Disabilities and the International Day of Tolerance.

Aspects of Social Inclusion and Gender Equality:

The Baltazar project directly affects the increase in social inclusion and integration of students with disabilities in primary and secondary schools in Krapina-Zagorje County. Baltazar creates a broad and lasting partnership and is an example of good practice applicable in all environments. Through his activities, Baltazar nurtures and promotes tolerance, friendship and inclusion in society, encouraging children to be more independent and show their possibilities. By enabling students to fully integrate, participate in the community and realise their potential, they are given the opportunity to get involved in achieving sustainable development at any time in their lives, which requires the complete engagement, creativity, ideals and courage of young people as well as the experiences of local and indigenous people whose identity, culture and interest should be recognized and supported. Furthermore, sustainable development indirectly talks about strengthening the role of basic social groups – women, children and young people, civil society organisations and others, where the basis is education, which is one of the key goals of this project.

Duration of the initiative:

The project implementation period is 12 months, from August 25, 2023, to August 25, 2024. The Baltazar project, led by Krapina-Zagorje County, has been implemented continuously since 2014 and now the Baltazar 8 project is already being prepared. The project is a long-standing example of good practice of encouraging social inclusion and integration of students with disabilities in primary and secondary schools in their place of residence.

Tell us in three key points: why do you think your submitted initiative should receive the MYFER Award?

1. The right to education is one of the fundamental human rights, and this is exactly what the Baltazar project promotes.

2. The project directly affects the improvement of the integration of students with developmental disabilities into regular and special primary and secondary educational institutions and their more successful social inclusion and emotional functioning thus ensuring their deinstitutionalization.
3. Long-term viability and the ability to maintain its positive impact over time.

Name of your organisation/company/public body: Krapina-Zagorje County

Type of entity: Regional authority

#3 REGIONE AUTONOMA TRENINO-ALTO ADIGE / SÜDTIROL | SCHOOLS BEYOND REGIONS AND BORDERS/SCUOLE OLTRE LE REGIONI E I CONFINI/SCHULEN JENSEITS VON REGIONEN UND GRENZEN (SBRB)

Region where the initiative takes place: The project involves nine high schools from Regione Autonoma Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol (Italy) partnering with 18 high schools from the following countries: Austria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain and the UK, for a total network of 27 high schools from 10 different countries, with over 600 pupils aged 16-19 benefiting from the project activities each year

Website: www.sbrb.eu

Brief description of the initiative:

SBRB is a unique European-wide initiative which fosters intercultural dialogue on global topics relevant to young pupils at regional, Euroregional and European level. Supported by the Autonomous Region Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol, the University of Trento, and Fondazione FBK, SBRB encourages interaction among European pupils and teachers by sharing knowledge and best practices in active citizenship education. This is achieved through monthly webinars in English by university teachers, interactive classroom activities, dedicated workshops, various bilateral initiatives and an annual plenary meeting.

The project's specific aims are as follows:

- Make top-notch learning materials freely available on an open platform, after thorough scientific scrutiny provided by an academic committee
- Provide students with a solid understanding of current global issues during webinars with prominent international experts
- Encourage interaction among pupils from different backgrounds, e.g. through school exchanges and language tandem projects
- Foster a sense of belonging to the EU and the wider Europe
- Promote teacher mobility
- Enable pupils to undertake collaborative projects, resulting in enhanced mutual understanding
- Emphasise a multicultural and multilingual collaborative learning perspective, particularly in the bilingual Region Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol
- Enhance foreign-language proficiency through interactive activities and the use of multilingual classroom resources

Impact and regional dimension of the initiative:

SBRB is deeply rooted in the Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol region, with regional authorities providing vital financial and institutional support. They foster partnerships with local institutions like the University of Trento, which contributes academic expertise and administrative assistance to ensure the project's seminar cycles maintain high standards and contemporary relevance. Moreover, the region aids in organising the plenary meeting by providing venues and technical support. Regular reporting is conducted at institutional and administrative level, including with the Presidency.

This close involvement ensures that SBRB significantly impacts the region, enhancing its reputation as a hub for educational excellence and innovation. SBRB also promotes intercultural dialogue in the Euroregion Trentino-South Tyrol-Tyrol, leveraging a network of 12 partner schools.

SBRB addresses regional challenges like cultural inclusion, minority issues and youth disengagement, making it a vital asset for the area. Its positive impact can be measured by the quality of work produced by the schools, as evaluated by our scientific committee, and by other measurable outcomes like the number of projects completed, bilateral agreements, school exchanges, and teacher mobility exchanges.

SBRB's flexible structure, featuring thematic modules and webinars, makes it easily transferable to other regions, offering a successful model for fostering European unity in diversity and cooperation through education.

Involvement of youth in the process of development and management of the initiative:

The project is deeply youth-centred:

Students are selected by their schools based on their motivation and commitment, ensuring genuine interest in the initiative's success. They are encouraged to engage with speakers during online seminars, asking questions and sharing their perspectives. Together with their teachers, they decide which webinars to attend and what kind of deliverables to produce in class, resulting in original and creative materials.

At the annual plenary meeting, they open the ceremony in their own languages, present their work in English, and participate in interactive workshops. Their work is published on the project's website, and they are encouraged to contribute their reflections on the website blog. During the plenary meeting, they also write articles for local newspapers, are interviewed by regional TVs, and give speeches at the inauguration ceremony.

Several workshops have been organised to gather feedback and insights from these young participants on the project's progress or on current European issues, including a workshop on the Europe they envision. This collaborative approach enriches the project's development and helps shape its future direction, ensuring relevance and impact.

Through this bottom-up approach, young people become integral to the initiative, bringing fresh perspectives and innovative ideas. Their active participation exemplifies the project's commitment to inclusivity and fosters a sense of ownership and agency among Europe's youth

Aspects of Social Inclusion and Gender Equality:

- The initiative guarantees equal participation of language minorities in the Region Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol, with balanced involvement of Italian-, German-, and Ladin-speaking pupils, in full compliance with the principles of the Region's Special Statute.
- Participation in the annual plenary event and in all other activities is completely free of charge, ensuring accessibility for everybody, including young people with fewer opportunities.
- Schools are chosen from not only cities and towns, but also from villages situated in more remote areas.
- The project consistently promotes gender equality, which is reflected in the composition of the management team, the choice of speakers and the students selected to give speeches, interviews or write newspaper articles.
- Minority rights and gender equality have also been the focus of several webinars, such as 'States, diversity and minorities' and 'Europe, diversity and minorities' with Jens Woelk, 'Gender equality: an urgent and shared challenge' by Lisa Marchi, and the webinar cycle on extremist narratives co-organized with ARENAS/Horizon2022, which included discussions on hate speech against women.
- In the latest plenary meetings, with up to 120 participants each year, we gave priority for catering and accommodation of delegations to community service providers that support individuals with mental and physical disabilities as well as to organisations offering vocational rehabilitation to former offenders and drug or alcohol abusers.

Duration of the initiative:

After a pilot phase in 2020, SBRB has been ongoing since 2021, enhancing civic competence among high school pupils. Over time it has included schools from various countries and plans further expansion to extend to a diverse range of countries, in line with the Region's policy of European integration. Ahead of the next three-year phase, the project will be embedded within the regional political agenda, relying for its implementation on a virtuous investment involving public and private funding.

Tell us in three key points: why do you think your submitted initiative should receive the MYFER Award?

