

**THINK BIG
DO LITTLE**

**START
AVALANCHE**



Young
Researchers
of Serbia

Voluntary Service of Serbia

**2024 ANNUAL ACTIVITY
REPORT OF
YOUNG RESEARCHERS OF SERBIA**

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I. INTRODUCTION – YRS AND 2024.

Activities of Young Researchers of Serbia in 2024 took place in very challenging social and geopolitical circumstances in Serbia, Europe and the world.

Late 2023 and early 2024 were marked by a snap election, as well as citizens' protests over electoral fraud. During the summer and early autumn, the reinstatement of the license to the company Rio Tinto for the implementation of the Jadar project sparked vigorous protests. Citizens, environmental activists, civil society and the scientific community united against the project, fearing irreversible environmental damage in the Jadar valley. The demonstrations reflected deep concern over environmental degradation, suspicions of a corrupt relationship with the private company Rio Tinto, and profound distrust in institutions and their capacity and willingness to assess the public interest and to enforce environmental and regulatory standards.

Reform processes in Serbia did not progress at the expected and desired pace, which led to further slowing of the European integration process and, coupled with other unfavorable factors, to a decline in public support for accession to the European Union.

In the tabloid media, the negative campaign targeting civil society organizations continued, along with labeling representatives of the civil sector as foreign agents, enemies of the state and spies.

The collapse of a canopy at the Novi Sad railway station on November 1, causing the deaths of 15 people, brought about public outrage and triggered a new wave of protests.

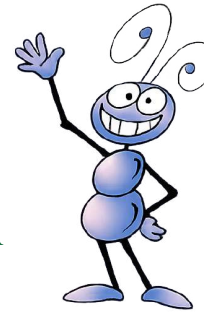
Working in a highly unfavorable environment and under difficult conditions, Young Researchers of Serbia sought to fulfill their role by monitoring the implementation of reforms (primarily in the area of environmental protection and climate change), proposing and recommending improvements, involving citizens in decision-making processes and promoting European values, volunteering and the rule of law.

Through its programs, projects and activities, Young Researchers of Serbia managed to contribute to the improvement of public policies by advocating dialogue and participation. Together with partner civil society organizations engaged in environmental protection from 23 municipalities across Serbia, we sought solutions to accumulated problems in local communities, worked to improve dialogue with local decision-makers, promoted the right to participate in decision-making processes and the right to a healthy environment, while simultaneously strengthening the organizations themselves to make them more sustainable and indispensable actors in the communities from which they originate. We intensified cooperation with protected area managers, and by supporting informal groups of citizens from communities surrounding protected areas, we contributed to nature conservation and adaptation to changing climate conditions.

Through volunteer programs, volunteer work camps and support to informal youth groups, we motivated young people to become active members of their communities and promoted solidarity and tolerance.

Believing in the power of collective action, we strengthened the existing partnerships and actively contributed to the networks of civil society organizations of which we are members.

Tanja Petrović
Executive Director of Young Researchers of Serbia



2. ABOUT THE YOUNG RESEARCHERS OF SERBIA

Young Researchers of Serbia (YRS) is a non-profit, non-governmental and non-party organization that evolved from a research movement originating in 1969 in Valjevo.

In 1976, it was officially established as a network of research organizations, societies, clubs and sections, brought together by shared interest and coordinated by a national-level office. The number of YRS's members has changed throughout its history, but it is beyond doubt that more than 50 different organizations were its members at one point in time. In the 1990s, the organization of Young Researchers of Serbia was transformed by abandoning the vertical hierarchy form of organization, and from thereon it continued to evolve and change by adapting to the development of the civil sector in Serbia.

Voluntary Service of Serbia and the Aarhus Center Novi Beograd are part of YRS.

VISION

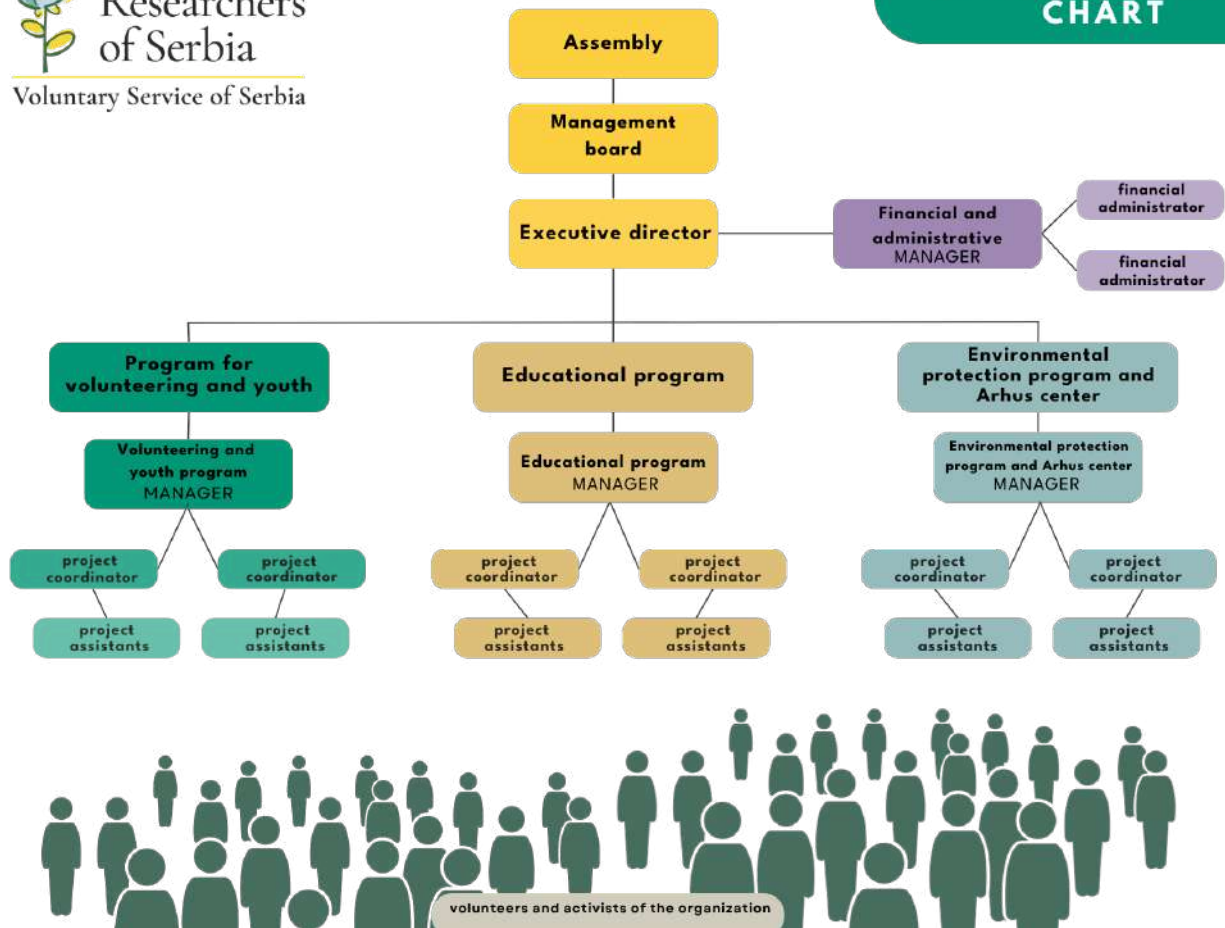
We stand for a world in which natural resources are used sustainably, and a society that is just, solidary and affords equal opportunities to everyone and support for development.

MISSION

Our mission is to be a driving force in society which contributes to the environmental protection and the sustainable development of communities by using scientific knowledge through educational programs, environmental and climate action and volunteering.

VALUES

YRS stands for the preservation of freedoms, environmental justice and transparency, equality and solidarity in society and the participation of all in designing and implementing the public interest.



Infographic 1. Organizational Structure of the Organization

YRS team in 2024

Managing Board: Dragana Randelović, PhD – Chair; Snežana Jovičić, PhD, Aleksandar Ristić, Violeta Orlović, PhD, and Bogdan Radić

Executive Director: Tanja Petrović

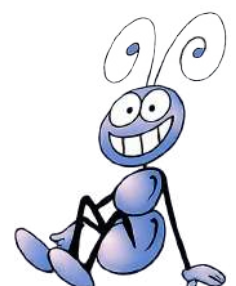
Program/Sector Managers: Milka Gvozdrenović, Aleksandar Ristić, Dušica Trnavac Bogdanović and Sanda Plavec

Coordinators: Tijana Ljubenović, Olivera Stepanović and Nataša Milaković

Assistants: Nebojša Knežević and Katarina Klačnja

Secretary of Coalition 27: Milena Antić

Financial Administrator: Vera Bukilić Radusin



3. IMPACT OF YRS ACTIVITIES IN 2024

In 2024, Young Researchers of Serbia:

- ➔ informed and educated the public on various topics related to environmental protection and volunteering;
- ➔ built the capacities of citizens' associations, informal groups and protected area managers in the context of environmental protection and volunteering;
- ➔ advocated on issues of importance for environmental protection and volunteering.

Owing to the work of the Young Researchers of Serbia:

VOLUNTEERING IS INCREASINGLY RECOGNIZED AS AN IMPORTANT TOOL FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, AND MECHANISMS AND VOLUNTEERING PROGRAMS HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED THROUGHOUT SERBIA THAT CONTRIBUTE TO STRENGTHENING SOCIETY'S CAPACITY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.

VOLUNTEERING IN SERBIA



“Activities such as cleaning the village and the the riverbanks directly contribute to environmental protection and increase attractiveness for tourists. The revitalization of infrastructure (a viewpoint, a basketball court, a camping area) creates a foundation for continuous use and enjoyment, while the festival and workshops build cultural and social awareness, which can inspire similar activities in the future. Volunteers gained new knowledge and experiences that they will carry with them, spreading the story of Topli Do and the importance of togetherness in preserving nature and tradition.

Partners from the local community participated in various stages of the project – from planning and preparation to the actual implementation of the festival and the volunteer camp. Local volunteers were actively involved in cleaning the village, improving the area, organizing activities and providing logistical support during the festival.

We believe our cooperation with the Young Researchers of Serbia to be very good and highly significant for the implementation of this project. Since there is always a great deal of work to be done in a virtually abandoned mountain village, and we cannot fully rely on the local population to participate in all the projects we organize, our main goal was to receive help from visiting volunteers – both in the restoration of the village and in organizing the festival. I can say that these expectations were fully met and that the contribution in terms of manpower was invaluable. I would particularly like to commend the Young Researchers of Serbia for their availability and support during the preparation and implementation of the camp”.

Association I Love Topli Do

VOLUNTEERS TRAINING AND EDUCATION



“We learned or improved our knowledge about peace and techniques for maintaining it. By dividing peace into three segments – peace with ourselves, with nature and with others – we expanded the topic throughout our working space through workshops as early as the second day. I believe that when we remind ourselves of the fact that we are all human beings with similar basic needs, and that there is a tendency toward peace among us, we will be able to achieve success in a peaceful way in any international environment.”

Story of a group of participants from Serbia who took part in the Erasmus+ training "United in Diversity”

VOLUNTEERING ABROAD

“Sharing parts of ourselves awed by the pristine and profoundly unpredictable nature of Iceland.

Parts of ourselves concerned about the potential endangerment of such richness that we have just witnessed.

Parts of ourselves questioning, in all the languages we know, how in such a short time people who until yesterday were complete strangers could become so close that we are already thinking about meeting again.

Parts of ourselves awakened, aware of everything on this planet that needs fixing, and of the realization that we are the ones contributing to those changes.

Parts of ourselves eager to discover new limits of our own courage, aware that through experiences like these, that limit is constantly pushed a little further.

Parts of ourselves thirsty for knowledge about new communities, cultures, and landscapes.

Parts of ourselves eager to expand our world, now realizing that being a citizen of the world is not a cliché, but the ability to embrace kind human souls across the globe, to learn through new encounters and to grow together, with pride reflected in the smiles of volunteers after a job well done.

The volunteer camp in Iceland was the sharing of all these parts of ourselves, after which we returned home many times richer and better.

Better us and at least a slightly better world.”

Story from the contest "Backpack Full of Stories"

EMPOWERED CIVIL SOCIETY, WITH GREATER INFLUENCE AND COMPETENCE TO TAKE PART IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES IN AN INFORMED MANNER AND TO IMPLEMENT ACTIVITIES AIMED AT ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT.



SUPPORT TO INFORMAL GROUPS OF CITIZENS

“The project "(Pre)serve Gradac!" ((Sa)čuvajmo Gradac!) is our first initiative which we implemented as the informal group Clean Air Council Valjevo with your help and support (and for the first time, we applied for funding for the implementation of a project).

Judging by the results, it turns out that the saying that you must spoil before you spin does not hold true.

Jokes aside, through the implementation of the project and its activities, we as an informal group also became more active, trained, empowered and built our capacity for teamwork under newly emerging circumstances. In the meantime, we changed our name and became the Environmental Protection Council Valjevo, with interests extending not only to air quality, but to all aspects of environmental protection – water, air, soil, and their impact on human health.

It is a particular honor and pleasure for us to have collaborated with the excellent team of the Gradac Ecological Society. With their help, we discovered the beauty of this protected area, including those parts that may seem hidden at first glance, yet possess a special charm and beauty.

Thank you to the YRS team for enabling us to be green heroes! It's a wonderful feeling.”

Coordinator of the informal group “Council for Clean Air Valjevo”

SUPPORT TO CITIZENS' ASSOCIATIONS

Through the "ECO-SYSTEM" program, volunteer fire departments from Kraljevo and the surrounding area, with a tradition spanning nearly 100 years, have become a strong voice for nature. Through their courage, solidarity and care for the environment, they have been improving their work for four years now and inspiring women to actively join their ranks. One of the major fires this year broke out in the inaccessible terrain of Mount Troglav, above Bogutovac near Kraljevo. The fire destroyed vast areas of forest and low vegetation. Around 280 hectares were consumed by flames, endangering many wild animals inhabiting the area.

If nature could speak, it would repeat the words of the members of the Padobranci Voluntary Fire Brigade, who fought the fire on Troglav from the very first day, "We are glad that we found and successfully cared for a fawn. We managed to save it, but much of the wildlife had perished.

The establishment of the Padobranci Voluntary Fire Brigade was initiated in cooperation with the Volunteer Fire Department Kraljevo, which has been supported through the "ECO-SYSTEM" program implemented by the Young Researchers of Serbia with the support of Sweden.

With the support of Sweden, a water intake facility was also constructed, enabling more effective firefighting in inaccessible terrain and further strengthening the fight against wildfires.

INFORMED PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

The "Public to Act" (Javnost na potezu) campaign was a joint effort of Coalition 27, focused on encouraging public participation in the consultation process for the development of the Environmental Protection Strategy of the Republic of Serbia. This initiative emphasized the importance of transparency and civic engagement in shaping environmental protection policies. The Young Researchers of Serbia prepared recommendations in the area of nature protection, while the Belgrade Open School, the Environment Improvement Center and Environment Engineering Group prepared recommendations for other areas. All comments and recommendations were made available as a source of information, support and encouragement for citizens who wished to take part in the public consultation process.

At the same time, a social media campaign was organized, highlighting key topics: environmental protection, air quality, and biodiversity, and inviting citizens to submit joint comments on the proposed document.

INCREASED PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND COMPETENCES OF CITIZENS IN RELATION TO THE ENVIRONMENT AS A RESULT OF INNOVATIVE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS.

Citizens donating for nature

Kornjača spornjača

The main idea of the campaign was to raise awareness and sensitize the general public about donations for nature.

Through the campaign, funds were collected to support research (by the Faculty of Biology in Belgrade) and the protection of pond turtles inhabiting the habitats within the Kraljevac Special Nature Reserve.

A total of 840,200 dinars was raised from 208 donors.

During the campaign, the following were organized: nine different live events, 11 TV appearances and three radio appearances. The campaign achieved high visibility: over 60 social media posts, reaching 1,753,213 citizens, with more than 20 collaborators involved.

Artists promoting sustainable habits

Don't Buy - Create!

The objective of the contest "Don't Buy – Create! Shop Less, Gift Creativity" was to use the art of up cycling as a tool to raise awareness about changing habits in order to reduce the impact of climate change and contribute to biodiversity protection. The campaign reached 366,287 people solely through social media, and over two million people learned about it through online and traditional media.

A total of 60 submissions – artworks – were received (entries came from five secondary art schools, ten universities and academies, and independent artists).

A group exhibition of the works was held from December 16 to 19, 2024, at KC Grad. More than 100 people attended the opening of the exhibition.

Active individuals protecting nature

Volunteers are nature peers (Volonteri prirodi po meri)

The recipient of the award in 2024, within the contest organized by YRS, was Zoran Savković from Aleksandrovac. Zoran is a relentless protector of nature in his region, whose long-standing and dedicated volunteer work in the field of environmental protection is focused on the Aleksandrovac district and the mountains of Kopaonik and Goč. In the district villages, he has succeeded in motivating institutions and the local community to take concrete actions, such as the removal of an illegal landfill in the village of Grčak. Zoran initiated a campaign against the discharge of hazardous substances into the Trnavačka River, led an effort to ban the operation of an asphalt production plant in the village of Novaci, fought against the construction of a quarry at the Rađevce site, and initiated the revitalization of the said site. His volunteer work and activities aimed at environmental protection and improving the quality of life for people have been recognized both within the local community and beyond. Zoran is a role model, a leader and a catalyst for change in the fight to preserve nature. Through his work and dedication, he has succeeded in motivating and inspiring people of different generations, especially the youth, to actively engage and take action for the protection of the environment.

4. ANALYSIS OF ACHIEVED OBJECTIVES AND RESULTS

The Strategic Plan of the Young Researchers of Serbia was adopted in 2023 and serves as the foundation for developing action plans, program work plans and projects.

Following the frameworks set by the Action Plan in 2024, the YRS team worked on all strategic and operational program objectives, and through the implementation of numerous activities, the expected results were achieved.