- SBRB is an expanding international network that successfully enhances youth active citizenship as per MYFER's aim
- Leveraging synergies among schools, universities, embassies and cultural institutions at regional, Euroregional and European levels, it offers meaningful educational opportunities to hundreds of teachers and students annually
- It is easily replicable due to its flexible structure, combining online and in-person activities, while minimising public expenses and bureaucratic burdens

Name of your organisation/company/public body: Regione Autonoma Trentino-Alto Adige/Suedtiroil

Type of entity: Regional authority

#4 KRAPINA-ZAGORJE COUNTY | RECEZA - REGIONAL CENTER ZABOK

Region where the initiative takes place: Krapina-Zagorje County

Website:

CUT webpage: <https://www.rcktu-zabok.hr/>

CUT Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/CUTZabok/?locale=hr_HR

Zabok High School: <http://www.ss-zabok.skole.hr/>

Brief description of the initiative:

Project ReCeZa has propelled Zabok High School into a leader in the education of tourism and hospitality personnel. Anchored in core values such as excellence, integrity, social responsibility, partnership, cooperation, inclusiveness, and diversity, the implementation of this project has enabled Zabok High School to effectively respond to the dynamic demands of the tourism sector. Through this initiative, school has undergone a transformative journey, emerging as a regional hub for high-quality, practical and internationally oriented education in tourism. In the long term, the Regional Center of Competence Zabok evolves into a vibrant centre of development and innovation, serving as a breeding ground for new ideas and trends aimed at enhancing the quality of service provision. RCC Zabok offers a diverse range of educational programs, including regular high school education programs for comprehensive qualifications, formal adult education programs for partial qualifications and micro-qualifications, as well as informal adult education programs delivered through short courses and events. The educational activities of the project are also structured around the development of new curriculums and establishing the HUB, a digital platform for business meetings, communication, and idea exchange. This centre also fosters entrepreneurship skills among students, providing professional guidance through the Center for Careers to help students navigate their career paths in the industry. The project activities engaged more than 850 students, professors, and mentors from Zabok High School and partner institutions. The activities included: participation in over 50 competitions, more than 60 educational workshops, 9 study trips all around Europe, participation in more than 20 conferences. Furthermore, the high school organised various events and presentations to showcase hospitality professions and foster engagement with the wider community.

Impact and regional dimension of the initiative:

Over the years, Zabok High School has consistently demonstrated exceptional performance in competitions within the hospitality and tourism sector. The ReCeZa project marks a significant advancement in the education of personnel for these industries. Its implementation has a tangible impact on employment both locally and regionally. Serving as a regional hub of expertise in tourism and hospitality, the school is poised to enrol successive generations of participants in both formal and informal education, including students and adult learners, thus enriching the broader community in the years to come. The outcomes of this project, including new educational programs, tailored individual programs, and state-of-the-art equipment, are set to enhance the quality of personnel and their competencies in tourism and hospitality. Consequently, the entire sector stands to benefit from added value in the future. In recent years, a noticeable trend of personnel shortages has emerged, particularly in tourism and hospitality. The implementation of this project addresses this challenge by outfitting new facilities with specialised catering equipment and designing programs aligned with labour market demands. Akademis,

the hotel and restaurant developed through the project, serves as a learning environment grounded in practical experience. This hands-on approach allows participants to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings, honing their skills and gaining valuable insights into the intricacies of the hospitality industry. Through the project, a digital platform named HUB was created. It serves as a space for business meetings, communication, and idea exchange among all stakeholders in the tourism industry. As part of the project, a school tourism agency was established within project classes. This agency serves as a practical learning environment where students can gain hands-on experience and develop skills in the tourism sector.

Involvement of youth in the process of development and management of the initiative:

The primary target group of the project consisted of young people, primarily students of Zabok High School and three partner schools. They played an active role in the establishment of the Center, a self-evaluation system, and the Career Center, among other stakeholders. The project activities engaged more than 850 young people - students who participated in over 50 competitions, workshops, study trips, events, and presentations of food and drinks focused on showcasing hospitality professions to the wider community, especially young primary school pupils who represent potential future students of the Center of Competence, along with their parents. The students were trained by highly professional and educated professors and professional chefs and were constantly encouraged to learn and engage more in the project activities, which were mainly created for them. With young people in mind, the Center, through engaging programs and projects, has contributed and continues to contribute to motivating young people to develop careers in tourism, enhancing the attractiveness of tourism professions, and intensifying cooperation and interaction between vocational schools and their students. Through various activities, young people are presented with career development opportunities and offered the chance to participate in professional development courses, workshops, or training programs.

Aspects of Social Inclusion and Gender Equality:

Project activities were aimed at strengthening the capacities of the Zabok Center and partner institutions. All project activities were conducted on a non-discriminatory basis and equally accessible to both female and male employees of partner institutions, as well as to students and adult participants, including members of national minorities. Activities, competitions, and workshops were organised with consideration for religious and national holidays. The existing website of the Zabok Secondary School and the newly created website were adapted for people with disabilities in terms of font and display. Access to the spaces where workshops and educational activities were held was adapted for people with disabilities, as were the presentations and materials used for educational purposes. One of the project partners was an association whose primary goal is the transfer of knowledge and best practices in working with students and people with disabilities. The new programs that were developed were adapted for students with disabilities, and the staff was trained for their proper implementation. Workshops, round tables, events, and other activities included civil society organisations and various stakeholders in tourism, such as employers, hospitality businesses, cafes, and others, with the aim of expanding the network of experiences of the Center and transferring knowledge to future employees in tourism.

Duration of the initiative:

The implementation of ReCeZa Project started in February 2020 and ended in December 2023. During this period, Zabok High School underwent a transformation and became a regional centre of excellence in

tourism and hospitality. Through the project, new and enhanced educational programs were created and infrastructure capacities were improved. ReCeZa represents a proactive response to the evolving needs of the tourism sector through education combined with the praxis-based training and learning.

Tell us in three key points: why do you think your submitted initiative should receive the MYFER Award?

The Regional Center Zabok should receive MYFER Award because it holds potential beyond national borders, serving as a versatile tool within the entire EU. With skilled staff overseeing training through new educational programs tailored to labour market demands and tourist expectations, it aims to elevate tourism by motivating young people to pursue careers in the field, enhancing the appeal of tourism professions, and fostering collaboration between vocational schools and their students.

Name of your organisation/company/public body: Krapina-Zagorje County

Type of entity: Regional authority

#5 COHESION REGION WEST SLOVENIA | AN ENTREPRENEURIAL APPROACH TO CHALLENGES

Region where the initiative takes place: Cohesion Region West Slovenia

Website: <https://zahodna-slovenija.si/sejem-podjetno-v-prihodnost/Ra>

Brief description of the initiative:

The main goal of the project is thus to set up new businesses that will be brought to realisation by individuals with an enterprise idea via entrepreneurship training. In order to promote entrepreneurial activity and the success of development of business ideas, substantive support is required in the first phase. This will be provided to participants by internal and external mentors, external experts and entrepreneurs. The project covers the provision of substantive support activities via which over a period of four months groups of participants are ensured employment and a supportive enterprise environment in which they can successfully develop and realise their own business ideas. The training programme will accompany participants from the development of a business idea to the elaboration of a business model and business plan. At the same time it will provide them with comprehensive information about all important areas of entrepreneurship. In addition, the project facilitates the use of physical infrastructure under the co-working principle. Most of the recipients are the young people.

Impact and regional dimension of the initiative:

The project is implementing the Regional development agencies. Our Cohesion Region West Slovenia has 4 development regions (NUTS 3) and 4 regional development agencies.

Results: In the period 2014–2020 in the cohesion region of Western Slovenia, 220 participants were trained in 20 groups within the framework of the project An entrepreneurial approach to challenges, which were selected from 671 applications. Of these, 159 were women and 61 were men. 88 of them were employed. The average age, however, was 32.6.

Impacts:

- an increase in the number of newly created companies;
- increased survival prospects for newly created companies due to improved entrepreneurial skills of their founders;
- potential entrepreneurs as the target group of the project receive entrepreneurial support activities,
- an important contribution to a properly developed entrepreneurial support environment in the region and thus better opportunities for the identification and realisation of entrepreneurial ideas,
- the creation of new, quality jobs;
- raising the level of entrepreneurial knowledge of the inhabitants of each region;
- development of the region in terms of strengthening entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial culture and activation entrepreneurial potential.