During 2024, the development of diverse volunteer programs continued, contributing to the development of local communities, with a focus on topics related to sustainable development and environmental protection, through education, financial support and networking (Operational Program Objective 1.1). Partnerships were established with the scientific community, schools, protected area managers, local self-governments, civil society organizations and local businesses in the implementation of camps (Result 1.1). Additionally, a project proposal was developed, which was subsequently approved by a donor and will develop a volunteer program focused on sustainable development in protected areas and promote its results (Result 1.2).

Various educational packages were developed (online courses, trainings, brochures, leaflets) and promoted through protected areas, universities, schools and local self-governments (Result 1.3), as well as a methodology for reaching and promoting programs tailored to the needs of target groups and partners (Result 1.5). Through the implementation of an annual thematic campaign and events aimed at promoting volunteering (Result 1.6), progress was made toward achieving Operational Program Objective 1.2. Increased public awareness on the benefits of volunteering for the development of society/local communities and benefits from the volunteering programmes implemented in partnership with CSOs, schools, informal groups, businesses etc.

As in the previous years, YRS participated in international networks and national coalitions aimed at strengthening the quality of volunteer programs and advocating for the creation of a functional legislative framework (Result 1.9), which improved quality of volunteer programs and legislative frameworks for volunteering through promotion and implementation of international standards in volunteering (Operational Program Objective 1.3).

Great interest of schools in ecological competitions

Danube Art Master

In 2024, YRS acted for the fourteenth time as the national coordinator of the Danube Art Master Competition.

As in the previous years, the contest was jointly organized by the Global Water Partnership for Central and Eastern Europe (GWP CEE) and the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR).

This year, the contest was supported regionally for the first time by the ERSTE Foundation.

Two promotional videos were produced, and a campaign was carried out on social media as well as in magazines for teachers and children.

Owing to the successful promotion, a large number of entries was submitted this year. 21 awards were given in six categories in Serbia.

At the international level, an entry from Serbia won first place in the “Video-Teenagers” category among submissions from all the countries in the Danube basin.

A total of 413 students from 40 educational institutions, representing nearly 40 municipalities and towns across Serbia, participated.



Program Strategic Objective 1. Volunteering has been recognized as an important tool for community development, and mechanisms and volunteering programs have been set in place throughout Serbia that contribute to strengthening society's capacities for sustainable development.

Success indicators for

Operational Program Objective 1.1.

➤ Over ten partnerships strengthened and established for the organization of camps.

➤ A cooperation plan for 2024–2025 developed, defining the responsibilities of stakeholders and the required resources.

➤ A project developed and approved (by the EU Delegation in Serbia) that will develop volunteer programs in protected areas.

➤ Over 60% of volunteers who participated in the activities actively joined the YRS network (they follow updates, attend promotional events, participate in camps and engage in informal initiatives and local organizations).

Success indicators for

Operational Program Objective 1.2.

➤ Content for educational packages on volunteering and volunteer camps identified and created, and then promoted at various events, through social media and via brochures.

➤ The campaign Backpack Full of Stories conducted, aimed at motivating and attracting new volunteers. A total of 25 volunteer stories were submitted, with the most compelling ones being published and awarded.

➤ Three promotional and preparatory events for volunteer camps held, where 250 young people had the opportunity to obtain information and prepare for attending a camp.

➤ Several post-camp activities with volunteers brought together over 300 young people.

➤ Get Involved (Uključi se) platform developed and promoted to inform and network volunteers, informal groups, businesses, citizens' associations and other stakeholders. Over 100 informal groups used the platform to submit project proposals.

➤ The number of volunteers increased by 10% compared to the previous year.

➤ Over 60% of the volunteers reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their participation in the activities and demonstrated readiness for further engagement.

➤ Youth Day was celebrated at the Obedska Bara Special Nature Reserve, with around 50 young participants, and the International Volunteer Day was marked with 50 participants.

➤ A contest organized and the award "Volunteers are Nature Peers" (Volonteri prirodi po meri) presented.

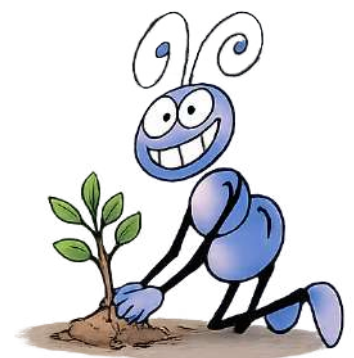
Success indicators for

Operational Program Objective 1.3.

➤ The formation of a network of partner organizations initiated to contribute to the creation of a functional legislative framework for volunteering.

➤ More than 70 different stakeholders make up the informal network Youth Rules (Mladi su zakon). These include local communities, municipalities, associations, youth offices, ministries and international organizations.

➤ During 2024, YRS participated in eight international meetings, was a member of the Alliance's Education Team and took part in at least five working groups within this network.



One of the priorities of YRS's work in 2024 was Operational Program Objective 2.1, which focuses on empowering CSOs for active participation in reforms within the EU integration process in the field of environment and climate change (Cluster 4, Chapter 27, Green Agenda). This is achieved through a capacity-building program that includes educational and financial support, as well as support through networking at the local, national and international levels.

The YRS team, in cooperation with experts, collected and assessed the needs of CSOs for support in their activities within local communities in defined priority areas of environmental protection. The findings were incorporated into the annual research (Result 2.1). During 2024, support programs were implemented for civil society organizations to carry out initiatives/projects aimed at environmental protection and improvement at the national and local levels (Result 2.3.1). In addition to this, support programs were implemented for informal groups of citizens to carry out initiatives/projects for environmental protection and improvement at the national and local levels (Result 2.3.2). YRS continuously documents examples of good practice (such as the impact of projects at the local level, capacity building, participation in decision-making, etc.) and promotes them at the national, local and international levels (Result 2.4.1). Through various activities and cooperation with other civil society organizations and certain institutions, mechanisms for citizen participation in national-level decision-making processes have been strengthened (Result 2.10).

Operational Program Objective 2.2 is a distinctive feature and is a kind of YRS tradition. The Voluntary Service of Serbia works on strengthening CSOs, partners, informal groups and individuals to implement volunteer programs and camps through a capacity-building program that provides educational and financial support, as well as support through enhanced international cooperation for volunteer exchanges. In 2024, educational programs were developed and implemented for various stakeholders on priority topics (Result 2.2). The challenges and support needs of different stakeholders for the implementation of volunteer programs and environmental protection programs were identified, and the findings were included in the annual research (Result 2.5). Educational programs and mentoring for camp leaders and organizers were developed and implemented (Result 2.6). Support for volunteer projects of informal groups of citizens was provided through the "Youth Rules" project (Result 2.7). Exchanges of more than 100 volunteers who participated in over 50 camps and programs were carried out (Result 2.9). Through the implementation of educational and informational sessions on volunteer exchange, public awareness and motivation for volunteering were increased (Result 2.11).

Although socio-political challenges in 2024 were significant, modest progress was achieved in reaching Operational Program Objective 2.3. Empowered institutions and CSOs for engaging the public and civil participation in decision-making processes that are relevant to environmental protection and monitoring the development and implementation of environmental protection/climate change policies. Through the use of various tools and capacity-building programs, CSOs were empowered to participate in decision-making processes and to monitor the development and implementation of environmental and climate change policies (Result 2.13). At the local level, through the "ECO-SYSTEM" program, certain institutions were sensibilized to the importance of public involvement and civic participation in decision-making processes (Result 2.14). Shadow Report of Coalition 27 was prepared and published, and communication materials for engagement with citizens were developed (Result 2.15).



Program Strategic Objective 2

Empowered civil society, with greater influence and competence to take part in the decision-making processes in an informed manner and to implement activities aimed at environmental protection and community development.

Success indicators for

Operational Program Objective 2.1.

- ➔ The needs of around 150 CSOs for financial support and capacity-building support assessed.
- ➔ The formulated recommendations used in planning support programs for 2025.
- ➔ The defined conclusions shared with respondents and validated as important by over 70% of them.
- ➔ Ten CSO networks – bringing together more than 40 civil society organizations – supported to implement projects through the "ECO-SYSTEM" program.
- ➔ 30% of the supported organizations improved their project management capacities.
- ➔ 10% of the supported organizations work more effectively on monitoring the implementation of environmental policies, either independently within local communities or as part of national and local networks.
- ➔ Ten informal groups of citizens (IGs) supported through the "Everyday Green Heroes" program.
- ➔ More than ten examples of good practice from CSO projects documented and promoted.
- ➔ Two meetings of the Green Chair network held.
- ➔ Calls for CSO participation in working groups and advisory bodies promoted through the Aarhus Center Novi Beograd.
- ➔ The work of the Green Chair CSO network coordinated.

Success indicators for

Operational Program Objective 2.2.

- ➔ 65 IGs trained to implement projects.
- ➔ 70% of participants/volunteers reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their participation in the activities and demonstrated readiness for further engagement (keeping track of activities, participating in events and trainings, joining as volunteers, or engaging in other initiatives).
- ➔ The needs of ten camp organizers, more than 20 camp leaders, and over 100 volunteers assessed, and the formulated recommendations used in planning support programs for 2025.
- ➔ Two trainings for camp leaders held in cooperation with international partners, during which 12 young leaders from Serbia were trained, while an additional 13 camp leaders were prepared through individual meetings.
- ➔ Capacities of camp organizers built in 11 local communities across Serbia: Golubinci, Kragujevac, Sremski Karlovci, Topli Do, Totovo Selo and Orom, Perućac, Obedska Bara, Pećinci, Deliblato, Ražana and Povlen.
- ➔ More than 30% of camp leaders continue their cooperation with YRS, engage in YRS volunteer programs and further develop their personal competencies.
- ➔ A total of 42 "Šta nam teško" volunteer projects implemented across 22 local communities in Serbia, involving more than 500 young people. The total number of members of informal groups was 245, with an additional approximately 250 volunteers engaged in their activities, and over 500 citizens attending their events.
- ➔ A total of 233 volunteers exchanged through 13 camps in Serbia and more than 90 projects worldwide. In addition to this, YRS prepared and sent nine volunteers for long-term volunteering within the European Solidarity Corps program.
- ➔ 35% of young people who participated in the programs continued their social engagement.
- ➔ 50% of young people who took part in the activities improved their knowledge of environmental protection.
- ➔ Over 500 citizens informed about volunteer camps through 10 educational and informative sessions.
- ➔ 60% of citizens reported increased awareness and satisfaction with their participation in the sessions.

Success indicators for

Operational Program Objective 2.3.

- ➔ YRS participated in four formal working groups focused on the development of public policies and regulations (Environmental Protection Strategy, Strategy for the Implementation of the Aarhus Convention in Serbia, Nature Protection Program and Action Plan for the Implementation of the Water Management Strategy of the Republic of Serbia).
- ➔ More than 20 meetings and events held, along with one online consultation process ("Kaži-ukazi"), contributing to the formulation of recommendations and positions for participation in decision-making processes.
- ➔ Work on the Green Cards improved, with methodology elements revised in accordance with regulatory changes and practical findings from methodology implementation.
- ➔ Over 20 CSOs trained to monitor the implementation of environmental protection policies in local self-governments on an annual basis.
- ➔ As a result of the mentoring work of Coalition 27, more than 70% of participants reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their participation in activities and demonstrated readiness for further engagement or advocacy initiatives.
- ➔ More than 20 individuals from institutions participated in various events organized by YRS or partner organizations.
- ➔ YRS participated in writing three chapters of the Shadow Report on Chapter 27.
- ➔ Data for the Green Cards collected and processed from 17 local self-governments.
- ➔ The Shadow Report titled "Years Go by, We Stand Still" was prepared, printed and promoted.



Through the implementation of more than ten educational events on topics of interest for environmental protection, in cooperation with partners from the platform (Result 3.6), the foundations were established for developing an educational platform that brings together experts, education stakeholders (educational institutions, institutes, research units), and both international and domestic CSOs that recognize the topics and needs of various target groups for education in the field of environmental protection (Operational Program Objective 3.1).

YRS worked intensively on developing innovative educational programs and integrating them into relevant projects and activities (Operational Program Objective 3.2). Tailored trainings were delivered to strengthen the capacities of individuals and young professionals, informal groups of citizens, CSOs, teaching staff, and Members of Parliament (MPs), based on their needs and interests (Result 3.5).

At least one national campaign per year was conducted on the need for environmental protection and sustainable development (Result 3.7), mechanisms for citizen cooperation and information-sharing were established and initiated in municipalities and protected areas (Result 3.8), public awareness of the need to protect and preserve the environment as a core value was raised and capacities for participation in decision-making processes at the local level were strengthened (Operational Program Objective 3.3).

Program Strategic Objective 3

Increased personal responsibility and competences of citizens in relation to the environment as a result of innovative educational programs.

Success indicators for

Operational Program Objective 3.1.

- Institutions, research and educational units and organizations identified for the establishment of an educational platform in the field of environmental protection.
- Five workshops for civil society organizations held within the "ECO-SYSTEM" program.
- Two educational events on topics from Chapter 27 – Shadow Report conducted (in Belgrade and Novi Sad).
- 70% of participants reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their participation in the activities and demonstrated readiness for further engagement (keeping track of activities, participating in events and trainings, joining as volunteers, or engaging in other initiatives).
- Two two-day educational seminars held for teachers and administrative staff of secondary schools of agriculture, with over 50 participants from 13 schools.

Success indicators for

Operational Program Objective 3.2.

- Two online courses published: Volunteering for Nature and Agriculture and Climate Change.
- 250 new participants in the online courses, 313 course registrations, and 126 certificates issued.
- More than 80% of participants who completed the evaluation reported being satisfied or very satisfied with the course content.
- A lecture on the work of CSOs in environmental protection delivered to MPs at a seminar in Loznica.
- In cooperation with OSCE, materials prepared for the Green Digital Platform of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia.
- YRS – Aarhus Center Novi Beograd organized a panel "Recipe for the Green Transition".
- More than 80% of participants reported being satisfied or very satisfied with the format and content of the event.
- Through 16 international exchanges, 50 young individuals participated in personal development trainings, enhancing their knowledge and skills in ecology, interculturality, sustainability and group leadership.
- Out of more than 30 schools of agriculture in Serbia, six introduced the subject Climate Change in Agriculture in their curricula, and more than 75% received the accompanying Handbook.

Success indicators for

Operational Program Objective 3.3.

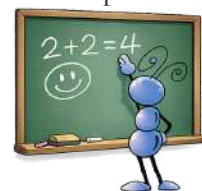
- Through the campaign "Don't Buy – Create!", over 366,000 citizens informed via social media and more than two million through other media channels, while over 60 artists exhibited their works at a joint event in Belgrade.
- The "Kornjača Spornjača" campaign carried out through a crowdfunding mechanism, in cooperation with the Kraljevac Special Nature Reserve, with 208 donors (citizens, associations and small and medium-sized enterprises) contributing funds for nature protection.
- Educational material on Climate Change in Agriculture promoted at the 2024 Agricultural Fair in Novi Sad.
- YRS assisted in the initiation of Council of Beneficiaries in protected areas: Palić – Ludaš Special Nature Reserve and the community of Carska Bara Special Nature Reserve, Rusanda Nature Park and Ritovi Donjeg Potisja Special Nature Reserve.
- Tara National Park and Peštersko Polje Special Nature Reserve supported through the grants to increase transparency and improve cooperation with the local community.



The main challenges in 2024 for implementing activities and achieving objectives were related to environmental protection policies and dialogue with institutions. Coordinating the work of the Green Chair – a mechanism intended to enable CSO participation in the work of the National Assembly’s Environmental Protection Committee – was particularly challenging. Due to political instability and a series of negative attitudes and accusations from certain MPs directed at the organizations, cooperation with the National Assembly was limited to occasional and restricted information exchange.

Additionally, cooperation with the Government was limited, even though YRS participated in several working groups. Dialogue with decision-makers was absent at critical moments, and the exchange of information and access to important environmental data were restricted. By the end of 2024, the situation further deteriorated due to protests.

5. LESSONS LEARNED



Monitoring, evaluation and learning were a very important part of YRS’s work in 2024.

The YRS team regularly assessed results, reflected on lessons learned and integrated them into subsequent activities.

One of the most widely recognized learning theories, Kolb’s experiential learning cycle, was applied because it supports YRS’s overall methodological approach: concrete experience – engaging in or repeating an activity (in communication, grant implementation or decision-making) – leads to reflective observation, thinking about what happened and drawing conclusions from the experience.

These concrete experiences helped target groups to learn about environmental and nature protection, collaborate effectively, implement better projects and become informed citizens who make environmentally responsible choices and decisions.

The benefits of applying lessons learned include improved efficiency (simplified processes, better organization and task allocation), enhanced risk management (identifying potential problems and implementing proactive strategies to mitigate risks) and improved team performance (learning from past experiences strengthened team dynamics).

“It is difficult to assess the direct and indirect pressure that the environment, civil society organizations, the rule of law, freedom of speech, democratic processes, etc., suffered in 2024. The time invested in planning at the YRS level, regular monitoring and risk assessment paid off many times over. In unstable times, we learned that the Strategic and Action Plans, together with project plans, provide stability and a sense of security. Good organizational-level planning serves both as a tailwind and a safe haven.”

Environmental Protection and Arhus Center Program Manager at YRS

“Due to the political situation, the media space in Serbia, especially on social networks, was overcrowded with information and sponsored content. Despite these circumstances, we successfully overcame the challenges, maintaining our visibility and audience engagement, and contributed to raising awareness about climate change and environmental protection. In 2024, we learned that we must always be ready to adapt and financially support our communication activities.”

Communications Coordinator at YRS

“This marks the fourth year of providing support to CSOs working on environmental protection, with a focus on nature conservation, biodiversity preservation and climate change. We are proud to have developed a partnership-based relationship with them, building mutual trust and contributing to greater efficiency and improved project management quality. Based on their needs and suggestions for improvement, we design the next cycles of “ECO-SYSTEM” support and work on strengthening the capacities of the civil sector in Serbia. What we have learned is that networking is the key to success for civil society organizations, as through networking, individual organizations strengthen their capacities, become more influential and gain greater visibility.”