Involvement of youth in the process of development and management of the initiative:

Young people are recipients within the project.

Aspects of Social Inclusion and Gender Equality:

Social inclusion and gender equality are guaranteed. Conditions for applying are unemployment and having good business ideas.

Duration of the initiative:

First generation: 1st of July 2020 – 30th of September 2023 in the programming period 2014-2020.

Second generation (ongoing): 1st of November 2023 – 31st of December 2029 in the programming period 2021-2027.

Tell us in three key points: why do you think your submitted initiative should receive the MYFER Award?

- For raising employment.
- To have opportunity for establishing new network.
- To improve knowledge.

Name of your organisation/company/public body: Development Council of the Cohesion Region Zahodna Slovenija

Type of entity: Regional authority

#6 AUTONOMOUS REPUBLIC OF ADJARA | SUPPORT FOR PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS AND EVENTS

Region where the initiative takes place: Batumi, Autonomous Republic of Adjara, Georgia

Website: <https://yrc.ge/event/65af6e8bda6d4300143a56c5>

Brief description of the initiative:

The Youth Regional Center's "Support for Participation in International Projects and Events" initiative is dedicated to empowering youth aged 14 to 29 by providing financial assistance to attend international trainings, conferences, and university programs. This project addresses the financial barriers that often prevent young people from participating in valuable international opportunities, thereby fostering global engagement and personal development.

Impact and regional dimension of the initiative:

Regional Involvement: The "Support for Participation in International Projects and Events" initiative operates across six municipalities in the Ajara region, involving local schools, universities, community organisations, and government bodies. These partnerships ensure broad awareness and accessibility, with educational institutions nominating candidates and community groups assisting in outreach.

Impact on the Region: The initiative significantly enhances educational and professional development by enabling youth to participate in international events. Participants return with new skills, knowledge, and networks, contributing to local economic growth and social cohesion. They often initiate community projects inspired by their experiences abroad, addressing local needs and improving quality of life.

Regional Challenges Tackled: The initiative addresses critical challenges, such as limited access to international opportunities, brain drain, and youth unemployment. By providing financial support for international engagement, it removes barriers and encourages young people to apply their skills locally, thus fostering regional development and reducing unemployment.

Transferability: The initiative's success is based on its community-centred approach, scalable financial support, youth-led management, and robust feedback mechanisms. These elements make it easily adaptable to other regions with similar challenges. By engaging local stakeholders and ensuring continuous improvement, other regions can replicate this model to empower their youth and stimulate community growth."

Involvement of youth in the process of development and management of the initiative:

The "Support for Participation in International Projects and Events" initiative thrives on the active involvement of young people at every stage of its development, management, and implementation. This ensures that the initiative is not only relevant but also driven by the very demographic it aims to support.

Development:

Needs Assessment: The project began with a comprehensive needs assessment conducted by a team of young volunteers. They surveyed their peers to identify the barriers preventing them from participating in international opportunities and gathered suggestions on how to address these challenges.

Design and Planning: A youth advisory board, consisting of young people from diverse backgrounds, collaborated with our organization's leadership to design the program. Their input was crucial in outlining the objectives, structure, and criteria for the initiative. Additionally, most of our employees are under the age of 29, ensuring that the perspectives and needs of young people are central to the project's development.

Management:

Decision-Making Roles: Young people are integral to the decision-making process. The youth advisory board meets regularly to review applications, select beneficiaries, and ensure that the allocation of funds aligns with the project's goals.

Employee Involvement: With the majority of our employees being under 29, they bring fresh insights and energy to the project management. Their involvement ensures that the initiative is continually adapted to meet the evolving needs of young participants.

Implementation:

Outreach and Promotion: Young volunteers lead the outreach efforts to promote the initiative. They utilise social media, organise information sessions, and connect with schools and universities to spread awareness about the available support.

Peer Support: Participants who have benefited from the program often return as mentors and ambassadors. They share their experiences, provide guidance to new applicants, and assist in organising workshops on application processes and international engagement.

Feedback and Improvement: Continuous feedback from participants is actively sought and valued. Regular feedback sessions and surveys are conducted to gather insights and suggestions for improvement. This feedback is then used to refine and enhance the initiative.

Through this collaborative approach, the "Support for Participation in International Projects and Events" initiative not only provides financial assistance but also empowers young people by involving them directly in shaping and running the program.

Aspects of Social Inclusion and Gender Equality:

Social Inclusion: To ensure equal access, the initiative actively engages minorities, youth with fewer opportunities, and youth with disabilities through targeted outreach in collaboration with local organisations. We conduct awareness campaigns in diverse communities, provide application support, and offer accommodations for disabilities. Financial assistance is made flexible to meet the unique needs of these groups, ensuring inclusivity.

Gender Equality: Gender equality is central to our initiative, with measures in place to ensure balanced participation and management. We mandate equal gender representation in our youth advisory board and selection committees. Additionally, specific outreach efforts encourage young women to apply, and we offer mentorship programs focusing on empowering female participants. Regular gender-sensitivity training for staff and volunteers ensures an inclusive environment, promoting gender equality at all levels of the initiative.

Duration of the initiative:

The project took place in 2019, it is an ongoing project which is in progress from 26.01.2024 to 26.11.2024 this year.

Tell us in three key points: why do you think your submitted initiative should receive the MYFER Award?

1. Empowerment and Opportunity: The "Support for Participation in International Projects and Events" initiative provides critical financial support, enabling youth aged 14 to 29 to participate in international trainings, conferences, and university programs. This initiative breaks down financial barriers, empowering young people to gain valuable global experiences and skills that they can bring back to their communities.
2. Inclusive and Equitable Access: Our initiative prioritises inclusivity and equality, ensuring that all sectors of society, including minorities, youth with fewer opportunities, and youth with disabilities, have equal access to opportunities. Targeted outreach, flexible support, and accommodations for disabilities ensure that everyone can participate and benefit.
3. Youth-Led and Regionally Integrated: With most of our employees under 29, young people are at the core of our initiative's development, management, and implementation. Operating across six municipalities in the Ajara region, our initiative deeply integrates local stakeholders, ensuring community relevance and sustainable impact.

These elements collectively make our initiative unique and deserving of the MYFER Award.

Name of your organisation/company/public body: Youth Regional Center

Type of entity: Regional authority

#7 BRDOVEC MUNICIPALITY | YOUTH COUNCIL OF THE BRDOVEC MUNICIPALITY

Region where the initiative takes place: In Brdovec Municipality (Hrvatsko Zagorje - Prigorje Region) in Croatia

Website: <https://brdovec.hr/opcina/savjet-mladih/novosti>

Brief description of the initiative:

Brdovec Municipality Youth Council, a project launched in June 2023 in Brdovec Municipality with the aim of including young people in the active life of the Municipality and the wider region of Hrvatski Zagorje-Prigorje. The Council was founded to gather young people, who will actively work within the newly opened Youth Center in the Municipality. This project is a unique local-regional project for young people in Croatia because it takes care of young people and their integration into society at the local-regional level. The council has 7 active members, who meet and implement projects on a monthly basis. The goal of the Council is to maintain various activities dedicated to young people in the Municipality and the region and through informal education and activities to educate young people about everyday social life in their local-regional environment. The target group is young people from 15 to 30 years of age. Through the activities of the council, young people will better connect and get to know each other, and awareness of the need to activate young people will develop. The President of the Council also has the right to propose guidelines for the development of the Municipality to the Mayor when he forwards issues related to youth. The Council has so far implemented more than 12 projects within a year of its existence and plans to continue working actively in the future.