Project Coordinator at YRS

"In 2023, we began planning something entirely new for our organization, and in 2024 we embarked on the adventure of running a civic fundraising campaign for nature. It was a highly complex process involving numerous preparatory steps, delays, adaptations, ad hoc activities and new collaborators. Throughout this process, we first earned the status of a "transparent organization", then reconnected with our support base, applied familiar strategies while venturing into new media experiences (with formats and subjects), gained highly dedicated collaborators for future actions and much more. Even when it seemed the campaign might not reach its goal, we decided not to give up, knowing such initiatives can be highly unpredictable. Balancing the desire to contribute to nature protection (for protected area managers and young biology researchers) with the intention of providing citizens a safe and reliable way to help in protecting nature, we invested extraordinary effort. We concluded that the "Kornjača spornjača" campaign, despite being one of the pioneering donating-for-nature initiatives in Serbia, was something new and inspiring in the world of donations. Its success, however, relied heavily on environmental activists, friends and members of civil society organizations, who helped achieve the financial target and procure the planned equipment. The business sector showed almost no interest in the initiative. Citizens noticed us through media appearances and mainly responded through direct turtle rescue actions. Influencer support increased campaign visibility, but its investment return was essentially zero. The creative energy of the team of about 20 members grew through the educational value of the outputs generated during the campaign. Overall, the learning gained from this process was far more valuable than the financial target or all the resources mobilized."



TEP Project Coordinator at YRS

"Young Researchers of Serbia are not so young anymore. Entering our sixth decade of operation, we still believe that achieving meaningful social change requires the involvement of all citizens, including the elderly, who bring invaluable knowledge gained through rich experience and decades of work. To this end, through new nature protection projects, we have recognized retirees as an important target group we want to engage in our activities. We believe that many of them wish to spend their time in socially beneficial ways, and we will strive not only to offer them suitable activities but also to create opportunities for greater intergenerational collaboration – because it is precisely such collaboration that can lead to more lasting and higher-quality results."

Volunteering and Youth Program Manager at YRS

6. ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS IN 2024

Program Strategic Objective 1. Volunteering has been recognized as an important tool for community development, and mechanisms and volunteering programs have been set in place throughout Serbia that contribute to strengthening society's capacities for sustainable development.

Operational Program Objective 1.1. Diverse volunteering programmes developed, contributing to the development of local communities, focusing on topics related to sustainable development and environmental protection, through educational, financial support and networking.

The YRS-VSS continuously sends volunteers to activities and programs both abroad and in Serbia. In 2024, YRS enhanced its visual identity on social media, created a completely new platform to support projects by informal groups and increased the number of volunteers and social media followers. Efforts are also underway to improve volunteering conditions through various projects, including enhancing the volunteer exchange platform, developing projects that improve volunteer safety at camps and designing new seminars for volunteer exchange coordinators and camp leaders. YRS developed and implemented a wide range of volunteer programs directly focused on community development and environmental sustainability, building capacities for sustainable development at local, national and international levels, with a strong emphasis on youth participation and environmental protection.

In addition to camps, which form the core of YRS's volunteer-youth program, **over 50 projects by informal groups were supported in 2024, 18 volunteers were sent on long-term volunteering across Europe, and participants took part in ten youth exchanges.** Throughout the year, YRS was actively involved in numerous activities within the Alliance network.

Efforts were made to strengthen existing partnerships and establish new collaboration models at the level of individual camps. Volunteer camps were organized in cooperation with: Živimo Zajedno Association from Golubinci, Sabo Deneš Association from Totovo Selo, Vladimir Mandić Manda Association of Researchers from Valjevo, Sports Anglers' Association Deliblatsko Jezero from Deliblato, Zeleni Mir Srbija Association, Sports for All Association, Olimpijsko Selo Ražana Association, Zeleni Pogled Association from Kupinovo, I Love Topli Do and Vojvodina Environmental Movement.

Five national and nine international volunteer camps were organized, involving 82 volunteers from 13 countries and 50 volunteers from Serbia, with additional support from over 100 local volunteers.

The volunteer camp "Oasis in Golubinci" was organized by the Živimo Zajedno Association in July 2024 in Golubinci. The aim of the camp was to provide assistance and support to the daily and work community for people with intellectual developmental disabilities. Support was provided to participants and hosts in carrying out various camp activities and, most importantly, communication and socialization were established between individuals with developmental disabilities and volunteers from diverse regions of the world. Two camp leaders, eleven volunteers and six local participants successfully painted a five-meter-long wall and created a large mosaic depicting planet Earth, made from several hundred pebbles.

The volunteer camp "Totovo Squad in Action and the Windmill Festival" was organized in cooperation with the associations Sabo Deneš and Wemsical Serbia in August 2024. The camp was organized for the third time, and for the first time this year, part of the camp took place at the site of the Windmill Festival, held in the nearby village of Orom. During the first part of the camp, volunteers helped organize this alternative art festival which, in addition to a music program, aims to educate visitors about various environmental topics. The second part of the camp was held in Totovo Selo and focused on promoting local community development and improving the tourist offer through the renovation and construction of a model of the Little Danube, along with surrounding sculptures and information boards. Eight international and two national volunteers participated in the camp.

The volunteer camp "ECO Tent" was organized in August 2024 by the Vladimir Mandić Manda Association of Researchers. The goal of the volunteer camp was to bring together young people from around the world to raise environmental awareness and spend quality time in nature. The organizers followed the volunteers' interests and accordingly organized workshops and lectures on ecology, speleology, ethnology, as well as soft skills such as public speaking and presentation preparation. The volunteers were introduced to the work of the organization, which inspired them to independently initiate projects and research in their own countries. Eight international volunteers and three local volunteers participated in the camp.

The volunteer camp "Stories from the Lake" was organized by the Sports Anglers' Association Deliblatsko Jezero at the Kraljevac Special Nature Reserve. The camp was held in late July and early August 2024. Twelve volunteers worked on improving the facilities along the shore of Lake Kraljevac, including rest and fishing areas, and removed invasive woody and herbaceous plant species. As a result of their work, litter was removed along two kilometres of shoreline, nine benches and three tables were refurbished, two rest and fishing areas were improved, and invasive woody and herbaceous plant species were removed from one hectare of land.



The volunteer camp "Gledić Zove" was organized by the association Zeleni Mir Srbija, with the aim of educating children and young people, promoting socialization and working with persons with disabilities, removing illegal dumping sites, engaging in local community work and carrying out rural activities. The "Gledić Zove" camp was implemented in an expanded format in parallel with the first Humanitarian Camp for Children. The camp was held in August 2024.

The volunteer camp "Eco Recreational Camp" was organized by the Association Sport for All in August 2024 at Lake Perućac. During the camp, the shoreline of Lake Perućac was cleaned of plastic waste, and volunteers were introduced to the connections between ecology and sports and recreational camps.

The volunteer camp "Olympic Village Ražana" was held in August 2024 and was organized by the association Olympic Village Ražana. The objective was to promote walking and hiking, as well as a future cycling trail from Ražana to Taorsko Vrelo. During hiking and walking activities, volunteers covered more than 30 km over two days. The entrance to the trail from the main road was marked, along with info table indicating 4.7 kilometres from the main road to the peak of Kozomora.



The volunteer camps "Archeofun I and II, Obedska Bara" were organized by the association Zeleni pogled from Kupinovo. The aim of the camps was to assist with systematic archaeological research and to spread knowledge about Serbian medieval history and tradition. The camps were organized in August and September 2024.

The volunteer camp "Birds ELDORADO, Obedska Bara" was organized by the association Zeleni pogled from Kupinovo in August 2024. Cooperation was established with the Tourist Organization of the Municipality of Pećinci, the public enterprise Vojvodinašume and the Municipality of Pećinci. Volunteers were accommodated in the premises of the Tourist Organization, while Vojvodinašume provided logistical support for fieldwork, and the local self-government ensured media coverage of the camp. Local volunteers were occasionally involved in the project. The aim of the camp was to remove invasive vegetation in part of the Obedska Bara Special Nature Reserve.

The volunteer camp "Free Rivers and Mountains Camp 2024" was organized by the association I Love Topli Do on Stara Planina in August 2024. The aim of the camp was to improve the village as part of preparations for the fifth "Festival of Free Rivers and Mountains", with the goal of promoting the natural beauty of Stara Planina as an area of exceptional significance, as well as Topli Do as a tourist destination and a free ecological zone.

The volunteer camp "Knights in Shining Armor" was organized in September 2024 by the Vojvodina Environmental Movement. The objective of the camp was to organize and enhance the program of the event "Knight's Day", which was held in cooperation with the Vojvodina Environmental Movement and the association Beli Vukovi. The program prepared by the camp volunteers was intended for children and young people. As part of the camp, an educational and promotional event was created for the festival, in which the volunteers took active participation.

During 2024, YRS volunteers participated in **95 camps across Europe, as well as in Mongolia, Japan and Colombia, with a total of 118 volunteers.**



The aim of the project **National Volunteering Program "Youth Rules 2024"** was to strengthen youth activism and improve conditions for volunteering of young people and for young people. The core idea of the program was to promote the importance of volunteering, affirm volunteer work and enhance the volunteering program in Serbia. The project directly contributes to the strategic goal of the Youth Strategy of the Republic of Serbia: Youth Activism and Active Participation and its Specific Goal 3, by helping create a favorable environment for volunteering of young people and for young people and by empowering associations that carry out youth activities, as well as local youth offices (KZM) to implement volunteer activities. Capacity-building efforts continued: 25 participants underwent training for camp leaders (through two group and several individual training sessions), and an online training was organized for 65 representatives of informal groups through the "Šta nam teško" (ŠNT) program.

For the sixth consecutive year, a competition was held to support youth local activism projects. **A total of 69 informal groups applied, and 42 groups from 22 districts were supported.**

During the **"YOUTH PATH" project**, which YRS implemented in cooperation with partners from the Azores and Canary Islands, EU support programs for local initiatives and their impact on local communities were tested in the context of non-standard EU frameworks (island regions and countries in the process of EU accession). Through a mentor training held in March 2024 on the island of São Miguel, four YRS representatives were trained to support young people in local initiatives, usually carried out by informal groups. During 2024, two informal groups were supported: "How to Live Waste-Free?" (circular economy), a project by an informal group from Kikinda, and the project "Are You Okay?" (youth mental health) by the informal group Tebrizam from Bor.

The objective of the **C.L.I.C. – Long-Term Volunteering Community Empowerment** project was to strengthen organizations that support volunteers on long-term European Solidarity Corps (ESC) projects, in order to increase the program's impact on inclusion, environmental protection and the promotion of European values. In April 2024, YRS, together with other project partners, organized the "C.L.I.C. Blooming Laboratory" seminar in Tallinn, Estonia, attended by 22 ESC volunteers, who had the opportunity to work together on skills development and the creation of their own ESC personal projects. Through the C.L.I.C. project, organizations were supported with over 2,500 examples of good practice, the ESC Buddy mobile app was improved to facilitate volunteers' experiences on long-term projects, a one-day training for volunteer mentors was created, and over 40 personal projects across Europe were supported, demonstrating the ESC program's impact on local communities.

YRS continued its cooperation with interested companies and organized volunteering activities for corporate volunteers in 2024 as well (details are available in Chapter 16 of this Report).

Operational Program Objective 1.2: Increased public awareness on the benefits of volunteering for the development of society/local communities and benefits from the volunteering programs implemented in partnership with CSOs, schools, informal groups, businesses etc.

Through the **"Get involved" project**, YRS developed a new digital platform with an interactive map showcasing youth initiatives, which attracted around 6,700 visitors. Four open calls were published on the platform, resulting in the selection and support of 52 projects ("Šta nam teško", "Youth Path", FAO) out of more than 130 applications. These support projects engaged over 1,000 volunteers in various activities. YRS also organized a meeting with ten companies aimed at connecting the business sector with the world of volunteering and fostering partnerships and support opportunities between companies, informal groups and other key stakeholders. Support for the development of the platform was provided through the project "ACCTING – Together for an Inclusive European Green Deal" (Horizon 2020, European Union Research and Innovation Programme), where YRS was among ten supported organizations in Europe conducting pilot projects during 2024.

In 2024, YRS launched the **campaign "Backpack Full of Stories"**, which consisted of a competition in writing about volunteering experiences, aiming to share and promote inspiring volunteering stories. The campaign sought to foster a culture of volunteering by showcasing real-life stories that resonated with young people and local communities, significantly increasing the visibility and recognition of volunteering. The results of this campaign, together with the outcomes of the "Youth Rules 2024" program, were presented on International Volunteer Day, December 5. During a skills development workshop held as part of Volunteer Day, some volunteers presented their projects from camps and exchanges, allowing others to hear about their experiences, learn from them and gain inspiration to engage in similar initiatives.



The **"Volunteers are Nature Peers 2024" (Volonteri prirodni po meri) award** was presented to celebrate the important role of volunteers in nature conservation activities in Serbia. The competition was held in April 2024, receiving 16 nominations. At the ceremony, held on International Biodiversity Day, May 22, at the Veliko Ratno Ostrvo Protected Area in Belgrade, the power of volunteering to drive positive change was highlighted. The event promoted the values of volunteering, collaboration and civic participation, while also showcasing the positive impact of volunteering programs implemented in partnership with CSOs, schools, informal groups and businesses.



Additionally, during monitoring visits to volunteer work camps, organizers were introduced to the opportunities and benefits of the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) program. Expanding ESC accreditation to YRS's local partners and organizations running international volunteering activities would provide further support to the camps and volunteers.

Operational Program Objective 1.3: Improved quality of volunteer programs and legislative frameworks for volunteering through promotion and implementation of international standards in volunteering.

Through continuous engagement in the Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations network, YRS has strengthened its commitment to international cooperation, capacity building and the promotion of sustainable development through youth volunteering. YRS has been selected to host the Alliance's Technical Meeting in 2025, the largest gathering of international volunteer organizations in the world.

Through the **project "C.L.I.C. (Community, Learning, Inclusion, Change)"**, organizations and long-term volunteers within the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) were strengthened, over 2,500 examples of good practice were collected, the ESC Buddy mobile app was improved, a mentor training session was developed and more than 40 personal projects across Europe were supported.

During 2024, within its youth-volunteering program, YRS was highly active in networks and bodies advocating for and working to create a better environment for volunteering. Within national networks, YRS participated in the annual meeting of the National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS), as well as several meetings focused on youth engagement and the promotion of volunteering. YRS representatives also took part in the Working Group for the new Law on Volunteering and initiated the establishment of the informal partner network "Šta nam teško", which brings together partnerships for implementing projects of informal groups.

YRS's greatest engagement, however, was in international networks and bodies. Through global networks (CCIVS) and primarily European networks (the Alliance of International Voluntary Service Organizations and Service Civil International), YRS contributed through its active involvement to improving network operations, as well as enhancing conditions for volunteering and volunteer exchanges.

YRS participated in several bodies and working groups of the Alliance:

➔ In the Education Team: During a two-year mandate, the YRS delegate contributed to writing the accreditation for Erasmus+ projects for the Alliance, served as a trainer at joint meetings and helped improve educational content available to all Alliance members.

➔ In the Working Group for the Alliance's Transition to a Horizontal System: Together with other group members, YRS helped implement the transition of the Alliance from a vertical to a horizontal management system, creating opportunities for volunteers who wish to contribute to the network.

➔ In the Working Group for Improving the Quality of Volunteering: Over the course of one year, the group developed a questionnaire for organizations to better identify educational needs when running camps.

In addition, YRS participated in working groups for organizing the Alliance's General Assembly, the technical meeting to be held in Serbia in 2025 and the Working Group for Improving the Website and Volunteer Exchange Tools (PLATO).

YRS delegates regularly take part in at least four annual Alliance events: the technical meeting held in February 2024 in Spain, where YRS shared its volunteer program with over 30 organizations, the Alliance's General Assembly and Congress (Italy), and the January and September gatherings (Hungary and the Czech Republic) of member organizations. Participation in international network meetings and active involvement in the network's work not only contribute to developing a better environment for volunteering but also allow YRS to remain an active organization in the field of volunteer work, increasing the number of partnerships that YRS establishes.

Program Strategic Objective 2: Empowered civil society, with greater influence and competence to take part in the decision-making processes in an informed manner and to implement activities aimed at environmental protection and community development.

Operational Program Objective 2.1: Empowered CSOs for active participation in the reforms within the EU Integration process in the field of environmental protection and climate change (Cluster 4, Chapter 27, the Green Agenda) through a capacity-building program that includes educational and financial support and support through networking on a local, national and international level.