Project objects:

1. Cooperation with the youth council of the Republic of Croatia, cross-border cooperation with youth councils within the borders of the European Union and the Western Balkans.
2. Cooperation with cultural, sports, environmental and other associations and institutions within the Municipality of Brdovec and the Hrvatsko Zagorje - Prigorje region.
3. Cooperation with educational institutions and implementation of informal education.
4. Carrying out activities in the free time of young people.
5. Organization of cultural, sports, environmental and other forms of activities.
6. Encouraging lifelong education and assistance in choosing future occupations or retraining.
7. Active cooperation with municipal and regional bodies.
8. Cooperation with local committees.

Impact and regional dimension of the initiative:

The Hrvatsko zagroje-Prigorje region consists of seven municipalities and the City of Zaprešić and represents the region at the western entrance to the metropolitan area of the City of Zagreb. The region has been involved in the Youth Council project since the very beginning of the Council's initiative. Namely, until the establishment of the Council, there was no active Council in the region, which would lead and take care of the young people who will visit the established Youth Center in Brdovac. Therefore, the regional council encouraged the Municipality of Brdovec to establish a Council. Today, after one year, the Council is a recognized project throughout the region, which actively cares for young people and carries out activities with young people. Many young people from all seven municipalities and cities in the region come to Brdovec for activities related to the Council. As for the challenges, the poor traffic connections within the region are highlighted, i.e. the necessity of having a car if someone wants to actively attend all Council events due to the hilly landscape, which does not allow for easy walking or cycling within the region. Also, the Council is currently financed only by the Municipality of Brdovec, and it operates in the area of the entire region, so in the future it will be necessary to agree on the mutual financing of this project. The Brdovec Municipality Youth Council project represents a project that can easily be transferred to other Croatian and European regions. There must be a will and an agreement between several

municipalities in the selected region in order to realise a joint project, as in this case. Also, in order to start this project, there must be the motivation of young people, who are ready to do activities for their peers on a volunteer basis. We have already presented our Council project in several other municipalities within Croatia and in the Slovenian town of Brežice, so we believe that we have already inspired someone to start a similar success story.

Involvement of youth in the process of development and management of the initiative:

Young people have been involved in the Council's project from the very beginning, the condition for membership in the Council is belonging to the age category of 15 to 30 years. Furthermore, the elected young people themselves elected the president of the Council, adopted the work plan and the rules of procedure of the entire council. The entire project was conceived through the active participation of young people and the decision-making of young people about the future of the project. In the first year of its existence, young people independently carried out all planned activities and independently managed the spending of the budget money given to them by the Municipality. All activities of the Council are intended exclusively for young people and regularly gather young people from the entire region. The Council actively listens to the voice of young people and regularly conducts opinion polls on the activities carried out through various polls and posts on social networks. In case of doubt about the choice of activity, the Council actively asks for the opinion of young people via profiles on social networks. In these ways, all young people can actively participate in initiating the activities of the Council. At all times, council members are available on social networks so that young people can contact them and express their desire/initiative related to young people in the region. Overall, it can be said that the Youth Council really actively listens to young people and tries to integrate them into society as much as possible.

Aspects of Social Inclusion and Gender Equality:

Social Inclusion: To ensure equal access, the initiative actively engages minorities, youth with fewer opportunities, and youth with disabilities through targeted outreach in collaboration with local organisations. We conduct awareness campaigns in diverse communities, provide application support, and offer accommodations for disabilities. Financial assistance is made flexible to meet the unique needs of these groups, ensuring inclusivity.

Gender Equality: Gender equality is central to our initiative, with measures in place to ensure balanced participation and management. We mandate equal gender representation in our youth advisory board and selection committees. Additionally, specific outreach efforts encourage young women to apply, and we offer mentorship programs focusing on empowering female participants. Regular gender-sensitivity training for staff and volunteers ensures an inclusive environment, promoting gender equality at all levels of the initiative.

Duration of the initiative:

The Brdovec Municipality Youth Council project was officially launched on June 27, 2023, and the first cycle of the project will last until June 27, 2025. So now we are exactly halfway through this project. The goal is to continue the project in the future with the election of new members and leaders of the Council. The municipality is prepared to continue to allocate funds for the Council's budget. This is high on the list of natural projects of the Municipality for the period up to 2030.

FunINO is a project designed to promote the culture of innovation in the student population and encourage their proactivity in creating a regional and national culture of innovation. In today's rapidly changing world of digital technology, industry, business, education, and almost all aspects of everyday life, students of Business Economics, majoring in Digital Economy and Innovation, with the FunINO project, aim to network with Millennials and i-Geniuses—former, current, and future students of the University North—to contribute their innovations to the development of the Croatian economy and strengthen the competitiveness of northern Croatia. The project also has an educational component, enabling students to publicly present their innovative solutions and receive professional feedback, guiding them towards sustainable entrepreneurial ideas. The project's goal, which takes the form of the Festival of Innovative Ideas during implementation, is to promote knowledge and student ideas focused on digitization, digital and green transformation, and innovations among the student, scientific, and entrepreneurial communities. Throughout the year, both academic and business sectors collaborate in developing innovative ideas, exchanging ideas, knowledge, and experiences to inspire and help each other achieve project goals. By networking students with diverse knowledge that complements each other, an "incubator" of good ideas is created, providing participants with a space for networking and interdisciplinary knowledge sharing. At the first FunINO, 61 innovative ideas were presented, leading to several start-ups that are reducing youth unemployment in Varaždin County. Notably, one student, inspired by the Festival, launched a start-up in bookkeeping, showcasing the entrepreneurial spirit fostered by this initiative. This year's Festival expects even more innovative student ideas. Presenting the project in Bratislava will extend its reach internationally, encouraging innovation development among students globally.

Impact and regional dimension of the initiative:

The University North and Varaždin County collaborate on multiple projects, including the recent government-approved expansion of the university's facilities. This partnership allows more students to attend classes, enhancing educational opportunities. The Student Union of the University North works closely with the Youth Council of Varaždin County, and many students participate in both county and local youth councils. Varaždin County regularly engages in university activities, such as the recent UNIN Connect Week, fostering innovative practices that can transform into concrete business ideas and job opportunities. This collaboration helps mitigate brain drain by offering local employment opportunities to top innovators. Despite the initiative's success, broader youth involvement is needed to maximise its impact. Although youth unemployment in the region is declining, further efforts are required to prevent young people from leaving. Initiatives like these enable young people to realise their potential in regions like Varaždin County. The FunINO model's structured approach to fostering innovation through education and practice is highly transferable. The upcoming study trip to Bratislava to present the initiative at the University of Economics in Bratislava marks the start of its international dimension, showcasing its adaptability and potential for global implementation. This international exposure promotes a global culture of innovation among students.

Involvement of youth in the process of development and management of the initiative:

Young people were integral participants in all stages of the organisation of the FunINO Festival, thereby gaining invaluable experience and competencies. Students were actively involved in the planning, logistics, promotion, and implementation of all festival activities. Their roles included coordinating with lecturers, organising workshops, creating marketing campaigns, and collecting and analysing feedback

from participants. Furthermore, the young exhibitors had the opportunity to present their innovative ideas in front of the audience and expert jury, enabling them to receive valuable feedback and an opportunity for networking. This engagement encouraged creativity and entrepreneurial spirit among students, and the Festival became a platform for demonstrating their abilities and innovations. The contribution of young organisers and participants was crucial for the success of the FunINO because they brought freshness, energy, and innovative ideas that made the Festival dynamic and relevant. The mentor's role was to provide guidance and support, but the final decisions and their implementation were left to the students, which further strengthened their responsibility and self-confidence. Through this bottom-up approach, FunINO not only promoted the culture of innovation but also empowered young people to take an active role in shaping the future of Varaždin County.