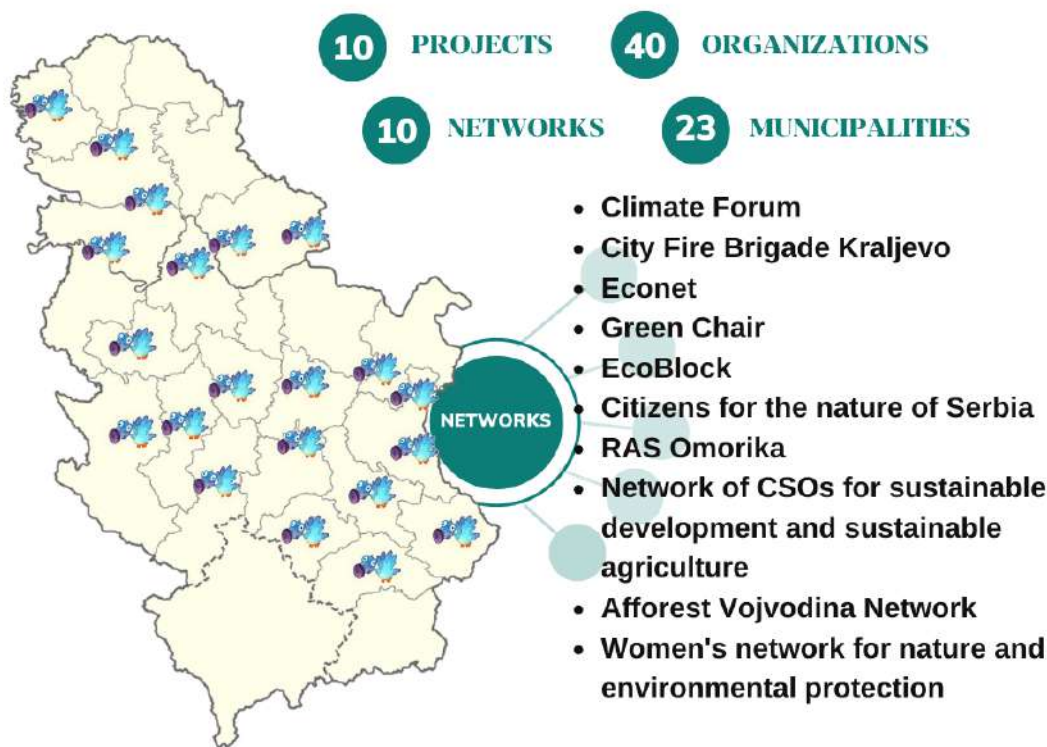
In 2024, YRS implemented a comprehensive support program to strengthen civil society organizations, combining capacity-building activities, financial assistance and structured networking opportunities at local, national and international levels, with a focus on building cross-sector coalitions and enhancing CSOs' advocacy capacities locally, nationally and regionally.

The YRS team continuously collected information on CSO needs through the selection process, trainings, thematic events, project monitoring and evaluation of supported projects. The collected data were processed and analyzed, then used to develop recommendations for capacity-building programs and financial support for citizens' associations and informal groups.

"ECO-SYSTEM" Program: Support for Environmental Protection Reforms – Ten networks of civil society organizations (over 40 organizations) were supported, carrying out activities in 23 local communities across Serbia. The "ECO-SYSTEM" program had a significant impact on strengthening environmental activism and advocacy. The projects implemented by supported CSOs addressed a wide range of environmental issues, from pollution and biodiversity to sustainable practices and climate awareness.

Support for CSOs through the "ECO-SYSTEM" program includes financial assistance, capacity building through seminars and trainings and mentoring during project implementation.

In cooperation with the organizations supported through the "ECO-SYSTEM" program in 2024, the following activities were conducted: **51 educational activities; 32 promotional/informational events; 34 consultative events; 18 advocacy events/activities aimed at improving public policies; 22 network capacity-building events; and 27 publications/podcasts were released.**



Infographic 2: List of Civil Society Organization Networks Supported Through the "ECO-SYSTEM" Program in 2024

The Environment Improvement Center from Belgrade, on behalf of the **Climate Forum network**, focused its activities on its network members, as well as young people from Belgrade and the Moravica District. They significantly strengthened the network's capacities in the areas of decarbonization and climate change, improving collaboration, information exchange and target group education. The project included an analysis of waste management policies in Gornji Milanovac, educational activities for elementary school students and enhanced visibility of climate change issues and the role of women in this field through the production and promotion of four podcasts and interviews with female scientists working on climate change.

The Volunteer Fire Department Kraljevo Kraljevo, on behalf of the Alliance of Fire Brigade Departments of Kraljevo, implemented the project "Forests Without Fires". The project improved public policies in nature protection by strengthening regional cooperation and raising the awareness of volunteer firefighters about the importance of participating in policy-making. Local community capacities were enhanced through trainings and exercises for rapid and effective response to forest fires. Ten new members were trained, a volunteer action was organized and a water reservoir was built in a high-risk zone of the protected Stolovi Mountain area. An educational program and technical documentation were prepared for the construction of a unique firefighter training ground in the region. Young people from Kraljevo participated in three workshops and a volunteer action marking an educational forest trail, gaining a better understanding of forest protection, preventive measures and volunteerism, and demonstrating readiness to actively engage in the association's work.

The Forum of Civil Action FORCA from Požega, together with its partner organizations within the Ekonet network, implemented the project "Recycling Pesticide Packaging" in the municipalities of Sombor, Zaječar, Kruševac and Knjaževac, including a pilot project in Požega, with the aim of setting up a sustainable system for managing pesticide packaging. The project strengthened the network and its members through trainings, including a gender dimension, and raised public awareness through media campaigns and direct meetings with farmers. In the partner municipalities, a collection model for pesticide packaging waste was adopted, resulting in over 200 kg of waste collected in the local communities of Kaonik, Bukovac and Kljajićevo. Recommendations were also developed to improve public policies, further strengthening the network and promoting environmental protection.

The Women's Network for Nature and Environmental Protection strengthened the capacities of female activists and experts by organizing seminars on protected area management with a gender-sensitive approach through the "Udružene" (Women Together) project, implemented by Polekol together with partner organizations. The project enhanced their advocacy skills for public policies and increased the visibility of women's work in nature conservation across Serbia. Network members gained knowledge through trainings and consultations on gender-responsive budgeting, the rights of nature and public policies, enabling more active participation in decision-making processes and submission of comments, 90% of which were adopted. The project also strengthened mutual cooperation and exchange of experiences among organizations. The network's visibility increased through media activities, panels and promotion of a documentary film, while members acquired new skills in moderation and active listening, which they will apply in their organizations. The project resulted in increased membership and greater involvement of women in nature and environmental protection.

The Novi Sad Environmental Movement, on behalf of the **Let's Afforest Vojvodina network**, implemented the project "One Belt – Multiple Protection" to expand forest belts in Vojvodina and raise awareness among local communities, youth and farmers about the importance of forests. Through a series of educational workshops and afforestation actions, they engaged local stakeholders and contributed to the preservation and expansion of forest areas in the province. The project initiated a new co-financing measure for windbreak belts in the Provincial Secretariat for Agriculture, Water Management and Forestry's 2025 program. Collaboration with local authorities was strengthened through roundtables and the planting of 80 seedlings in Sremski Karlovci. Additionally, a scientific study was prepared on the impact of protective belts on soil quality.

The Citizens for Nature Network, through PROAKTIV from Niš and the Society for Environmental Protection Stara Planina from Pirot, implemented the project "Collaboration Instead of Borders" to establish a model for joint management of the protected areas of Stara Planina in the cross-border region. By involving the public in decision-making and civic oversight, the project contributed to the decentralization of environmental protection and strengthened the network members' capacities to advocate for Natura 2000 policies. More than 1,000 direct participants were engaged, and the project enabled greater involvement of local communities and NGOs through panels, monitoring activities and collaboration with institutions. Two initiatives were launched to improve the work of protected area managers and a new decentralized management model was created, ensuring greater participation of the local community.

Private Forest Owners Association Bor from Užice, on behalf of the **RAŠ Omorika** network, implemented the project "Citizens Clean the Air" with the goal of reducing pollution from individual household heating. Through research on the efficiency of firewood use, with a special focus on households headed by women, and an awareness-raising campaign, the project contributed to a better understanding of energy poverty issues. Based on the research, a document with recommendations was created to improve policies for subsidizing energy renovations and to advocate for social measures for energy-vulnerable groups. The project also strengthened the capacities of the RAŠ Omorika network, which is formally registered under the name DENDROSRBIJA. A long-term development strategy for the network was developed, along with essential documents that enhance transparency and professionalism in its operations.

The EkoBlok network, with support from its member organization **iRevolucija** from Valjevo, implemented the project "New Technologies in the Service of Public Health", focusing on using digital tools to assess the impact of air pollution on the health of residents in Valjevo, Leskovac and Novi Pazar. During the project, workshops and training sessions were held for public health professionals, who learned to use WHO tools for assessing health risks, while local media established real-time reporting on air quality, contributing to greater citizen awareness. The project assessed the impact of air pollution on the health of residents in the three cities and the research results were presented at a regional UN conference in Sarajevo. The project also supported the establishment of the Health Council in Valjevo and the development of a Draft Air Quality Plan in Novi Pazar. Through these activities, the network attracted new members and partners, strengthened its capacities, established better cooperation with public health experts and increased public awareness about air quality in the three cities.

The Network of Civil Society Organizations for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Agriculture, led by the **Ibar Development Association (IDA)**, implemented the project "Safe Steps to Sustainable Resource Exploitation in Golija Nature Park – SKOK". The project established a platform for cooperation between civil society and the management of Golija Nature Park, improving citizen and organizational participation in planning and implementing sustainable development in the area. More than 100 young people and over 20 local organizations gained new knowledge and skills that enabled them to actively participate in nature protection. They engaged in discussions with the Park administration, jointly designing measures for the preservation and development of the Park, which helped youth and citizens better understand the importance of sustainable development in Golija Nature Park. Three workshops for local stakeholders were organized, proposals for improving public policies were prepared and a dialogue was established between the Park administration and civil society organizations.



The Center of Modern Skills from Belgrade, on behalf of the Green Chair network, implemented the project "The Power of Change for a Green Future" with the goal of increasing the engagement of youth and decision-makers in environmental protection. The project included activities to restore participatory mechanisms within the Environmental Protection Committee of the National Assembly of Serbia, specifically through the Green Chair platform, which enables civil society to directly participate in decision-making and monitoring environmental policies. During the project, informational sessions were held for Members of Parliament, raising their awareness and support for legislative changes in environmental protection. The network organized trainings and panel discussions for members and youth from multiple cities, encouraging active participation in local environmental initiatives. A Youth Forum for Environmental Protection was also established in Novi Pazar as a model for involving young people in decision-making. Despite political challenges within the Committee, the network successfully restored the significance and visibility of the Green Chair mechanism through dialogues with key decision-makers and maintained public engagement by regularly distributing and publishing the "Green Bulletin", keeping the public informed on current environmental protection issues.



Infographic 3. Map of supported local initiatives in 2024



Support for informal groups

Since 2019, support for informal youth groups has been one of the innovative focus areas of the Young Researchers of Serbia (YRS). Through the Youth Rules (Mladi su zakon) program, implemented with the support of the Ministry of Tourism and Youth, over 300 informal youth groups across Serbia have been supported to date. In collaboration with partner organizations – Cegrad Association from Obrenovac, Vojvodina Environmental Movement from Sremski Karlovci, GM Optimist from Gornji Milanovac and Team 42 from Leskovac – a unique and innovative support mechanism for young people carrying out their own initiatives has been developed.

This support model goes beyond purely financial assistance, as it is based on a methodological approach that also includes mentoring support. Mentors play a key role in empowering members of informal groups by providing professional and organizational guidance throughout the planning and implementation of activities, enabling young people to successfully put to practice their ideas and initiatives.

Through projects carried out by informal groups, young people are given the opportunity to actively engage in the life of their local communities and contribute to their development. At the same time, participation helps young people become more aware of community needs, improve their knowledge and skills in project management and strengthen their self-confidence and readiness to take on increasingly complex challenges.

During 2024, YRS provided support to a total of 59 informal groups through four public calls.

Within the "**Šta nam teško**" program, support for informal groups continued throughout 2024, during which 42 informal groups from 22 districts across Serbia implemented activities of importance to their local communities. The total number of members in these groups was 245, with approximately 250 additional volunteers involved in carrying out the activities. More than 500 citizens attended their events.

The project "Climate Change in Agriculture", implemented by YRS in cooperation with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in addition to developing a Handbook for Students of Secondary Schools of Agriculture, establishing an accredited training program for teachers and supporting the organization of an elective subject, also included support for projects run by informal groups as a form of student activism. Students from five secondary schools of agriculture in Serbia (Sombor, Zrenjanin, Požarevac, Kraljevo and Požega) organized themselves into informal groups and implemented projects that improved their schools and local communities, with a particular focus on strengthening resilience to the impacts of climate change.

The Erasmus+ KA2 project "YouthPath", implemented in partnership with the organization Mojo de Cana from Spain and Pro-Azores from Portugal, aimed to test different models of youth support outside the standard European Union program frameworks. Through this project, informal groups from Serbia, in cooperation with peers from abroad, designed and implemented their own projects, which they were able to further improve and develop into larger initiatives through an evaluation process.

The thematic focus of informal group activities is defined in line with donor priorities. While the project "**Together for the Environment**" focused on activities in protected areas and nature conservation, the "**Šta nam teško**" program allows informal groups the freedom to independently identify problems in their communities and propose appropriate solutions. This way, initiatives were supported that included building shelters for stray dogs, organizing workshops on online safety, publishing a queer youth magazine, renovating rural libraries and many other activities. These projects also provide YRS with valuable insight into current challenges and needs within local communities.

After the completion of their projects, members of informal groups have the opportunity to join other volunteer and program activities of the Young Researchers of Serbia, allowing them to continue developing their knowledge, skills, and capacities for active civic engagement.

Further in this Report, a table provides an overview of the informal groups supported during 2024, whereas a more detailed presentation of their results and achievements is available on the "[Get involved](#)" (Uključite se) platform.



No.	Informal group	Project's name	District	Supporting programme
1	Zeleni	Zelena okruženje	Grad Beograd	Šta nam teško
2	Ekološko udruženje „Vilin Konjic“	Eko Točak	Mačvanski okrug	Šta nam teško
3	Radevi Vitezovi	Porodična priča	Mačvanski okrug	Šta nam teško
4	Omladinci	Kutak znanja i druženja: Uređenje seoske biblioteke u Ušću	Braničevski okrug	Šta nam teško
5	Zavicajno drustvo	Seoski bioskop na otvorenom	Kolubarski okrug	Šta nam teško
6	Naselje Tolerancije	Naselje Tolerancije	Grad Beograd	Šta nam teško
7	Zelenkovići	Akcija sadnje	Grad Beograd	Šta nam teško
8	Ratarci	Učionica na svežem vazduhu: Udahni, sedi, odmori	Podunavski okrug	Šta nam teško
9	Mali psi	Dom svakom psu	Braničevski okrug	Šta nam teško
10	Code Pogim	Dani inženjerskih nauka u Požarevačkoj gimnaziji	Braničevski okrug	Šta nam teško
11	Udruženje „Lunje i Maze Novog Pazara“	#BaciKoskicu!	Raški okrug	Šta nam teško
12	Šapice Novog Pazara	Ručice za šapice	Raški okrug	Šta nam teško
13	Spasilačka garda Srbije	Zeleni heroji i herojine	Rasinski okrug	Šta nam teško
14	EkoTur Pešter	Miris borova: Mjesta za predah	Raški okrug	Šta nam teško
15	Vujetinčani	Da školski teren opet zaživi	Moravički okrug	Šta nam teško
16	Feministi	Femina front	Moravički okrug	Šta nam teško
17	Udruženje „Studenac“	Šareni tragovi za zelenu Novu Varoš	Zlatiborski okrug	Šta nam teško
18	Mala ali odabrana	Samo veselo	Zlatiborski okrug	Šta nam teško
19	Ekipa na "o ruk"	Za čistiju Tresku	Moravički okrug	Šta nam teško
20	PRAVI Sekuričani	Ekonomsko osnaživanje sela kroz lakši plasman domaćih proizvoda	Pomoravski okrug	Šta nam teško
21	Ekipa iz kraja	Kad zatreba ponovi me	Rasinski okrug	Šta nam teško
22	Gumari	Svemirski kabum	Rasinski okrug	Šta nam teško
23	Čuvari tradicije	Baka zna najbolje!	Zapadnobački okrug	Šta nam teško
24	Sigurnija internet generacija - SIG	Sremski okrug	Sremski okrug	Šta nam teško
25	Mladi Filantropi	Retro-Etno	Sremski okrug	Šta nam teško
26	Eko elita	Veternicka eko patrola	Južnobački okrug	Šta nam teško
27	Na Početku Duge	Na Kraju Duge	Južnobački okrug	Šta nam teško
28	Zrenjaninski gimnazijalci	Eko Ulica	Srednjobanatski okrug	Šta nam teško
29	Muralizam	Povratak Karlovačkog sokačeta	Južnobački okrug	Šta nam teško
30	Pionir slobodna škola	Ponovo	Severnobanatski okrug	Šta nam teško
31	restART	restART	Južnobački okrug	Šta nam teško
32	Diaverzum	Koraci koji menjaju sve(t)	Južnobački okrug	Šta nam teško
33	inkluzivNI	Inkluzivnost na DAN	Nišavski okrug	Šta nam teško

No.	Informal group	Project's name	District	Supporting programme
34	Udruženje „Omladinski pokret za prosperitet sela FAMILIJA“	Igraj za zdravlje - budi human	Jablanički okrug	Šta nam teško
35	Mladi gimnazijalci Vlasotinca	Univerzum knjiga	Jablanički okrug	Šta nam teško
36	NišKA EKO Družina	SMANJI plastično - PROMENI drastično	Nišavski okrug	Šta nam teško
37	Basketaši	Daj koš ne budi eko loš	Jablanički okrug	Šta nam teško
38	Vladini istoričari	Edukativna radionica „Učiteljica života“	Jablanički okrug	Šta nam teško
39	Liberta Arts	Sinergija generacija: Mladost i iskustvo u akciji – međugeneracijska saradnja	Pčinjski okrug	Šta nam teško
40	Udruženje mladih „Naš svet, naša pravila“	Sa mentalnim zdravljem na TI	Pčinjski okrug	Šta nam teško
41	Avanturisti	Krov nad glavom za naše krznene prijatelje!	Borski okrug	Šta nam teško
42	balkanARHitrav	Tajne bakine škrinje	Pirotski okrug	Šta nam teško
43	Mladi baštovani	Priroda nek ide prirodnim putem	Srednjebanatski okrug	Organizacija za hranu i poljoprivredu UN FAO
44	Eko kap	Žedne biljke - gladan narod	Zapadnobački okrug	Organizacija za hranu i poljoprivredu UN FAO
45	Veterinari	I njima je vruće	Zlatiborski okrug	Organizacija za hranu i poljoprivredu UN FAO
46	Milk moo team	Happy cows, happy milk	Raški okrug	Organizacija za hranu i poljoprivredu UN FAO
47	Klimatolozi	Klimatizuj se	Braničevski okrug	Organizacija za hranu i poljoprivredu UN FAO
48	Tebrizam	Si ti okej?	Borski okrug	Erasmus + projekat "Youthpath"
49	Pionir slobodna škola	Kako se živi bez otpada?	Severnobanatski okrug	Erasmus + projekat "Youthpath"
50	Asocijacija čuvara prirode Vojvodine i Srbije	Čuvari prirode ujedinjeno za efikasniji nadzor u zaštićenim područjima u Srbiji	Zlatiborski okrug	USAID
51	Eko Uvac Sjenica	Edukativne table za kanjon Uvac: Upoznajte endemske i druge vrste	Zlatiborski okrug	USAID
52	Eko-horizonti	Pešterska ekološka oaza	Zlatiborski okrug	USAID
53	Mladi za selo	Jedan cvet menja vet	Zlatiborski okrug	USAID
54	Mladi Bajinobaštani	Tarsko zeleno	Zlatiborski okrug	USAID
55	Igre napolju	Podržimo igru dece u prirodi	Grad Beograd	USAID
56	Savet za čist vazduh Valjevo	Sacuvajmo Gradac zajedno!	Kolubarski okrug	USAID
57	Ujedinjeni za Kraljevac	Trčimo za tekunicu	Južnobanatski okrug	USAID
58	Pančičevi Istraživači	Projekat Jastrebac: Istraživanje i promocija biološke raznovrsnosti kao podrška procesu sticanja statusa zaštićenog područja	Toplički okrug	USAID
59	Planetarstvo	Oplemenimo sebe i svoje okruženje	Južnobački okrug	USAID

Through the project “**Together for the Environment**”, YRS implemented the support program “**Everyday Green Heroes!**” during 2024, supporting ten informal groups that carried out activities focused on environmental protection, biodiversity conservation and adaptation to climate change at the local level. As part of the program, YRS organized training sessions and provided mentoring support throughout project implementation, resulting in 40 activities and 43 events with a total of 960 participants, involving more than 60 members of informal groups, establishing 60 partnerships with organizations and institutions, publishing around 140 pieces of social media content with a reach of over 65,000 users, installing 12 educational and informational boards, producing four video programs and distributing several thousand promotional leaflets.



The informal group **Outdoor Play** designed a variety of activities: nature exploration, artistic expression and the use of recycled materials in creative workshops, with the aim of engaging children through time spent outdoors, awakening their curiosity and encouraging them to take action. Through the project "Supporting Children's Play in Nature", they successfully connected people who share the same goals and values, created inspiring child-friendly spaces and activities and enabled the youngest participants to recognize the importance of protected natural areas and strengthen their connection to them, while also collecting suggestions for a future sensory trail at the Natural Monument Arboretum of the Faculty of Forestry of the University of Belgrade.



At a camp organized by the informal group **Youth of Bajina Bašta** in Tara National Park, high school students had the opportunity, through active time in nature and workshops, to gain new knowledge about the importance of environmental protection, climate change, sustainable development and rules of conduct in protected natural areas. Many of them visited Tara National Park for the first time, staying in the village of Rastište, where they became familiar with the natural and cultural-historical heritage of the area and visited the Dujin Breg viewpoint and the Derventa River Canyon Special Nature Reserve.



The **informal group United for Kraljevac** involved the youngest residents of Deliblato, who live in close proximity to this nature reserve, in the conservation of endangered species and their habitats. Through the project "Running for the Ground Squirrel", they learned more about this strictly protected species in Serbia, which stands as a key link in the food chain of endangered birds of prey, such as the Eastern imperial eagle and the saker falcon.

The **informal group Youth for the Village from Zlakusa** organized the project "One Flower Can Change the World", bringing their community together and demonstrating how simple, somewhat forgotten activities can have a significant impact on biodiversity protection. Over the course of three weekends, they organized a series of activities for the local community, including grafting training to engage both older and younger participants and teach them how to preserve old fruit varieties, workshops in which preschool and school-age children independently built and installed bee hotels, the promotion of selective mowing to help conserve pollinator insect populations and, together with volunteers from Zlakusa, the improvement of the village entrance.



The conservation of natural resources and the rich biodiversity of Jastrebac is of vital importance, and a notable contribution to this complex process was made by the **informal group Pančić's Researchers**, which organized a summer camp on Jastrebac where biology students and students of related disciplines, together with activists, took part in seasonal biodiversity monitoring that included expert workshops and field research. Participants contributed to the Nature Protection Study by sampling and confirming the presence of numerous species, thereby boosting data on this still insufficiently researched region, while workshops on building hotels for solitary bees enabled interested citizens to actively engage in nature conservation and contribute to the protection of Jastrebac.

The **informal group Planetarstvo** organized a series of workshops in Sremski Karlovci, where participants had the opportunity to learn about the art of puppetry, urban gardening and painting. During one of the workshops, the mascot Karlovci Lion was created using recycled materials by young participants, who also learned more about urban gardening, painted a mural and left their messages about nature conservation.

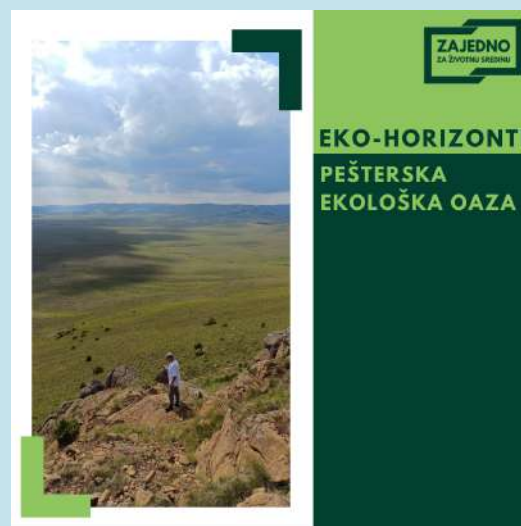


In addition to the workshops, a short educational program was filmed, capturing how the youngest residents think about protecting nature, as well as the stories of activists with whom they worked to make their town a more beautiful place for everyone.



As part of the project "(Pre)Serve Gradac" and with the consent of the management of the Gradac River Gorge Landscape of Exceptional Features, the **informal group Clean Air Council Valjevo** initiated water sampling at several locations by an accredited institution. For the first time, comparative analyses of water quality were conducted in the protected section of the Gradac River. The sampling results clearly showed that water at three selected locations has a high ecological status (Class I), while at one location it was assessed as good (Class II). In addition to monitoring water quality, members of the Clean Air Council Valjevo installed informational boards at designated camping sites in Čelije and Šareno Platno and distributed leaflets to visitors with guidance on appropriate behavior while staying in the protected area.

Members of the **informal group Eco Horizons** from Sjenica installed informational boards in cooperation with the management authority of the Peštersko Polje Special Nature Reserve and volunteers from the local community. The group carried out a series of activities as part of the initiative "Pešter Ecological Oasis", including clean-up actions along access roads to the Peštersko Polje and the installation of informational boards together with fellow residents, with the aim of leaving better conditions on Pešter for both wildlife and visitors and raising awareness about responsible behavior in nature.



The **informal citizens' group Eco Uvac Sjenica** from Sjenica came together for the first time with the idea of contributing to the preservation of this protected natural area and of informing visitors and nature enthusiasts about the protected and endemic species that inhabit it. Through the support program "Heroes in Green", they designed and installed an informational board aimed at raising awareness of the importance of species protection and the values of this area. The group successfully involved the local community in all of its activities, which, recognizing the importance of such initiatives, responded with great enthusiasm and support.



The **Ranger Association of Vojvodina and Serbia**, which has been active for many years as an informal group, is focused on connecting rangers from different parts of the country. With the support of the "Everyday Green Heroes!" program, they organized the first National Rangers Convention on Mokra Gora and celebrated World Ranger Day. The gathering brought together rangers from across Serbia, enabling them to exchange experiences and practices, enhance their knowledge and skills and become more effective in organizing and engaging with local communities.



Support for CSOs and informal citizen groups (IGs) had a significant impact on increasing citizen participation in decision-making processes.

During 2024, YRS strengthened various mechanisms for citizen involvement in decision-making, particularly regarding environmental protection, by:

- promoting calls for CSO participation in working groups and bodies through the Aarhus Center Novi Beograd;
- monitoring the functioning of existing mechanisms and providing recommendations for improvement, together with partner organizations in the "Together for the Environment" project;
- coordinating the activities of the Green Chair network.

YRS supported the capacity-building of the Green Chair network of organizations by assisting in the organization of meetings and, to a limited extent, participated in coordinating cooperation with the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia – Environmental Protection Committee.

Operational Program Objective 2.2: Empowered CSOs, partners, informal groups and individuals for implementing volunteering programs/camps through a capacity-building program that provides educational and financial support, as well as support through improvement of international cooperation on volunteer exchange.

As part of the "Youth Rules" project, an **online training was organized for informal groups** within the support program "Šta nam teško". The training was attended by 65 volunteers and was conducted with the support of the project coordinator and the presence of four mentors. A variety of approaches was used during the training, including trainer presentations, group work, participant presentations, real-time surveys, Q&A sessions and sharing of useful tools and best practices. Volunteers were provided with practical examples and common challenges they might face during project implementation, such as bad weather, insufficient numbers of volunteers, difficulties obtaining work permits and approvals for public gatherings, team disagreements and changes in the costs of budget items. Additionally, volunteers received specific examples of important documents they can use during project implementation, including sample calls and press releases, donor letters, proforma invoices and invoices, social media posts and social media posting calendars. Online tools for creating visual content were also introduced to the volunteers.

Camp leader training was held twice in-person, in April and June, in Spain and Italy, with 12 participants from Serbia attending. The camp leaders gained insight into the work of the Voluntary Service, the importance of international camps and volunteer exchanges, as well as the knowledge and skills necessary to lead a camp and manage an international group. The training included leadership skills assessments before the training and after camp implementation, a three-day internationally standardized training, a practical phase of coordinating volunteer camps with mentorship and follow-up sessions. Additional training for experienced camp leaders was conducted online and at the YRS office. Twelve participants of the international training were trained to lead a camp for the first time, while 13 participants who had previously completed training received updated guidelines for conducting camps this year.

Pre-departure trainings were also organized for volunteers attending an international camp for the first time to help them prepare for their volunteer experience.

In 2024, YRS continuously collected information on the needs of camp organizers, camp leaders and volunteers through the application process, trainings, thematic events, project monitoring, evaluation of supported projects and similar activities. After processing and analyzing the collected data, guidelines and recommendations for implementing volunteer programs were updated.

Two trainings were held for mentors participating in the "Youth Path" and "C.L.I.C." projects to support volunteer leadership and development.

Promotion of international camps continued through a network of partner CSOs and local self-governments (e.g., youth offices, student and professional associations, schools, etc.).

Operational Program Objective 2.3: Empowered institutions and CSOs for engaging the public and civil participation in decision-making processes that are relevant to environmental protection and monitoring the development and implementation of environmental protection/climate change policies.

During 2024, YRS promoted and encouraged public participation in environmental decision-making, bridging the gap between institutions and citizens.

Through active engagement in working groups, thematic conferences and training programs, YRS played a proactive role in shaping national environmental protection policies. **YRS participated in four formal working groups focused on the development of public policies and regulations** (Environmental Protection Strategy, Strategy for the Implementation of the Aarhus Convention in the Republic of Serbia, Nature Protection Program and the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Water Management Strategy in the Territory of the Republic of Serbia), attending over 25 meetings and consultations in these processes.

During the final consultations on the section of the Draft Environmental Protection Strategy related to biodiversity and nature conservation, YRS conducted informal consultations (via email and phone calls) with protected area managers and representatives of the scientific community.

The campaign "Public to Act" (Javnost na potezu) was a joint effort by Coalition 27, focused on encouraging public participation in the consultation process for the development of Serbia's new Environmental Protection Strategy. This initiative emphasized the importance of transparency and civic engagement in environmental policymaking. Building on this effort, a special campaign was launched to accompany the public discussion of the Draft Environmental Protection Strategy, held from December 4 to 24. YRS joined the campaign developed by the Belgrade Open School, in cooperation with the Environment Improvement Center (CUŽS) and Environment Engineering Group (IZŽS), to raise public awareness about the Strategy and encourage citizen involvement. Through 19 targeted social media posts, the campaign highlighted key topics such as environmental protection, air quality and biodiversity, inviting the public to submit joint comments on the proposed document. As a result of the campaign, over 150 comments and suggestions were sent to the Ministry of Environmental Protection, approximately 50 of which were adopted

One of the central advocacy achievements of the **"ECO-SYSTEM" program** was the preparation and promotion of the eleventh **Shadow Report of Coalition 27**, titled in 2024 "Years Go by, We Stand Still", which assessed Serbia's progress in implementing Chapter 27 (Environment and Climate Change). YRS participated in collecting, processing and analyzing data and information for the Shadow Report in areas such as horizontal legislation, waste management, nature protection and water management. The YRS team coordinated the translation, proofreading, print preparation and printing of the Shadow Report of Coalition 27. The report presentation event brought together over 150 key stakeholders, highlighting the growing public and institutional interest in environmental transparency and accountability, raising awareness of environmental and climate change issues and tracking progress on Chapter 27. The Shadow Report provides an overview of the current situation and includes 138 recommendations for improving environmental protection and climate change mitigation and adaptation in Serbia.



YRS prepared and submitted written comments on the Action Plan for meeting the criteria of Chapter 27, specifically regarding nature protection.

In 2024, in collaboration with experts from Coalition 27, YRS worked on updating and improving the methodology for monitoring environmental protection policies at the local self-government level. This methodology, applied since 2020, enables the creation of **Green Cards**.

Through the "ECO-SYSTEM" program, YRS also organized **training for CSOs on monitoring the implementation of environmental protection policies in local self-governments**. Data were collected in 17 local self-governments with the participation of 17 organizations.



Through mentorship from Coalition 27, all data were verified and prepared for publication in the form of Green Cards in 2025.

Despite the significant challenges in implementing the activity "establishing a permanent dialogue between the civil sector and institutions", in 2024, primarily through the "ECO-SYSTEM" program, YRS participated in 95 events, 19 of which were organized by institutions or involved representatives from institutions. Additionally, 19 meetings were held at the national and local levels related to Chapter 27, with the participation of YRS and local partners (grant recipients through the "ECO-SYSTEM" program).



In 2024, regional cooperation on nature protection and biodiversity conservation policies continued through the BioNET network, as well as through YRS's participation in the work of the Regional Biodiversity Task Force. YRS also took part in planning activities for the implementation of the fifth pillar of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, led by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC).

Program Strategic Objective 3: Increased personal responsibility and competences of citizens in relation to the environment as a result of innovative educational programs.

Operational Program Objective 3.1: Developed platform for education that brings together experts, actors in the field of education (educational institutions, institutes, research units), international and domestic CSOs who recognize the topics and needs of different target groups for environmental education.

YRS has a long-standing tradition in environmental education and is widely recognized by the public for its contributions. Through its activities and partnerships, YRS has established strong frameworks for collaboration with numerous schools, universities, organizations, associations and other institutions. In 2024, key institutions, research and educational units and organizations were identified to create a platform for environmental education, aiming to strengthen collaboration in this field.

Over the course of 2024, YRS developed and implemented educational programs, seminars, campaigns, training for camp leaders, art competitions and raising public awareness activities. In total, YRS organized around 30 educational events (workshops, trainings and field activities) and participated in more than 50 additional events focused on awareness-raising, promotion and monitoring. These efforts focused on the development of local capacities and actively engaged teachers, students, youth and the wider public, laying a solid foundation for long-term societal change.

During 2024, following the approval from the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia, **a textbook for the elective course Climate Change in Agriculture for secondary schools of agriculture was published** and printed, with a print run of 1,000 copies. Since the training program was accredited in 2023 (under code 5379 with the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia) and the first training was conducted, two additional two-day educational seminars were held in 2024 for teachers and administrative staff of secondary schools of agriculture, with over 50 participants from 13 schools. This resulted in training teachers from more than 70% of schools of agriculture in Serbia. The second educational seminar, which brought together 25 participants, as well as the final evaluation event at the Agricultural Fair in Novi Sad, provided an opportunity to continue promoting the course in new schools. At the May Fair, a promotional activity called Climate Quest was also held, with around 20 students from different schools participating in four teams. As the project continued, another training session was conducted for 33 participants. YRS also presented and distributed the Handbook and promoted the course at the Assembly of the Association of Schools of Agriculture in Valjevo on November 29.

Innovative environmental topics were presented to the public during a lecture on topics covered by Chapter 27 in November 2024. During the promotion of the Shadow Report at the Serbian Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Belgrade, with the participation of representatives from the civil sector, the EU Delegation, experts and the media, short presentations were held on the status of various areas addressed by Chapter 27. Speakers at the event included representatives from Coalition 27, the EU Delegation in Serbia and the Serbian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. A panel discussion, organized as part of the Shadow Report promotion, featured brief presentations on environmental financing.

Representatives of Coalition 27 also held a presentation of the Shadow Report and an educational session at the French Institute in Novi Sad, primarily aimed at journalists. The session covered the following topics: Serbia's alignment with EU environmental legislation; Air quality, nature protection, waste management and climate change; Environmental protection financing and the implementation of Green Cards in Novi Sad and Vojvodina; and Investments in environmental protection: What has been invested so far and what is expected by 2030?

In 2024, under the **"ECO-SYSTEM" program, five workshops were organized for citizens' associations.** In June, as part of an introductory training for supported networks of organizations within the "ECO-SYSTEM" program, four workshops were conducted covering the following topics: gender and climate change; anti-corruption and the importance of internal controls; implementation of a methodology for monitoring local environmental protection policies (waste management, climate change, nature protection); and the Law on the Planning System of the Republic of Serbia. In November, the first day of the "ECO-SYSTEM" conference was dedicated to standards guiding corporate policies to align with the concepts of sustainable development in the areas of environmental, social and governance (ESG) factors, aiming to enhance knowledge and raise awareness within the civil sector in this field.