Aspects of Social Inclusion and Gender Equality:

All students from the Department of Business Economics were involved in the initiative, including those with fewer opportunities, but their participation was therefore not undervalued, patronised or otherwise diminished in any way. On the contrary, several innovative ideas that were presented at the Festival were aimed at actively reducing inequality in society, such as the "Box" initiative, i.e. delivering packages to inaccessible places in the context of developing the inclusion of rural areas in Varaždin county in a way that equalises opportunities. However, the intention was not only to equalise opportunities, but primarily to design concrete measures and ideas that will equalise outcomes because, if we equalise outcomes, then everyone, regardless of inaccessibility, will be able to get that "Box" or some other service they need. And that concept was presented by the young people themselves, the participants of the Festival. According to the list of registered participants and exhibitors at the Festival, there was equal representation of both sexes, with female students slightly dominating. We additionally ensured gender equality by the number of female participants who were involved in the work of the expert jury, the coordination of volunteers and the exhibitors themselves from the domain of the business sector. A serious gender equality policy is being pursued in the context of all Festival participants.

Duration of the initiative:

The project started in January 2023 and continues this academic year when we add an international dimension in the form of a study trip to Bratislava, where the initiative will be presented to fellow students and professors from the University of Economics in Bratislava (EUBA). Long-term sustainability is ensured by the University's support for continued implementation, but also by a summer school through which students will gain additional practical knowledge of entrepreneurship to be even more successful in developing their innovations both this year and next year.

Tell us in three key points: why do you think your submitted initiative should receive the MYFER Award?

1. An initiative designed and led by young people
2. Regional influence and high level of inclusiveness
3. Promotion of the culture of youth innovation with easy transferability to other regions

FunINO is a project through which young innovators encourage young innovators, from the level of organisation of the festival itself to entrepreneurial advice and joint development of ideas. It is an initiative that came from students and is intended for students, and as the result brings an increase in the market

competitiveness of the region. Encouraging innovative youth entrepreneurship is the way to a better society in which the digital and green transition are the main levers of the modern economy.

Name of your organisation / company / public body: University North (www.unin.hr)

Type of entity: University or Research Centre

#9 THE AZORES | ARE YOU ON?! PROJECT - BE AWARE, DEBATE, AND TAKE ACTION!

Region where the initiative takes place: Azores, Portugal (Government of the Azores - Regional Directorate for Youth)

Website:

- <https://portal.azores.gov.pt/web/comunicacao/-/gacs-7377>
- <https://radioilheu.pt/atualidade-projeto-estas-on-informa-te-debate-e-decide-arranca-nos-acoress/>
- <https://correiodosacoress.pt/2024/04/21/projecto-estas-on-informa-te-debate-e-decide-arranca-nos-acoress-para-promover-a-cidadania-e-a-educacao-mediatica/>

Brief description of the initiative:

The Are you ON?! Project - Be aware, debate, and take action! is dedicated to encouraging critical thinking as a tool to question, analyse, and evaluate information objectively and impartially - through Media Literacy. The Project is developed by the Regional Directorate for Youth and is co-funded by the Erasmus+ Program.

The idea for the Project arose within the scope of a consultation with young Azoreans, promoted by the Regional Directorate for Youth – Youth with a Voice - for the construction of the Regional Plan for Literacy and Young Democratic Participation, between 18th and 29th of September 2024, on the nine islands of the Azores, with a final session on the 13th of October 2024. Young people identified the proliferation of information that they come across with as a big challenge. Media literacy was considered as a strategic theme to be worked on, to give young people skills to know how to deal with the amount of information that reaches them, critically and responsibly, as a way to become more informed and participative citizens.

The aim of the Project is to raise awareness among young people of the importance of information as an essential element for responsible participation and involvement in the democratic life at regional, national, and European levels. In addition, the Project will address various issues related to citizenship, aiming to:

- Raise awareness of the importance of voting, considering the 2024 electoral acts, particularly the European Elections.
- Promote multilevel and intercultural identity through European citizenship combined with regional and national citizenship.
- Incentivize young Azoreans to participate in the Erasmus + and CES Programmes.
- Rapprochement between young people on the nine islands and creation of a community spirit and work networks to build future projects.

The Are you ON?! Project includes:

- Participatory Laboratories, which took place on the 6th, 7th and 14th of June, in which more than 60 young Azoreans were heard and worked on key concepts related to Media Literacy;
- Are you ON?! Information Campaign, to be launched in October 2024, on the social networks of the Regional Youth Directorate to mark World Media Literacy Week;
- Youth Meeting - I'm ON! -, which will take place in November 2024, and preparations are ongoing.

Impact and regional dimension of the initiative:

The Are you ON?! Project is based on active participation by the region, as it is promoted by the regional public administration, through the Regional Directorate for Youth.

The Project considers geographic, economic, and social specificities of the Region - an archipelago of nine islands and an outermost region of the EU. From those conditions arise constraints recognized by everyone, and which particularly affect young people. The means of communication, for us islanders, are an essential mechanism for coping with the physical distance that separates us from events.

The Project even addresses more than one European Youth Goal, namely:

- #4 Information and Constructive Dialogue;
- #6 Support rural youth;
- #9 Space and participation for everyone;
- #3 Inclusive societies;
- #1 Connecting the EU with young people,
- #11 Youth organisations and European programmes;
- #10 Green and Sustainable Europe.

For this reason, we believe that the impacts of the Project will be felt at a local, regional, national, and even European level. At a regional level, we can foresee:

- Strengthening azorean identity;
- Encouraging a sense of regional unity among young people, as they will be able to understand that, although they come from different islands, they share many experiences and challenges, which can lead to a sense of greater regional cohesion;
- Opening a space for young people to express their opinions to policymakers, and giving them an active role in the formation of regional policies, resulting in policies that are more inclusive and sensitive to the needs of youth Azorean;
- Stimulating inter-island networks and collaborations, as they can lead to the development of long-term regional projects, benefiting the entire region;
- Promoting active work for media education and awareness of the importance of youth participation, as a crucial contribution to the Regional Plan for Literacy and Young Democratic Participation.

Involvement of youth in the process of development and management of the initiative

Young people were involved in the preparation and are involved in the current and future implementation of the Project.

First of all, young people, aged between 13 and 30, from the nine islands of the Azores, who participated in the Young People with a Voice consultation process were involved in the design of the project and will

be involved in its implementation. They were invited to participate in Participatory Laboratories; and they will be called upon to define the final version of the Youth Meeting program; to get involved in the preparation and implementation of activities, to publicise the project; and to register for the Youth Meeting - I'm ON! -; to follow the Are You ON? Campaign; to use the materials made available by the organisation and to disseminate the results of the project.

Furthermore, as young people involved in the project, mention should be made of the three young members of the Key Staff of the Project that work on the Regional Directorate for Youth: Inês Lalanda, 27 years old, graduated in Public Relations and Communication; Mariana Borges, 24 years old, graduated in European Studies and International Relations and Tânia Aguiar, 24 years old, graduated in Social Work.

The Are you ON?! Project is an initiative by young people, with young people, and for young people.

Aspects of Social Inclusion and Gender Equality:

The Project is aimed at azorean young people. Young Azoreans face increased challenges: job market opportunities; formal and non-formal education; transnational mobility; and proximity to decision-making centres; among others. The world in which we live today is full of challenges of various kinds.

The young people covered will be aged between 16 and 30 and will fit into the following profiles:

- Part of Youth Associations;
- Students;
- Involved in civic movements;
- Participants of Youth with a Voice consultation process;
- Young people who are not in the education or training system or work (NEET).

This Project allows young azoreans to establish contact with each other and with young people from other parts of the country. Thus, the project aims to overcome what geography separates.

NEET young people will be involved in the Project, as a public who live other challenges, such as educational, economic, and social. Empowering young NEETs to face these challenges through available information is fundamental to promoting inclusion.