Operational Program Objective 3.2. Developed innovative educational programs and integrated into the relevant projects-activities of YRS

The online educational platform <https://obuke.mis.org.rs>, which has been operating since 2014, offers 15 free courses. The platform has attracted over 2,100 registered users, reflecting the growing interest in learning about environmental protection and volunteering. In 2024, two new courses were launched: Volunteering for Nature and Agriculture and Climate Change.

The course Agriculture and Climate Change is intended for high school students and young people with no prior knowledge of this field, who are interested in exploring the world of agriculture and learning how climate change affects agriculture and what adaptation measures are available.

The course Volunteering for Nature contributes to promoting volunteer engagement in nature protection activities and highlighting the value of volunteer work as a whole. The course is intended for everyone who is involved, or wishes to become involved, in volunteer programs for nature conservation: volunteering organizers, volunteer coordinators and volunteers.

During 2024, the YRS online educational platform recorded 250 new course participants, 313 course applications and 126 certificates issued.

Due to limitations in cooperation with the National Assembly, YRS did not organize educational programs (seminars) for Members of Parliament, but it did participate in an introductory training seminar for newly elected Members of Parliament organized by the OSCE Mission to Serbia. The aim of the seminar was to empower participants to effectively perform their parliamentary duties and represent the citizens of the Republic of Serbia.

In early 2024, YRS completed its participation in the project **"Green Digital Platform"** – filling the National Assembly's platform with environmental information. The project was implemented with the aim of strengthening the capacity of parliamentarians in Serbia to more effectively fulfill their mandates in the field of environmental protection. The central objective was to identify, organize and categorize environmental information tailored to users' needs and upload it to the National Assembly's Green Digital Platform. The project supports a more transparent, informed and accountable approach to environmental policymaking in Serbia, while at the same time encouraging greater alignment with EU standards and promoting citizen participation in democratic processes. YRS worked on establishing a database of policies and regulations, laying the groundwork for a so-called glossary. In addition, YRS representatives took part in various events (meetings, workshops, consultations) related to this project, organized by the OSCE Mission to Serbia.

A panel discussion titled "Recipe for the Green Transition of Micro, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises" was organized as part of the project "Strengthening the Role of Aarhus Centers in Mobilizing Support for Fostering a Green Business Culture through Participatory Decision-Making", implemented by the network of Aarhus Centers in Serbia with the support of the OSCE Mission to Serbia. The panel discussed the impact of the Green Agenda on business operations in Serbia and how companies can become part of the green transition. The panel speakers represented the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia (CCIS) – Responsible Business Hub, the Aarhus Center Novi Sad and the cosmetics company AMELLES.

Build Together – a youth exchange in France – was organized in March 2024. Three participants from Serbia, together with participants from six other countries, created an escape game for young people on the topic of interculturality. An educational game for children was developed, promoting creativity, openness and cooperation in finding solutions, with a foundation based on getting to know, respecting and preserving different cultures and their practices.

Keys for Change, the second part of a training program focused on the personal development of young people who wish to engage in youth work and non-formal education, was held in Hungary in March 2024. This project is implemented by the organization EGYESEK from Hungary, with the support of the Erasmus+ program, and YRS collaborated by sending participants from Serbia.

FaciliCraft I: Another training focused on personal development and the skills necessary for project management, implemented in partnership with the organization SIW from the Netherlands. Three participants from Serbia enhanced their knowledge and skills as camp leaders and contributed to the development of new methodologies in non-formal education.

United in Biodiversity: Over the course of 15 days, 24 participants had the opportunity to build connections between biodiversity and human diversity (in terms of gender, origin, sexual orientation, etc.) in order to promote diversity in a practical way. Four participants from Serbia returned from the training with new tools and skills for encouraging diversity and highlighting its importance, aimed at combating discrimination in today's society.

Through partnerships with **15 organizations over the past year, 50 young people** had the opportunity to work on their intercultural skills and gain practical knowledge and skills related to personal development, environmental protection and the promotion of diversity.

During 2024, in cooperation with the organizations Mojo de Cana from Spain and Pro Azores from Portugal, it was tested **the experiences of three organizations in supporting young people through projects**. YRS comes from a country that is not a member of the EU, while the other two organizations are based on remote islands, although they formally belong to EU Member States. Through two exchanges, good practices and practical examples were discussed, and during the summer three informal groups that implemented their own personal projects were supported. YRS's methodology for working with informal groups was presented to partner organizations from the EU, while participants had the chance to develop new projects that could be used for future calls.

In the second half of 2024, work was completed on the **handbook "Climate Change in Agriculture"**, which was subsequently officially approved by the Ministry of Education. The authors of the handbook chapters are professors from the Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Belgrade, while Young Researchers of Serbia coordinated the project and the working group of the same name, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the Institute for the Improvement of Education, through the project "Climate Change in Agriculture", supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (UN FAO).

Operational Program Objective 3.3. Raised awareness of citizens about the need to protect and preserve the environment as a core value and improved capacities for participation in decision-making processes at the local level.

During 2024, YRS organized around 30 educational events (workshops, trainings and field activities) and participated in more than 50 awareness-raising, promotional and monitoring events.

Within the "ECO-SYSTEM" program and the "Good Tree" campaign, YRS organized an artistic campaign titled **"Don't Buy – Create! Shop Less, Gift Creativity"** for students of secondary art schools, art colleges and independent artists. The topic focused on art through upcycling, encouraging participants to express environmental messages through creativity and social engagement. This initiative significantly contributed to YRS's public visibility and to raising awareness of the need to change everyday habits, through the application of upcycling as a way to reduce the impacts of climate change and preserve biodiversity. Upcycling is the creative repurposing of waste, by-products and old or discarded items, transforming them into new, useful and/or more valuable products, instead of simply throwing them away or recycling them in a standard way. It is a process that gives items a second life, extends their lifespan and encourages creativity.

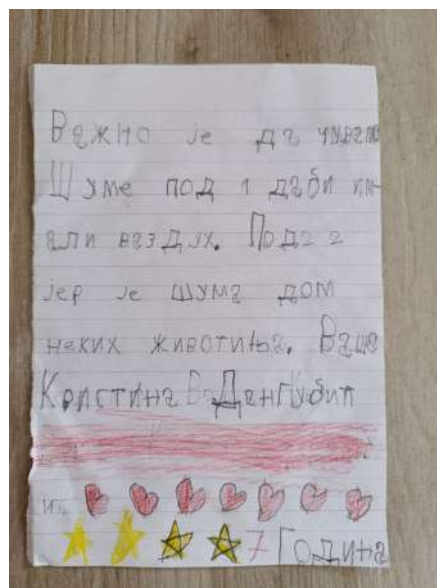
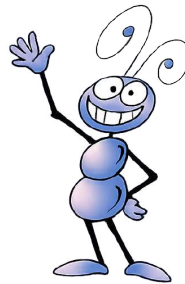




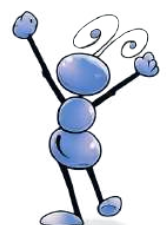
The campaign reached more than 360,000 people through social media alone, while over two million people heard about the campaign through online and traditional media. YRS implemented a comprehensive media and communications strategy that combined traditional media, paid advertising and strategic partnerships (e.g., cooperation with City Magazine, the online portal Buro, agencies FONET and Beta). From December 16 to 19, a joint exhibition of artworks was organized.



This unique event, which was the result of a competition of the same name, brought together more than 60 artists who demonstrated how nature conservation can be supported in a socially engaged way through upcycling and creativity. Applications for the competition were submitted by five secondary art schools, ten faculties and academies, as well as independent artists. The exhibition was ceremonially opened by artist Ivan Kocić, whose work combines modern art and the recycling process. More than 150 people attended the opening ceremony, while the exhibition itself had over 200 visitors. Catalogue can be downloaded [here](#)



The target group of the "Good Tree" campaign was children, who had the opportunity to be creative and create their own "good tree" using the provided elements in the "cut and paste" section of Mali Politikin Zabavnik, complete an educational quiz and send YRS their messages explaining why it is important for them to protect forests. Through social media, 20 artworks were submitted from Serbia and the region.





The "**Kornjača spornjača**" campaign was YRS's first civic fundraising campaign for nature. The campaign was organized as part of the project "Together for the Environment". It started on June 3, 2024, and lasted 77 days. The main idea of the campaign was to raise awareness and sensitize the general public to donating for nature conservation. The campaign was launched to support research and protection of the European pond turtle (*Emys orbicularis*) in Serbia, which faces serious threats such as pollution, climate change and habitat loss. The objective was to raise funds for the purchase of GPS devices, which would significantly help assess the level of threat to the European pond turtles in Serbia.

The campaign was implemented in cooperation with the Belgrade Open School, the Kraljevac Special Nature Reserve and the organization Catalist, with fundraising carried out primarily through the platform donacije.rs. A total of 840,200 RSD was collected from 208 donors. During the campaign, YRS participated in numerous events to increase awareness of the importance of protecting the European pond turtle. An event marking World Nature Conservation Day was organized on July 28 at Kraljevac. YRS also took part in the event Meteor Shower on Avala, the Picnic in Belgrade and MaliFest near Kanjiža. The YRS team and partners had a total of 11 live TV appearances and three radio appearances; more than 60 posts were published on social media and it is estimated that over 1,750,000 citizens saw the campaign.



The promotion of the educational material "**Climate Change in Agriculture**" was organized at the Agricultural Fair in Novi Sad in May 2024. As part of the project "Strengthening the Resilience of the Agricultural Sector to Natural Disasters", YRS organized an interactive game called Climate Quest with event participants, with the aim of encouraging students to apply the knowledge gained through the new subject. In 2024, five vocational schools of agriculture – from Kraljevo, Požega, Sombor, Požarevac and Zrenjanin – included the elective subject Climate Change in Agriculture in their curricula.

In 2024, the establishment of **Councils of Beneficiaries** (Saveti korisnika) was initiated in the protected areas of the Special Nature Reserves Palić–Ludaš and Carska Bara, Rusanda Nature Park and Ritovi Donjeg Potisja Special Nature Reserve. With the support of an expert associate, the YRS team held meetings with protected area

managers to discuss the steps and requirements for establishing Councils of Beneficiaries, address challenges and plan the next steps. Councils of Beneficiaries in protected areas are one of the functional models for involving the public in decision-making processes, as well as for raising public awareness – particularly among residents and workers connected to protected areas – about the importance of cooperation in nature conservation.



Protected area managers were also supported through other activities aimed at increasing transparency. In 2024, **the first cycle of support titled "Together for Protected Areas" was implemented**, in which YRS supported two projects focused on enhancing transparency and increasing citizen participation in the management of Tara National Park and Peštersko Polje Special Nature Reserve.

Additionally, two new protected areas were selected for support in 2025: Obedska Bara Special Nature Reserve and Golija Nature Park.

Tara National Park implemented the project **"Together Against Forest Fires"**, which included workshops and lectures on fire prevention, bringing together the local community and experts. These activities significantly contributed to raising awareness and knowledge about forest fire risks, while also establishing better communication between the managers of the national park/protected area and other relevant organizations. Informational boards were also installed to alert visitors to every-day fire risks and encourage responsible behavior.



The Tourist Organization of Sjenica implemented the project **"Preservation of Peštersko Polje"**, aimed at informing visitors and encouraging their active participation in protecting and preserving the natural heritage. Accessibility to information about the key values of the protected area was improved through the installation of wooden informational boards at selected locations within the Peštersko Polje Special Nature Reserve. These boards allow visitors easier access to information about local flora, fauna and significant sites, as well as a better understanding of the reserve's natural resources and their importance.



In 2024, YRS acted as the national coordinator of the [Danube Art Master Competition](#) for the fourteenth time. The competition was, as before, jointly organized by the Global Water Partnership for Central and Eastern Europe (GWP CEE) and the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR). This year, the competition was supported regionally for the first time by the ERSTE Foundation. Two promotional videos were produced, and a campaign was conducted on social media and in magazines for teachers and children. Owing to successful promotion, a large number of entries were received; 21 awards were granted in six categories in Serbia, and a work from Serbia won first place internationally in the "Teen Video" category, competing with works from all countries in the Danube basin.

Additional awareness-raising activities were carried out during the panel "**Recipe for the Green Transition**", where three short educational videos featuring the panelists were recorded and shared online. These videos helped raise awareness about the circular economy and the role of small and medium-sized enterprises in it.

7. ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Strategic Plan for Organizational Development of Young Researchers of Serbia (YRS) was developed as part of YRS's overall Strategic Plan through 2027. The organizational strategic objectives are:

- Enhanced organizational structure and strengthened human resources necessary for the implementation of program strategic objectives;
- Established system for monitoring the impact of work and capacity development;
- Developed capacities for public advocacy by staff and collaborators, with a defined advocacy and communication strategy.

Through various processes, projects and activities in 2024, the following results were achieved:

- Improved mechanisms for horizontal information exchange between programs and at the management–staff level in the processes of planning and implementing activities/programs.
- Employees were encouraged to participate in information-sharing and planning processes.
- The communication and coordination plan is implemented regularly.
- Job descriptions are regularly updated.

Employees are familiar with their job descriptions, and expected results are clearly defined.

- The practice of hiring employees through a competitive process continues, following established guidelines and selection procedures.
- Mechanisms for supporting and monitoring employees in the implementation of annual plans are defined (mentoring, trainings, shadowing etc.).
- Employee progress is regularly documented.
- Advocacy priorities and an action plan are defined and continuously developed.
- Advocacy campaigns within programs have been prepared and implemented.
- Methodologies and tools for communication with the base/target group have been developed based on identified needs.
- Employees' capacities to implement campaigns have been strengthened.
- Campaigns outlined in the plans have been carried out.

New employees at YRS gradually familiarized themselves with YRS procedures and practices defined in various internal documents (Code of Conduct, YRS Regulations and Procedures related to Anti-Corruption, Whistleblowing Policy, Rulebook on Procurement, Policies for the Prevention and Combating of Sexual Harassment etc.) with the aim of establishing an organizational culture based on principles and values, one of the most important being zero tolerance for corruption.



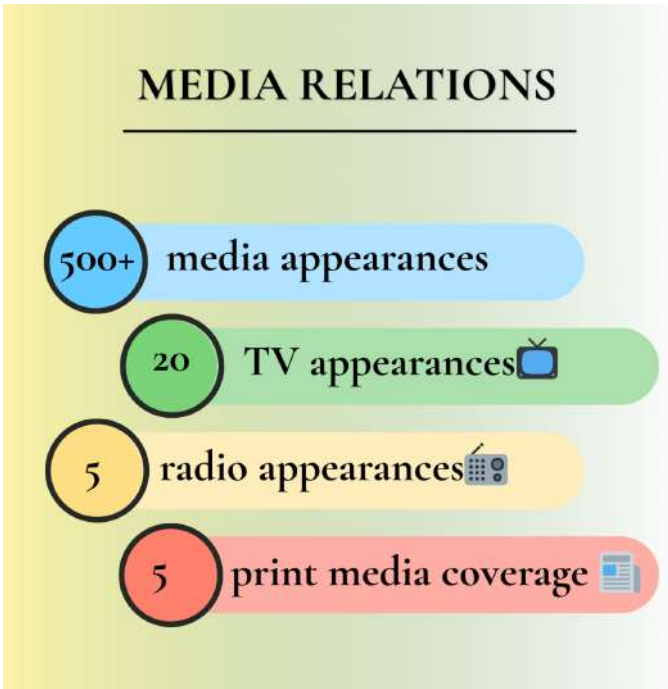
An efficiency audit of YRS's operation, initiated by Sida, was conducted in March and April 2024. The objectives of this process, carried out by Deloitte Advisory d.o.o., were to analyze and determine whether YRS has an adequate system of internal controls ensuring proper management of financial resources and accuracy of financial reporting, and whether YRS's internal policies and procedures are applied and support the achievement of YRS's strategic and operational goals. The auditors' findings, presented in the audit report, were positive, and the report also included recommendations for further development. Based on the audit report, the assessment of results from the five-year "ECO-SYSTEM" program, and the evaluation of YRS's Strategic and Action Plan for 2024 and 2025, Sida approved institutional support for YRS. This is the first institutional support YRS has received since its founding.

Progress in diversifying YRS's funding was also achieved through the implementation of its first crowdfunding campaign, "Kornjača spornjača", during which citizens contributed directly to nature protection through donations. The success of this campaign encouraged YRS to begin developing a model for raising funds through donations from individuals and companies, which, in the long term, would contribute to YRS's financial sustainability.

With the support of consultants, an operational plan was developed for implementing the fundraising model and campaigns, including tactics for building and engaging a community through various communication channels. At the level of documents and procedures, YRS also made progress. Improvements to the Rulebook on Accounting increased the efficiency of staff in the financial-administrative sector and enabled better and more accurate access to accounting information. The Rulebook on Procurement was updated in accordance with the recommendations of the external efficiency audit of YRS (Deloitte Advisory d.o.o.), and these improvements further facilitated procurement procedures while maintaining the most important aspects – preventing corruption and ensuring process transparency.

8. VISIBILITY

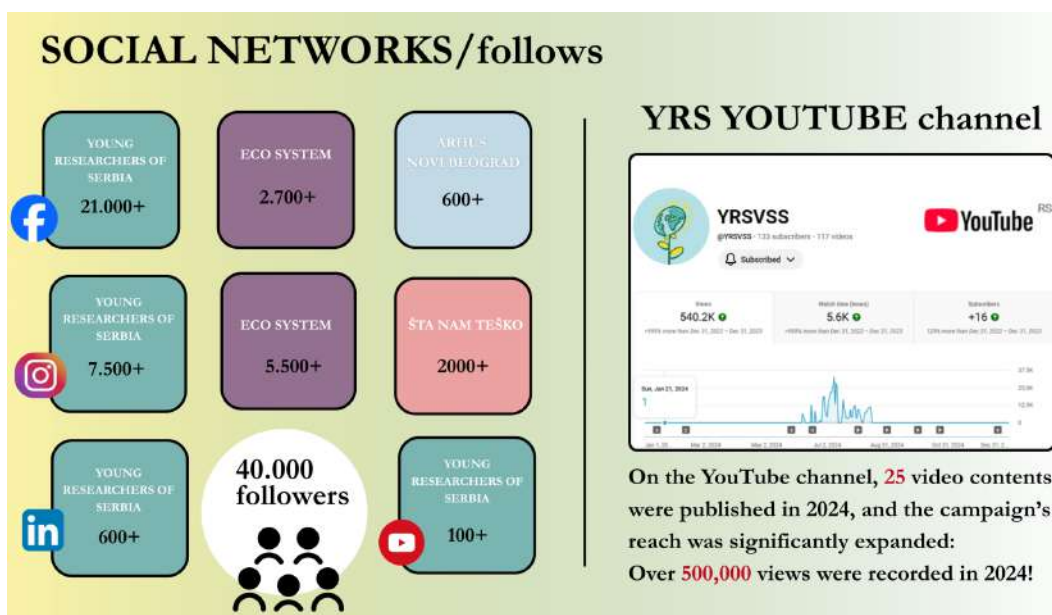
During 2024, Young Researchers of Serbia continued to enhance the visibility of the organization, its programs, campaigns and activities, building on results achieved in the previous years. A clear communication strategy and branding guidelines were applied, addressing both donors and the organization itself. The visual identity was significantly improved to ensure that communication is unified and consistent across different programs and specific donor requirements, while also being recognizable and aligned with contemporary trends and aesthetics. During 2024, through digital channels, creative campaigns and media partnerships, YRS reached a wide range of target groups, from youth and the general public to the business community. A visibility was further strengthened by distributing content via television, radio and print media, allowing our messages to reach a broader audience through diverse formats and communication channels (Infographic 4).



Infographic 4. Media Visibility

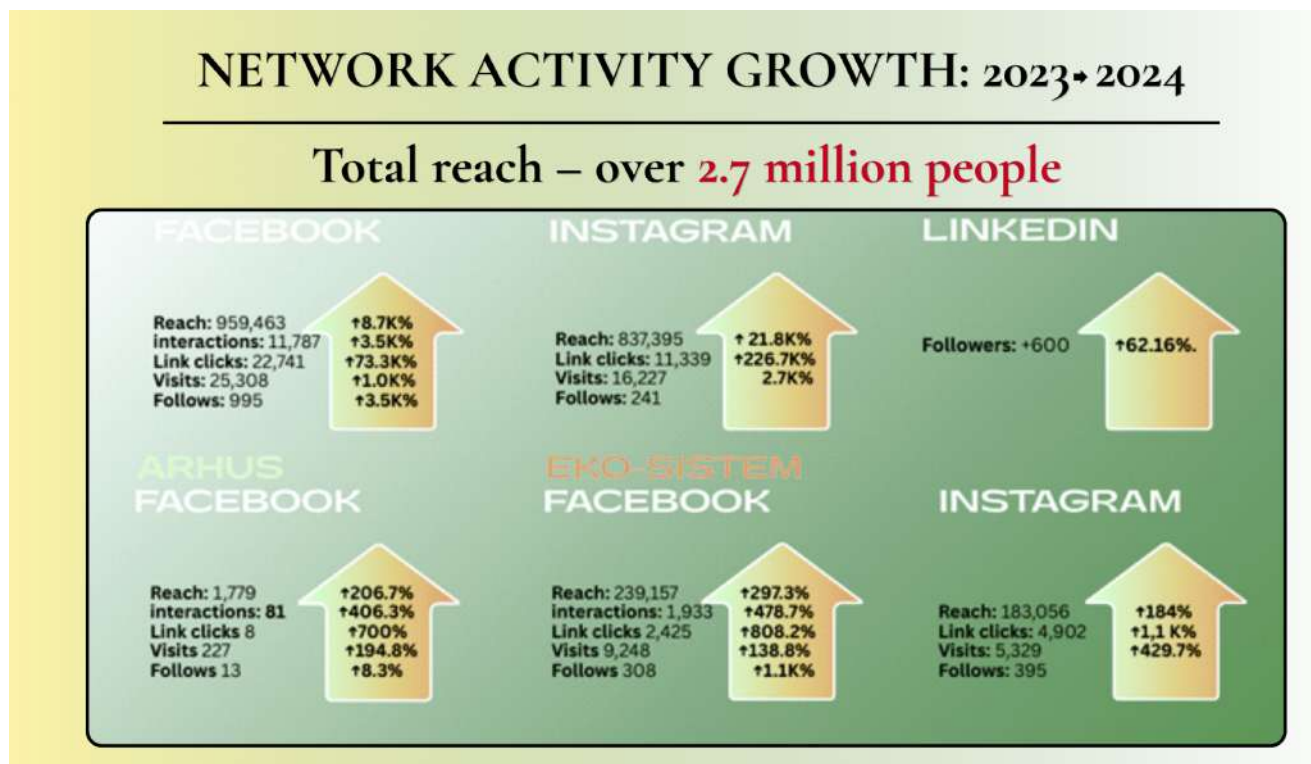
In addition to online activities on social networks and in the media, YRS was present in person at around 20 major public events, where we engaged directly with interested participants and further promoted our initiatives. Furthermore, in 2024, YRS coordinated the development of the **textbook "Climate Change in Agriculture"** for the new elective subject in secondary schools of agriculture, which was published and printed in a run of 1,000 copies.

The e-learning platform remains an important tool for expanding content accessibility and strengthening program visibility. In 2024, YRS developed and promoted a new e-learning course, Climate Change and Agriculture, aimed for the first time at secondary school students, further broadening our audience and the accessibility of our content. As part of the promotion and dissemination of activities, various branded promotional materials were created and distributed, tailored to specific projects – from bags, notebooks and USB drives to T-shirts, coloring books and other gifts – to increase visibility, particularly for the "Kornjača spornjača" campaign, where donors received materials that further connected the community with the campaign's goals.



Infographic 5. Number of Social Media Followers and YouTube Visibility Data

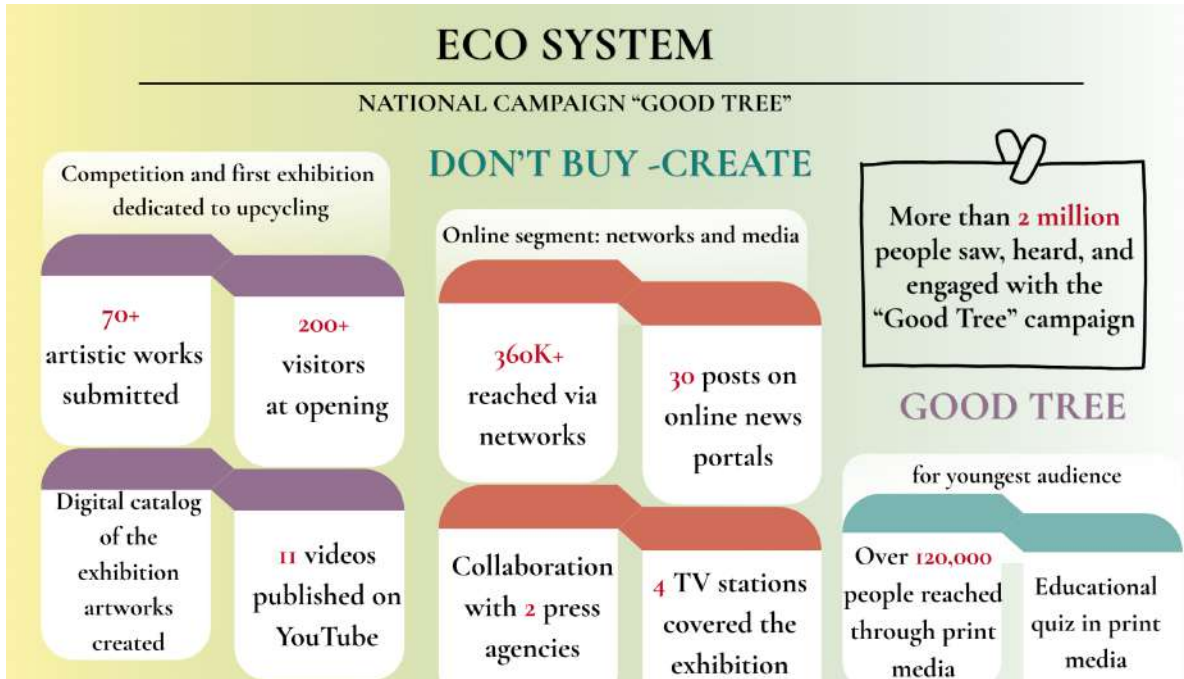
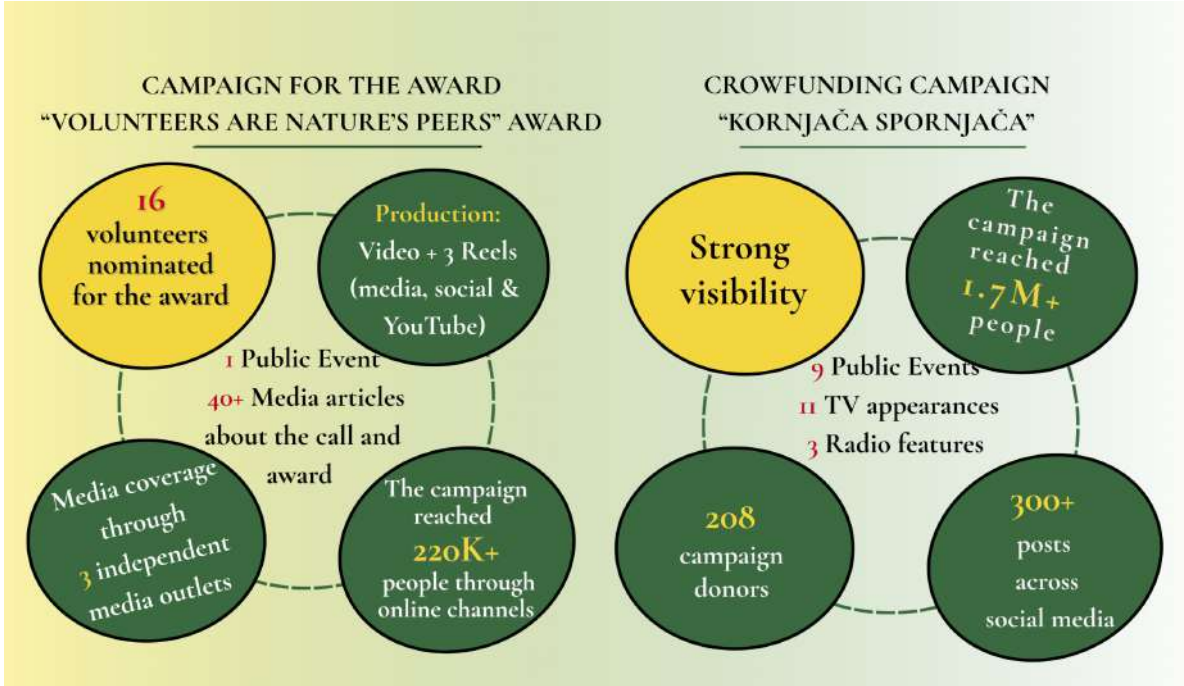
During 2024, YRS significantly increased its presence on social media (Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn). The number of followers and the total number of campaign views on YouTube grew steadily, reaching over 500,000 views (Infographic 5), which enabled greater visibility and expanded audience reach across different platforms (Infographic 6).



Infographic 6. Social Media Statistics

Throughout the year, several campaigns and competitions were carried out, achieving significant media visibility and having a measurable impact.

The competition "Volunteers are Nature Peers" (Volonteri prirodi po meri) attracted significant public and media interest, highlighting the important role volunteers play in environmental protection. "Kornjača spornjača" – YRS's first crowdfunding campaign – during which was worked intensively on visibility and activity dissemination, with a consistently strategic presence on social media to reach the widest possible audience, was successfully completed. The campaign increased visibility, attracted new followers and significantly raised public awareness of the importance of donating to support nature conservation.



Infographic 7. Overview of the Visibility of the Most Significant Campaigns Implemented in 2024

9. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The basic documents for planning and implementing YRS activities in 2024 were: the YRS Strategic Plan through 2027, the YRS Action Plan through 2025, as well as the work plans of the projects that were implemented.

YRS used the developed methods, routines and tools for monitoring projects/core activities based on best-practice principles, such as results-based management, including learning and adaptation, and the information obtained from monitoring and evaluation was used for learning and for adapting project management.

Monitoring and evaluation were conducted in several ways:

- ➔ Members of the project team presented the implemented activities, achieved results and their indicators at weekly meetings.
- ➔ Internal evaluation by the project team was carried out, as well as assessments by participants – all capacity-building and networking activities were evaluated by the participants/program beneficiaries.
- ➔ Quantitative analysis of web platforms and social media was conducted (website web analytics, training platforms, social media statistics and media content analysis).

The Quality Assurance Team consists of the Program Director and the Chair of the YRS Managing Board. This team assesses progress and controls the quality of achieved results at the level of the entire organization. Quality assurance is ensured through quarterly in-depth analyses of results, based on which recommendations are made for improving upcoming activities. The methods used include individual interviews, project document analysis, group discussions and similar approaches.

MONITORING

In 2024, the YRS team conducted 63 monitoring visits: 12 through the "Together for the Environment" project (two to managing authorities and ten to informal groups within the "Everyday Green Heroes" program), 23 through the "ECO-SYSTEM" program (14 programmatic monitoring visits and nine administrative ones), 17 monitoring visits to 14 camps and 11 within the project "Climate Change in Agriculture".

EVALUATION OF VOLUNTEERING PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

YRS-VSS collects assessments from camp organizers and camp leaders through reports prepared after the camps are implemented. Data extracted from the submitted reports are processed and used for further planning and for improving cooperation with local partners (camp organizers) and volunteers (camp leaders).



Infographic 8. Results of the Evaluation of

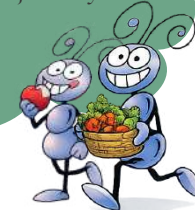
70% of camp leaders believe that the camp (the project or work they were involved in) is sustainable.

At most volunteer camps in 2024, there was no gender-based division of tasks, but camp leaders said:

"In the first part of the camp, no – everyone did everything. In the second part, at one point the organizer separated the guys for physically heavier tasks, but at the initiative of some female volunteers, we eventually avoided that."

"The guys did the mowing and heavy manual labor, while the girls worked with children, but this division was not imposed – it happened naturally. If anyone wanted to do something else, no one would prevent them."

"There were tasks that required raw physical strength, where the guys, together with locals, did most of the work, but every girl could join any task at any time."



Only one camp did not establish cooperation with the local community – because, according to the camp leader's statement, there was no local community.

At the other camps, according to the camp leaders' assessment, good cooperation was achieved.

EVALUATION OF THE "ECO-SYSTEM" PROGRAM

In 2024, an evaluation of the "ECO-SYSTEM" program was conducted by an independent evaluator with the aim of assessing the efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of the organizations' projects at the local level (applying the OECD/DAC Quality Standards for Development Evaluation).

Lead organization	Visibility				Dialogue				Network			
	2021	2022	2023	2024	2021	2022	2023	2024	2021	2022	2023	2024
Voluntary firefighting association Kraljevo	↗ Modest	↗ Modest	↗ Modest	↗ High	↗ High	↗ High	↗ High	↗ High	↗ High	↗ Modest	↗ High	↗ High
Center for Modern Skills	↗ Modest	↗ High	↗ High	↗ High	↗ High	↗ High	↗ Modest	↗ High	↗ Modest	↗ Modest	↗ High	↗ High
Pokret gorana Novog Sada	↗ High	↗ High	↗ High	↗ High	↗ High	↗ High	↗ High	↗ Modest	↗ High	↗ High	↗ High	↗ High
iRevolucija	-	-	-	↗ High	-	-	-	↗ High	-	-	-	↗ Modest
UPVŠ „Bor“	-	-	-	↗ High	-	-	-	↗ High	-	-	-	↗ High
IDA	-	-	-	↘ Low	-	-	-	↗ Modest	-	-	-	↗ High
FORCA	↘ Low	↘ Low	-	↘ Low	↗ Modest	↘ Low	-	↗ High	↗ High	↗ Modest	-	↗ Modest
POLEKOL	↗ High	-	↗ High	↗ High	↗ High	-	↗ Modest	↗ Modest	↗ High	-	↗ Modest	↗ Modest
Environment Improvement Centre	↗ High	↗ High	↗ High	↗ High	↘ Low	↗ High	↗ Modest	↗ Modest	↗ High	↗ High	↗ Modest	↗ High
PROAKTIV (Stara Planina Society)	↘ Low	↗ High	-	↗ Modest	↘ Low	↗ High	-	↗ High	↘ High	↗ High	-	↘ Low

Table 2. Assessment of the Sustainability and Impact of Projects Supported from 2021 to 2024

The table contains an assessment of the sustainability and impact of projects supported from 2021 to 2024. Additionally, an assessment was conducted of the dialogue and cooperation with decision-makers during the implementation of projects by the network of organizations from 2021 to 2024.