All activities are prepared for people with special needs, including the Youth Meeting - I'm ON! -, in person. Using accessible language is essential. We open all initiatives to young azoreans in general. Also, the Project has included the monitoring and evaluation (based on feedback from young people) phases so that we can be aware of those indicators.

The Regional Youth Directorate defends that a young person is not an island: not limited, nor does it end in itself. The Project aims for young people to be connected safely, responsibly, and aware of the impact they can leave on their communities, through their active participation.

Duration of the initiative:

The Project is still ongoing. It started with the ideas, shared by young people, that are in its genesis in 2023. In the same year, it was the object of an application for the Erasmus+ Program and was approved.

It is currently in the implementation phase: one of the activities has already taken place. The other two activities are in the preparation phase.

The Project addresses a very valid topic whose importance is growing nowadays. For the impact of the Project to be guaranteed in the long term, it is essential that the content created within the scope of this same Program is stored and shared and that themes related to Media Literacy are continuously worked on. Above all, it is essential to give young people solid knowledge and tools that they can apply in their daily lives, thus proving the effectiveness of the Project.

Tell us in three key points: why do you think your submitted initiative should receive the MYFER Award?

The Are you ON?! Project presents several reasons why it is special:

- It involves young people: shows that the Regional Government is attentive to the concerns expressed by Azorean youth and seeks to respond to them;
- It works on a subject that is very present in our lives and seeks to enhance the transformative capacity of each citizen towards a more enlightened, knowledgeable, actively participatory society;
- It is an unfinished construction: it is the beginning of work that is intended to be continuous.

The MYFER Award is an opportunity for the Azores to publicise the youth policies they implement in a context as peculiar as ours: archipelagic and outermost. Therefore, we participate in this sharing of good practices in the hope that it will recognise the commitment we have made to Azorean youth.

Name of your organisation / company / public body: Regional Directorate for Youth - Regional Government of the Azores

Type of entity: Regional authority

#10 THE AZORES | REGIONAL PLAN FOR LITERACY AND YOUNG DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION (DEMOCRACIAZ)

Region where the initiative takes place: Azores, Portugal (Government of the Azores - Regional Directorate for Youth)

Website:

- <https://portal.azores.gov.pt/en/web/comunicacao/news-detail?id=11171449>
- <https://radioilheu.pt/atualidade-projeto-estas-on-informa-te-debate-e-decide-arranca-nos-acoresh/>
- <https://portal.azores.gov.pt/en/web/comunicacao/news-detail?id=9440423>
- <https://www.radioatlantida.net/jovens-dos-12-aos-30-anos-vao-dar-contributos-para-promover-uma-cultura-democratica-nos-acoresh/>
- <https://jornalacoresh9.pt/2023/06/28/jovens-vao-dar-contributos-para-o-plano-regional-de-literacia-dos-acoresh/?amp=1>
- <https://www.freguesias.pt/portal/noticia.php?id=22450&cod=200703>
- <https://praiaexpresso.com/2023/10/15/regiao-reune-condicoes-para-ser-uma-referencia-de-democracia-e-participacao-juvenil-defende-maria-joao-carreiro/>

- <https://www.acorianooriental.pt/noticia/governo-dos-aco-res-promove-seminario-democracia-e-participacao-dos-jovens-351580>
- Official Website: <https://juventude.azores.gov.pt/programa/DAZ/>

Brief description of the initiative:

The Regional Plan for Literacy and Young Democratic Participation (DemocraciAZ) is a priority defined by the Regional Secretariat for Youth, Housing and Employment of the Government of the Azores, through the Regional Directorate for Youth.

The Plan aims to:

- define a transversal and integrated strategy to promote political and democratic literacy of the youth community;
- develop a democratic culture;
- promote the participation of young people in decision-making processes and be an instrument of media education.

The Plan has four key axes: Democratic Literacy, Electoral system and principles of democratic functioning, Participatory Ecosystem, and Media Literacy.

The process of building the Plan involves the following phases:

- Seminar “Democracy and Participation of Young People” to launch the process of consultation and reflection around the construction of the Plan (has already taken place);
- Study of the Azores Youth Observatory 'What do the young people from the Azores think about democracy and politics?' to assess levels of knowledge and practices, about democratic culture, regional political system, political participation, and media literacy (has already happened);
- Youth with a Voice consultation process, on the 9 islands of the Azores, to collect contributions from young people to the Plan (has already taken place);
- Sectoral meetings with departments of the Regional Government of the Azores (ongoing);
- Sectoral meetings with civil society partners (in preparation).

The objective is for the Plan to be built collectively, either by collecting ideas from young people and surveying the needs they present; either by consulting other departments of the regional administration; or by civil society: each party makes its contribution and presents how it can be actively involved in its field of action to promote the Plan and its objectives.

Impact and regional dimension of the initiative:

DemocraciAZ is based on the active participation of the region, as it is promoted by the regional public administration, through the Regional Directorate for Youth. The Plan considers the geographic, economic, and social specificities of the Region - an archipelago of nine islands and the outermost region of the EU and the particularity of the Region being endowed with political and administrative autonomy. Those facts bring special interest to the project as it works with democracy in how it is expressed at various levels that impact young people and citizens in general: from the local, the regional, and national to the supranational.

The Plan has a regional scope, so its impacts can be felt at this level because:

- It ensures that young people from all islands - even the smallest and most isolated - have equitable access to resources and opportunities for education and political participation, addressing regional disparities.
- It uses a comprehensive approach, integrating diverse educational and participatory methodologies to effectively engage young people to reach a wider audience and address different learning styles and preferences, through non-formal education.
- It places a strong emphasis on practical involvement and encourages young people to participate in local governance, community projects, and civic discussions, translating political and democratic literacy into tangible actions, thus promoting a culture of active citizenship.

Involvement of youth in the process of development and management of the initiative:

Young people are actively involved in the Plan.

Firstly, we refer to the young people who participated in the Youth with a Voice consultation process. They are young people from the nine islands of the Azores, aged between 12 and 30. These young people were a fundamental part of this Plan because they:

- debated, reflected, and recognized themselves as active citizens and a fundamental part of the development of their communities;
- identified challenges and opportunities;
- developed proposals capable of responding to the constraints observed.

This moment of consultation marked the beginning of the work related to the Plan, as it is understood that this is an empowering moment for the young community in political, democratic, and media literacy matters. These young people continue to be called upon to participate in activities that take place in parallel, such as:

- the Tu Fazes Parte initiative (which aims to encourage young people to participate in parish assemblies in their places of residence and involve them in decisions that affect their lives and their communities);
- Project Are you ON?! – Be Aware, debate and take action!;
- between others.

Secondly, we refer to the young people who were the target of the Study 'What do the young people from the Azores think about democracy and politics?'. With the responses collected and through the collaboration of young people, it was possible to assess the degree of affinity of young people from the Azores with the themes of the Plan.

Thirdly, we refer to the young women on the Regional Directorate for Youth team who are linked to the management and implementation of the Plan.

Aspects of Social Inclusion and Gender Equality:

DemocraciAZ was designed to be inclusive, representative, and participatory. For this reason, the Plan is open to participation (at this stage) and will see the entire region covered in the diversity that makes it (like the European Union itself) United in Diversity!

The Plan demonstrates the characteristics mentioned above as follows:

- It includes young Azoreans as a whole and adopts online participation tools that make it easy to reach young people who cannot take part in initiatives in person.
- It guarantees accessibility to all infrastructures where in-person events take place.
- It includes assessment and monitoring moments based on young people's assessments.
- It implements consultation processes open to the entire population.
- It bears in mind that the topic must be addressed in simple and practical language so that it can be easily understood by all recipients.

Duration of the initiative:

The Regional Plan for Literacy and Young Democratic Participation (DemocraciAZ) is still ongoing:

- DemocraciAZ began in January 2023, with the general organisation of the Plan and the organisation of the Study 'What do the young people from the Azores think about democracy and politics?'.
 ● Between March and April 2023, it was defined the strategic objectives of the Plan, followed by its Presentation in June of the same year.
 ● After that, the Youth with a Voice consultation process happened, in September and October of the same year.
 ● Currently, sectoral meetings with other departments of the Regional Government of the Azores are taking place, and meetings with civil society partners will follow. The meetings aim to collect proposals for actions to strategic and operational objectives.
 ● Following this, the preliminary proposal for the Plan can be prepared and subsequently presented, approved, and published by the Governmental bodies of the Region.
 ● The various steps that make up the Plan guarantee the parties involved commitment. After its approval, the Plan foresees the evaluation of the measurement indicators and goals of the Proposals that comprise it to ensure the sustainability of its initiatives.

Tell us in three key points: why do you think your submitted initiative should receive the MYFER Award?

DemocraciAZ is a priority for the Regional Government of the Azores and is recognized for its potential positive impact on young people's lives. It is special because:

- It demonstrates non-conformity towards today's challenges and young people's commitment to facing them;
- It leverages the natural closeness of young Azoreans with their elected representatives;
- It uses a multilevel strategy to enhance participation and democratic literacy.

DemocraciAZ benefits the Azores and serves as an exemplary model for other regions.

Name of your organisation/company/public body: Regional Directorate for Youth - Regional Government of the Azores

Type of entity: Regional authority

#11 THE AZORES | ENTREPRENEURIAL ACADEMY: SCHOOL FOR LEADERS

Region where the initiative takes place: Azores, Portugal (Government of the Azores - Regional Directorate for Youth)

Website: <https://juventude.azores.gov.pt/en/programa/ae/>

Brief description of the initiative:

Teacher training (at the beginning of each school year)

- Application of the training package in the School Context, in social action institutions and in University Education (during the 1st and 2nd quarter of each academic year)
- Monitoring, mentoring and pedagogical support; (during the 1st and 2nd quarter of each academic year)
- Local Ideas Competition (organised by schools and Social Action Institutions) (March/April 2024)
- Açores Regional Competition (May of each academic year)

Statistical data from the 3 previous editions

- Implementation on the 9 Azores Islands, with around 3000 young people involved and around 80 teachers and technicians, in 48 schools in the 19 municipalities of the Azores.
- The Program was also implemented in 4 social action institutions – Kairós, Cáritas on Terceira Island, Casa de Povo de Água de Pau and APADIF (Association of Parents and Friends of the Disabled on Faial Island).
- Participation of 20 young university students in the digital ideation training course for Higher Education and the presence of 6 teams in the Regional competitions.
- The team of Regional Leaders that included 38 young people, one from each municipality in the Azores who were able to support young people's projects and motivate them to be entrepreneurs.
- The 19.Açores Regional Competitions – Academia Jovem de Ideias Inovadoras had around 120 ideas in competition, from 2nd cycle to higher education, from 9 Islands, with the participation of around 270 young people and 120 teachers.
- Global investment in previous editions was around €260,000.00.

Impact and regional dimension of the initiative:

The impact in the Region is enormous, with small local businesses having already emerged, created by young people who went through the program, such as an artisanal cheese factory, gardening companies, web content creation services, among others.

The program is transferable to other national and European regions, as an international version has already been implemented under the Erasmus Program *, with Spanish, Bulgarian and Romanian partners, with great success.

Involvement of youth in the process of development and management of the initiative:

Young people actively participate in the program, developing a range of practical activities, and present their business ideas in a local and regional competition, carrying out tests, models and prototypes.

Aspects of Social Inclusion and Gender Equality:

Inclusion is guaranteed because students from schools, social action entities and prisons participate.

Duration of the initiative:

The Entrepreneurial Academy: School of Leaders program has existed since 2021 and is the evolution of the Entrepreneurial Education: The Path to Success program, which lasted from 2011 to 20221. It consists of implementing a training path in a school environment that develops entrepreneurial skills in students of all levels of education in Basic, Secondary, Professional and Higher Education, which ends in a regional competition for innovative ideas, the “I9.Açores – Academia Jovem de Ideias Inovadoras”.

In parallel, young leaders are trained, who stand out for their entrepreneurial and active attitude in society and who will serve as junior mentors for younger young people.

For the first time, in 2023/24, a pilot project was carried out for young inmates at the Ponta Delgada Prison Establishment, which covered 15 young people and which will be expanded to other prison establishments in the Azores in the coming years.

Tell us in three key points: why do you think your submitted initiative should receive the MYFER Award?

The great enthusiasm of teachers, students and local communities, the high number of participants in each edition and the quality of business ideas created and presented publicly, contribute to innovation in the Region.

Name of your organisation / company / public body: Regional Directorate for Youth - Regional Government of the Azores

Type of entity: Regional authority

#12 BRUSSELS-CAPITAL REGION | THE YOUTH COALITION OF MOLENBEEK FOR BRUSSELS 2030

Region where the initiative takes place: Brussels-Capital Region (Belgium)

Website: You can find all the videos, photos, links to articles, and a paper representing the project here: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/16X1i6pIMLo38okAyE5rPEsXk0QOAFGI3?usp=share_link

Brief description of the initiative:

The Youth Coalition is a group of 100 young people from throughout the Brussels-Capital Region who will embody 1,000 demands collected during the first phase of the Speak Up Brussels! project that started at the Brussels Parliament on September 9, 10 and 24, 2023.

The Youth Coalition is part of the "Co-creation" project of Molenbeek for Brussels 2030, Brussels' bid to become European Capital of Culture in 2030, that is then used as a basis for the artistic programme and the candidacy.

During the first day of Youth Coalition, the members were divided into 6 commissions:

- Commission 1 : Social Cohesion - community & younger generations / education / work
- Commission 2 : Identity & Culture
- Commission 3 : Mobility
- Commission 4 : Nature & Climate
- Commission 5: Living conditions & Urban planning
- Commission 6: Safety

Commission sessions: discussions, creation of sub-themes. On the second day of the Youth Coalition, we invited one person from civil society to act as the "Inspirators" for each commission.

The Third day of the Youth Coalition was dedicated to a "Crosstalk" moment, during which all the commissions were able to discuss cross-cutting issues that concern different commissions. For example, accessibility for persons with reduced mobility (PRMs) concerns the Mobility commission, but also the "Safety" commission, and the "Living conditions & Urban planning" commission for the "Social cohesion" sub-theme.

The presentation of the young people's proposals went very well. In all, the 100 young people put forward 19 ideas for the future to political and civil society stakeholders.

Members of the Brussels Parliament, ministers, party members, group leaders and members of civil society gathered in the hemicycle to listen to the young people of the Youth Coalition.

Read the Manifesto of the Youth Coalition here:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/1/folders/1MIHQmeiZBWFksWzs2r9GfmqkTDpDifm>

Impact and regional dimension of the initiative:

The Brussels-Capital Region is involved in this initiative.

The candidacy of MB2030 for the title of European Capital of Culture is an initiative of the Brussels-Capital Region. One of the key objectives is to further develop and strengthen the Region's social cohesion, following the terrorist attacks of 2016 in Brussels. It also aims to further develop a European consciousness at the heart of the capital of Europe.

Impacts of the Youth Coalition:

Participating in the candidacy for a city project, a unique experience: It's the first time that Brussels' young people have the opportunity to be decision makers in regional issues that concern them, as well as their present and future well-being in their city. Indeed, the bid of 2030 was born out of young people's desires for their future.

The 100 young people developed six themes in depth on the basis of 1,000 contributions from young people in Brussels. In doing so, they had the opportunity to process the opinions and ideas of many young people in Brussels. These themes will be integrated into the MB2030 bid.