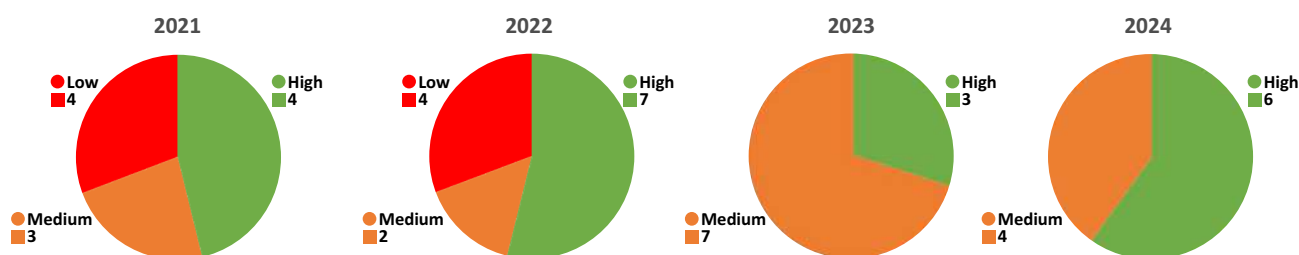


Table 3. Assessment of Dialogue and Cooperation with Decision-Makers during the Implementation of Projects by the Network of Organizations from 2021 to 2024

As an indicator of success, and with the aim of improving and planning future events, programs and projects, YRS regularly conducts evaluations of all events it organizes (online or using non-formal education methods).

Within the "ECO-SYSTEM" program, three events were organized: a conference and promotion of the Shadow Report, an introductory training for CSO networks supported through the program and an evaluation meeting of all networks. Based on participant feedback, the content and topics covered were relevant, the selection of experts was of high quality and the organization and communication with the YRS team were at a high level



Some of the responses from organizations/networks included in the survey on program performance, capacity building, challenges and further impact of the networks are highlighted below.

Did the "ECO-SYSTEM" program contribute to strengthening the capacities of organizations?

"Yes, it contributed to capacity building on multiple levels:

- 1) We improved our capacities for public advocacy and monitoring public policies and their implementation in the field of environmental protection;
- 2) We increased the visibility of the work of our women's section;
- 3) We enhanced cooperation with the public sector, primary and secondary schools and the public enterprise Srbijašume."

Volunteer Fire Department Kraljevo

What changes in the community has your project contributed to?

"What I see as changes is primarily the strengthening of young people's capacities to engage with policies in the areas of environmental protection, nature conservation and climate change, as well as the increased visibility of these topics and recognition of their importance in the community."

Belgrade Open School

Share your opinion on how organizations can work together and increase their impact in Serbia.

"Organizations can work together and increase their impact in Serbia through several key strategies and specific examples. First, networking and collaboration on joint initiatives allow organizations to pool their resources, knowledge and expertise, enabling them to more effectively influence policymaking and address social challenges. Through complementary activities, organizations can create synergy that enhances efficiency in achieving their goals. For example, an organization focused on education and raising awareness can collaborate with an organization engaged in advocacy and policy work to lay the foundation for long-term change and the implementation of new laws and strategies."

Climate Forum Network

EVALUATION OF THE FIRST CYCLE OF SUPPORT FOR INFORMAL GROUP "EVERYDAY GREEN HEROES"

Below are insights from several supported informal groups, in response to the questions: What are the most significant changes the project caused? What happened within you, around you, with you?



Coordinator of the IG Ranger Association of Vojvodina and Serbia: "For many rangers, who usually work in isolated areas and do not often have the opportunity to meet colleagues, this was a moment when they realized how much they are actually part of a larger community, how connected they are by the same challenges, but also by a shared love for nature. [...]"

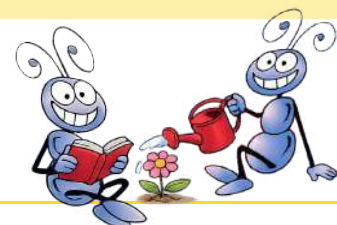
A new energy for problem-solving could be felt, and many shared ideas on how, together, they could improve nature protection. [...]"

[...] everyone agreed that such gatherings were truly refreshing, offering the motivation they needed. [...] That sense of togetherness was the greatest impression – because nature connects them in a way that they all deeply understand."

Coordinator of the IG Planetarstvo: "Working with children on this topic has greatly contributed to a personal sense of satisfaction and fulfillment. We believe that during their formative years, we managed to instill in the children some core values that they will return to every time they need to make a decision that could impact our planet – in other words, every day."

Coordinator of the IG EkoUvac Sjenica: "A particularly moving moment was when visitors to the event where the educational board was installed shared their impressions, highlighting that it was the first time they learned about the importance of the griffon vulture and other endemic species. This showed how crucial education is for raising awareness and responsible behavior toward nature. ..."

The project has sparked a wave of positive changes, from strengthening ecological awareness among children to empowering the local community to better appreciate the natural wealth that surrounds them."



10. RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk management is an important part of the organization's planning and operations. The risk management process is designed to reduce or eliminate the threat of certain types of events that could pose a danger or affect operations. YRS does not have written risk management policies, but it maintains a risk database with a plan to mitigate or eliminate risks.

The key stages of the risk management process carried out by YRS are: risk identification, risk analysis and risk response. Risk identification is conducted periodically by the entire YRS team. Risk analysis is carried out after identification, with the recognized risks being entered into the database (an Excel document). Decisions on risk assessment are made by consensus during a session in which the risks are evaluated. After the risk analysis, a risk response plan is developed and the relevant section of the Excel table is completed as an action plan.

In 2024, the YRS risk database included the following risks:

- Corruption leading to loss of YRS reputation and reduced support from partners and donors. Non-compliance with financial reporting rules, payment mechanisms, financial and systemic requirements, internal controls, etc., causing operational blockages in the organization.
- Sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH) leading to loss of staff and volunteers and jeopardizing the working environment and YRS's reputation.
- Support programs for CSOs and informal groups leading to YRS being perceived primarily as a donor organization.
- Unstable political situation, lack of freedom of speech and rule of law, and extremely negative attitudes toward CSOs, creating an unfavorable environment for YRS operations.
- Youth passivity, the organization's target group, leading to insufficient quantitative and qualitative participation in YRS programs.
- War in Ukraine, conflicts in Gaza and unstable political and economic situations in the EU, affecting Serbia's EU integration process and negatively impacting environmental reforms.
- Lack of adequate services and adherence to traditional habits by partners and collaborators, resulting in inadequate application of environmental protection standards during activities.
- Insufficient engagement with activists and volunteers, causing the loss of activist groups and active volunteers committed to YRS and its goals.
- Imbalanced cooperation with other CSOs (giving much more than receiving in programmatic and financial terms), leading to the exhaustion of YRS resources.
- Non-compliance with internal HR policies and rules, resulting in poor work organization, employee stress and frequent staff turnover.
- Gaps in employee skills and knowledge, as well as insufficient ability to adapt to new external circumstances (political, social, digital, etc.), threatening work performance and organizational effectiveness.

In addition to the organization's general risks, risk databases are also prepared for projects that are managed in a specialized manner.

11. ANTI-CORRUPTION AND SEAH

Recognizing that corruption undermines trust, weakens democracy, threatens economic development, deepens inequality, poverty and social divisions and is one of the causes of environmental degradation, Young Researchers of Serbia (YRS) are committed to preventing and combating corruption.

YRS upholds a zero-tolerance principle toward corruption, which means that all members and employees, as well as collaborators and partner organizations, are familiar with YRS's anti-corruption policy and associated rules, and are required to apply them consistently in every aspect of their work.

YRS's policy is to treat its employees, volunteers, partners, suppliers and external collaborators with honesty and integrity.

YRS expects them to behave toward each other and toward the organization according to the same principle.

The regulations and procedures of Young Researchers of Serbia that prevent corruption are:

1. Code of Conduct;
2. Employment contracts for staff;
3. Rulebook on Financial and Administrative Operations, with defined procedures for procurement, travel, payment responsibilities etc.;
4. Rulebook on Job Classification;
5. Rulebook on Human Resource Management;
6. Rulebook on Internal Whistleblowing Procedure;
7. YRS Risk Management and Risk Database;
8. Rulebook on Prevention and Fight against Corruption.

The responsibility for combating corruption, in accordance with YRS's policies, regulations, and procedures, lies with:

- The Managing Board of Young Researchers of Serbia;
- The Executive Director of Young Researchers of Serbia;
- Employees.

The reporting of suspected corruption, regardless of the party submitting the report, is carried out by notifying the Managing Board of the Young Researchers of Serbia via email at nepravilnosti@mis.org.rs. YRS enables anonymous reporting of suspected corruption across all its programs, including the work of partner organizations, and guarantees the protection and anonymity of whistleblowers throughout the process of reviewing and handling reports.

YRS has invested significant effort in developing procedures and policies that are implemented alongside a high level of voluntary transparency, enhanced operational efficiency, accountability and minimized risk of corruption. This approach and the work of YRS were confirmed through an independent efficiency audit conducted in 2024 by Deloitte Advisory d.o.o., commissioned by Sida.

Additionally, YRS continuously works on strengthening the anti-corruption capacities of its employees, associates and the organizations to which it awards grants. For example, during the introductory training for supported networks within the "ECO-SYSTEM" program, one session was dedicated to the identification and prevention of corrupt practices, analysis of different types of corruption, understanding their consequences and the development of procedures for preventing corruption. The session also covered the importance of adopting a code of ethics and internal controls, identifying corruption-related risks within an organization and possible measures to address and mitigate those risks.

YRS's policy and Code of Conduct governing the rights and obligations of the employer, employees and engaged personnel with regard to the prevention and prohibition of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH) were adopted in 2021 and have since been actively implemented in daily organizational operations and throughout program activities.

The key objectives are:

- preventing and eliminating all forms of violence, harassment, sexual harassment, abuse and sexual coercion in the workplace and in connection with the Employer's work, by regulating the organization and conduct of the Employer, employees and volunteers in a manner that enables effective prevention and protection of victims;
- protecting employees, engaged personnel and all third parties from all forms of harassment;
- establishing guidelines for reporting and referral to the appropriate procedures for handling harassment and violence;
- providing support to and empowering victims.

12. NETWORKS, SYNERGY WITH OTHER PROJECTS, COOPERATION WITH PARTNERS

The engagement of the YRS team in various civil society organization networks remained strong and intensive throughout 2024. Believing in the importance and power of networking, the YRS team invested more than 30 working days in network-related activities, including meetings, conferences, coordination, planning and the implementation of joint activities, among others.

In 2024, YRS was an **active member of the following networks in Serbia:**

Coalition 27, whose mission is to jointly advocate for and contribute to the process of alignment with and implementation of European Union policies, regulations and standards in the fields of environmental protection and climate change through the coordinated efforts of its member organizations.

The National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMs), an advocacy platform that represents the interests of young people, ensures their active participation and develops systemic solutions aimed at improving the position of youth through the development of strategic partnerships, cross-sectoral and international cooperation, as well as strengthening the capacities of member organizations and other stakeholders in youth policy.

Green Chair, whose mission is to improve communication with the Serbian Parliament -Environmental Protection Committee through an established mechanism – the only one of its kind – and to exert influence on improving legislative proposals in the field of environmental protection.

The Natura 2000 Resource Center of Serbia, which focuses on connecting, supporting and developing organizations that, in cooperation with other institutions and organizations, work on establishing the European environmental network NATURA 2000 by the time the Republic of Serbia joins the European Union.

The Climate Forum, a network of organizations working on climate change issues, raising awareness and supporting adaptation to climate change.

At the regional and international level, YRS is a **member of the following networks:**

SEENET, a network of organizations from Southeast Europe whose mission is to provide a platform for cooperation among civil society organizations working on environmental protection at the regional level and to mobilize other civil society sectors in achieving shared environmental goals.

BioNET, a regional network of organizations advocating for nature conservation in the Balkans through joint action.

Youth and Environment Europe (YEE), which aims to unite non-profit youth environmental organizations across Europe in order to improve international cooperation, increase knowledge about the climate crisis, raise awareness of environmental issues and strengthen youth participation in environmental decision-making processes.

The CEEweb for Biodiversity (CEEweb), whose mission is to conserve biodiversity by promoting sustainable development through advocacy, networking and influencing decision-makers, as well as through the implementation of national and transnational projects and the delivery of capacity-building and awareness-raising activities.

The Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations, an international non-governmental youth organization representing national organizations that promote intercultural education, understanding and peace through voluntary service programs.

The Coordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service (CCIVS), which strengthens international voluntary services worldwide by connecting and empowering its members, and by promoting and advocating for international voluntary services and their values at both local and global levels.

YRS is also an associate member of National Association of Youth Workers (NAPOR) and partner of the SCI network in Serbia.

Unfortunately, in 2024, the South East European Youth Network (SEEYN) – of which YRS was a founding and active member – ceased its operations and formally dissolved.

In 2024, YRS maintained strong cooperation with the European Commission and the EU Delegation to Serbia in relation to the Shadow Report of Coalition 27, which has been recognized both nationally and internationally as a high-quality document and is used as one of the reference materials in the preparation of the European Commission's Progress Report on Serbia – Chapter 27 within the EU accession process.

Due to thematic alignment, the most intensive cooperation was developed with the Belgrade Open School (BoŠ). BOŠ is a member of Coalition 27 and collaborates with YRS on the preparation of the Shadow Report on Chapter 27, as well as on the implementation of the project "Together for the Environment".

Cooperation and synergy between YRS and UNDP remained strong throughout the entire "ECO-SYSTEM" program. YRS participated in a number of UNDP activities, including that part of the project "EU for Green Agenda in Serbia", supported by the EU in cooperation with the Embassy of Sweden and the European Investment Bank (EIB), as well as the project "Protecting and Investing in Biodiversity and Water for Enhanced Climate Resilience", supported by Sweden.

In October 2024, YRS participated in the Green Belt Network Conference in Latvia, where synergies were established with projects and organizations working on nature conservation.

YRS is part of the BioNET network secretariat, together with three other organizations, and coordinates the network's activities, strategic decision-making processes and related matters. In November 2024, YRS took part in the BioNET annual meeting.

As a member of the YEE network, YRS serves on the Board of Directors of Climate Action Network Europe, an international network focused on climate change. In November 2024, YRS participated in an in-person Board meeting held in Brussels.

Within the ACCTING project, a new type of event in the form of an "Open Studio" was organized, bringing together representatives of the most successful supported pilot projects from across Europe and experts from relevant fields, with the aim of fostering synergy and networking, as well as developing new joint innovative ideas.

The annual meeting of Aarhus Centers networks from different countries was organized for the first time in Belgrade in October 2024, supported by the Aarhus Center Novi Beograd and at the invitation of the OSCE Mission to Serbia. Over 70 representatives from Aarhus Centers, national institutions, international organizations, civil society and the OSCE discussed the role of the Centers in implementing the key pillars of the Aarhus Convention and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This year, the meeting primarily focused on the contribution of Aarhus Centers to the implementation of SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, as well as the importance of including the perspectives of youth and children in environmental decision-making, and the significance of climate change and environmental education.



13. YRS's DONORS IN 2024.



14. COOPERATION WITH THE BUSINESS SECTOR

YRS cooperates with the business sector in Serbia on several levels: through capacity building, networking and securing financial support from the private sector for activities and initiatives. In addition to participating in the UN Global Compact Network in Serbia, in 2024, YRS representatives took part in at least five different events organized by companies and served as speakers at regional symposia aimed at the business sector.

In 2024, the total value of support from various companies and small businesses exceeded €20,000. The "Kornjača spornjača" campaign was supported by Delgaro d.o.o., BIO Solutions d.o.o., MOORE Audit and SuperLAB (direct donations). The annual schools' competition in the Danube region, Danube Art Master, was supported by ERSTE Bank (project support).

The volunteer cleanup action organized by YRS for employees of Pfiser was part of the broader campaign "Sokolom za sokola" (Falcon for the Falcon), aimed at the protection and conservation of the steppe falcon (Falco cherrug) and its habitat. From December 1, 2023, to May/June 2024, 1 RSD from every ticket purchased on the "Soko" train was allocated to the purchase and installation of artificial nests and the cleanup of parts of the steppe falcon's habitat in Alibunar municipality. Funds collected were used to purchase and install artificial nests on power lines along the Belgrade – Novi Sad railway, with the assistance of experts from Elektromreža Srbije and the Institute for Nature Conservation of Vojvodina Province.

The campaign was implemented by the Joint Stock Company for Passenger Railway Transport Srbijavoz in cooperation with the Institute for Nature Conservation of Vojvodina Province, Elektromreža Srbije, Alibunar Municipality and YRS.

YRS also receives an annual direct donation from Microsoft for the use of Microsoft 365 Business Premium software and associated licenses.

The MEET UP event was organized in September 2024 with the aim of introducing companies, in an informal setting, to the digital platform "Get Involved" (Uključi se). The platform promotes local initiatives and connects volunteers with interested donors and companies that want to act as driving forces in society, contributing to the sustainable development of communities. The event brought together representatives from ten companies, as well as members of informal groups and organizations collaborating with YRS.



In November 2024, as part of the conference "Eco + System = New Energy in Good Environmental Governance", a seminar was held to strengthen the capacities and knowledge of CSOs on the importance of ESG factors (environmental, social and governance factors) for achieving sustainability and the opportunities that an ESG approach offers to civil society organizations. While these principles are traditionally associated with the business sector, the conference demonstrated that they can also be crucial for enhancing civil society work through sustainable initiatives addressing topics such as climate change, biodiversity loss, circular economy and pollution.

The panel discussion "Recipe for the Green Transition of Micro, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises" was held in September as part of the project "Strengthening the Role of Aarhus Centers in Mobilizing Support for Fostering a Green Business Culture through Participatory Decision-Making", implemented by the network of Aarhus Centers in Serbia with the support of the OSCE Mission to Serbia. The panel focused on the impact of the Green Agenda on doing business in Serbia and discussed how micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) play a significant role in the green transition, but often face challenges in implementing it due to limited resources and knowledge.



15. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS – YRS CONTRIBUTION

The focus of YRS's work is environmental protection, volunteering, education and youth empowerment.

YRS promotes a peaceful and inclusive society for sustainable development, advocates for access to justice for all and collaborates in building efficient, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels (Sustainable Development Goal 16).

Through its work, YRS contributes to the following global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.

Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

Goal 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.





Young Researchers of Serbia

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