Empowerment: It's important for us to make the Brussels youth understand that their voices count. We value their opportunity to speak up. We let young people express themselves as much as possible, by creating as many different models of expression as possible, with the help of facilitators.

Creating "US" and networking: The added value of the project is to create a new Brussels ""WE"" with 100 other young people (over three full days) and, by extension, all platform participants. It's a long reflection on their city and their future in the city. A unique initiative that values the great diversity of Brussels whilst promoting a shared identity.

With the Youth Coalition, we want to enable its members to connect with other young people, experts and politicians from different backgrounds. Sometimes, what the most vulnerable young people lack are connections, contacts and networks.

Opportunities: Since the creation of the Youth Coalition, we've had a number of requests to participate in various events, meetings and projects. We allow young people to participate in all these events, taking care to ensure that the opportunities are relevant to their interests. They met with ministers (from the Brussels-Capital Region) & members of civil society organisations to exchange on regional challenges, such as sustainable development, a better understanding between the youth and the police, and others.

Read the full list of representants on page 9 on the full document available here: <https://drive.google.com/drive/u/1/folders/16X1i6pIMLo38okAyE5rPEsXkOQOAFGI3>

How is the initiative transferable to another region?

The initiative is transferable to all regions in order to involve its youth in the political, economic, social and cultural scene of their region.

Involvement of youth in the process of development and management of the initiative:

The members of the Youth Coalition have been thoroughly involved into the Youth Coalition initiative throughout its development, management, and implementation phases:

Development: The project began with the Speak Up Brussels! initiative, engaging 1,000 young people to gather their questions and concerns about Brussels' future. This input laid the groundwork for the Youth Coalition.

Management: From the 1,000 participants, 100 young representatives were selected to form the Youth Coalition. These representatives were divided into six commissions focusing on Social Cohesion, Identity & Culture, Mobility, Nature & Climate, Living Conditions & Urban Planning, and Safety. Young people led discussions and developed sub-themes within these commissions. The coordination of the Youth Coalition is led by a Young person: Astrid Begenyeza.

Implementation: During commission sessions, young members collaborated with ""Inspirators"" from civil society for guidance. In the ""Crosstalk"" sessions, they discussed intersecting issues across commissions,

ensuring a holistic approach. The initiative culminated with the young representatives presenting 19 proposals to the Brussels Parliament members, ministers, and civil society leaders.

Throughout the project, young people provided continuous feedback and adapted the initiative based on their evolving insights. Their sustained engagement ensured that their voices significantly influenced the project's direction and outcomes, from initial data collection to high-level proposal presentations.

During the Youth Coalition formation, we made sure to always be in a “co-creation” process. We worked with votes in the Hemicycle of the Parliament to ask how young people envisaged the way forward. For instance, they chose to propose their solutions for the Future of Brussels in front of the Ministers, but they didn't want to receive an answer from them.

Aspects of Social Inclusion and Gender Equality:

For the first phase of the project (Speak Up Brussels), we conducted a number of workshops in various organisations (schools, youth centres, museums, sport clubs, universities...) , from all the communes of the Brussels-Capital Region, to ensure diversity of gender, age, geographical location, and cultural background.

Selection process: we put out a call for participation on social networks, as well as by email. We also contacted all the young people we met at the Speak Up Brussels! workshops who had previously expressed an interest in the Youth Coalition.

The conditions for selection were to complete the Speak Up Brussels! platform, and to show their commitment to Brussels through a letter or video. Once the conditions were met, based on Brussels' demographic statistics, we were able to form a representative and diverse group of 100 young Brussels citizens aged between 15 and 30. Throughout this group's formation process, special attention was given to the integration of gender equality and the inclusion of otherwise under-represented groups, for example from different socio-economic background/situation, ethnic backgrounds, young people with a disability, and with a wide linguistic diversity. The operation was a huge success! The motivation and commitment of the young people far exceeded our expectations. In addition, equality and social inclusion are mainstreamed in the proposed actions.

Throughout the process, we were also supported by a steering committee made up of Ben Eersels (G1000), Darby Lubamba (Agence 95), Joanna Maycock (W100), Stéphane Vansantvoet (Brussels Parliament), Yasmina Aboudarr (Débagora), Lémane Imeri (Les Ambassadeurs d'expression citoyenne). The members of the Steering committee are involved in youth participation, democracy, and inclusion.

Duration of the initiative:

The Youth Coalition gives a voice to the youth of Molenbeek & the region of Brussels. The whole candidature is decided on the basis of the Youth Coalition; what the Brussels' youth wants for their future.

How did we start? The genesis of the Youth Coalition project was the Speak Up! project, part of the MB2030 (Molenbeek for Brussels 2030, candidacy of the Brussels-Capital Region as European Capital of Culture in 2030) co-creation project.

Between January and August 2023, we - the co-creation team of Molenbeek for Brussels 2030, with the help of 50 Youth organisations - went out to meet 1,000 young people under the age of 30 throughout the Brussels-Capital Region, to find out what questions they had for the future of Brussels. To gather these questions, we went through various structures to meet young people: secondary schools, universities, youth centres, summer camps, sports and cultural centres. We even did street interviews. Altogether, we were lucky enough to collaborate with 50 organisations along the way.

These 1000 questions on the future of Brussels are collected on the SpeakUp platform: www.Brussels2030.be/Speakup

The project Speak Up helped the Youth Coalition to be a success (You will find the details about the Youth Coalition in the second question). The outcomes of the Youth Coalition is a Manifesto of 19 solutions defined by Brussels' youth for their future. The Manifesto is the basis of the Molenbeek for Brussels 2030 Candidacy.

The Youth Coalition is still ongoing until the submission of the Bid-book. After that, whether we get the title or not, we will continue to empower, amplify the youth' voices for Molenbeek and the Region of Brussels through culture.

If we obtain the title of Capital of Culture, our objective will be: Integrating young talents as a vital force in our mission, facilitating work experience in the cultural sector, and being an inherent part of the team. Working with young artists, with a focus on artists with specific backgrounds or working on specific topics that reveals the potential of the Brussel's youth. Scholarships and broaden the criteria so that more young people qualify, and by providing more opportunities for non-professionals and in schools to join the work. Partnerships with other cities to encourage exchange of talents, and creating opportunities for youngsters to go abroad.

Tell us in three key points: why do you think your submitted initiative should receive the MYFER Award?

Deep Youth Engagement: Involving 1,000 young people from diverse backgrounds, our project empowers youth to lead discussions, develop proposals, and engage directly with policymakers. Indeed, this is the first youth platform of its kind which gathers young people's voices from throughout the Brussels-Capital Region This youth-led project contributes to position young people's valuable role in society, including to improve young people's social inclusion and living conditions.

Furthermore, the deep engagement lies in the fact that all their wishes for their future in 2030 will be exhausted in the framework of the European Capital of Culture. The Youth Coalition continues to be involved in the implementation of the candidate city. Gradually, it will transform into a reservoir of ambassadors for the programme in 2030, but also as volunteers, interns, or employees and collaborators. We want to engage in Fostering youth talents.

Holistic Approach: Organised into six commissions, the Youth Coalition addresses interconnected issues comprehensively, enriched by a collaboration with civil society ""Inspirators.""

Impactful Outcomes: The presentation of 19 proposals to high-level stakeholders has ensured that youth voices influenced policy and community planning in the Brussels-Capital Region. The Youth Coalition is an

innovative project which has materialised the importance of youth policies at regional level. We created a strong community of engaged young people in Brussels, and created bridges between young people from different political horizons, age (between 15 and 30 years old), gender, ethnic communities, ability status, neighbourhoods and socio-economic status.

Name of your organisation / company / public body: Molenbeek for Brussels 2030.

Type of entity: Non-Profit created by the Region of Brussels-Capital.