



PROJECT REPORT

Training for Youth Workers and Youth Activists from Switzerland and the Western Balkans on Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation

Supervised by the Swiss Helsinki Committee (SHV)

PROJECT DETAILS

From September 25 to 30, 2024, twelve young adults from the Western Balkans and from Switzerland (3 participants) participated in an intensive four-day training program on Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Organized under the auspices of the Swiss Helsinki Committee (SHV), this program aimed to equip youth workers and activists with the skills and methods necessary to foster civic society and democratic engagement within their communities.

PROJECT NAME

“Training for Youth Workers and Youth Activists from Switzerland and the Western Balkans on Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation”

SPONSORS & PARTICIPANTS

Sponsors

Smartpeace Foundation (main project sponsor)

Swiss Helsinki Committee (coordination)

Swiss Association of Youth Organisations (SAJV) (coordination)

Stiftung Schüler Helfen Leben (SHL) (price reduction participant accommodation)

Participants

Total: 12 (9 from the Western Balkans: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Slovenia; 3 from Switzerland)

Background of the participants (youth workers, students, civic society; age: 18-30)

Trainers

Gorana Mlinarević (independent researcher, see also: [Heinrich Böll Stiftung Sarajevo](#))

Asja Krsmanović (dramaturg, assistant director, see also: [Goethe Institut Sarajevo](#))

Amer Bahtijar (journalist, Mostar)



DURATION

Module on Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation: September 25–30, 2024

Locations: Sarajevo (3 days) and Mostar (1 day), Bosnia and Herzegovina

Affiliation: The Swiss Helsinki Committee is a partner of the overarching project “We Make Democracy! – Academy 2023-2025,” coordinated by the Swiss Association of Youth Organisations (SAJV).

AUTHORS OF REPORT

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PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

This training aimed to empower youth workers and activists from the Western Balkans and Switzerland with methodologies for engaging young people on the topics of peacebuilding and conflict transformation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Participants explored ways to address issues constructively, promote democratic values, and engage actively in peacebuilding efforts, particularly in the post-conflict context of the Western Balkans.

The training module formed part of the broader “We Make Democracy! – Academy”, an international initiative fostering intercultural exchange, practical skill development, and democratic engagement through multiple training units held across various European countries.

TASKS & RISKS

Tasks

- Teach youth workers and activists methodologies for addressing peacebuilding and conflict transformation
- Develop a “toolkit” comprising learning elements, module plans, and practical exercises
- Foster intercultural peer-to-peer learning through interactive activities.
- Enable participants to document and reflect on their learning experiences through “learning journals”
- Build a network connecting Swiss youth workers and diaspora communities with those in the Western Balkans



Risks

- Addressing complex topics and methodologies
- Addressing sensitive and emotionally charged topics
- Challenge of balancing intercultural dynamics among participants

TARGET ANALYSIS

- Train participants in community theater and role-play as tools for their work with young people in the field of peacebuilding and conflict transformation
- Equip youth workers with training skills to support young people in democratic and peacebuilding processes
- Methodological and didactic skills for the work with young people, specifically theater plays, role plays, community theatre
- Provide the opportunity for intercultural peer-to-peer learning
- Provide practical learning experiences through expert-led sessions and hands-on activities
- Participants create a learning journal to reflect on what they have learned and on their experience in intercultural cooperation
- Networking of Swiss youth workers and diaspora with youth workers in the Western Balkans

RESSOURCES

Human Resources – 3 experts: Trainers Gorana Mlinarević, Asja Krsmanović, and Amer Bahtijar

Local Partners: Stiftung Schüler Helfen Leben (SHL), Centar za kritičko mišljenje (Center for Critical Thinking, Mostar)

Accommodation for participants: Stiftung Schüler Helfen Leben (SHL)

Swiss Partners: Swiss Association of Youth Organisations (SAJV)



RESULTS

Training Summary

On **Day 1**, participants were introduced to foundational concepts of conflict and peacebuilding by expert Gorana Mlinarević. This initial session provided a platform for participants to share their expectations and concerns regarding the training topics, fostering an open and collaborative atmosphere from the outset.

Day 2 was first led by expert Gorana Mlinarević, who introduced the core theories of conflict transformation and peacebuilding. The expert has been working on these issues for 30 years. She emphasized the importance of understanding peacebuilding and conflict transformation as a process. The parts of the concepts should not be seen as boxes to be ticked, but as a process that needs to be addressed and constantly improved.

The day included practical exercises that simulated conflict scenarios and explored resolution strategies. In the second part of the day, Asja Krsmanović led a workshop on community theatre techniques, encouraging participants to create short plays that addressed pressing social issues. Participants explored the concept of “spect-actors”, where the audience actively engages in theatrical performances rather than passively observing. This method allows individuals to experiment with creative solutions to community problems. Through “theater of images”, participants learned how static visuals in performances can evoke new perspectives and foster a deeper understanding of conflict. Methods such as co-creating a plot, telling a story, and acting out scenes together were emphasized as ways to represent and address community interests and to foster collective creativity and problem-solving.

Day 3 involved a visit to Mostar, where participants engaged in a guided city tour led by journalist Amer Bahtijar. Participants also gained insights into the divided educational systems and historical narratives prevalent in Mostar.

The tour included a visit to the Centar za kritičko mišljenje (Center for Critical Thinking, Mostar) and interactions with a local witness who shared personal experiences of Mostar’s complex history, shedding light on the significance of overcoming interethnic tensions.

The participants were deeply impressed by the moving history of Mostar. The contemporary witness, a man who had lived in Mostar all his life, told the story of the city from different perspectives. The audience was impressed that, despite the tragedy of the story, he told it with humour and emphasised the importance of never losing hope and talking to the other side. He used friendship and love as examples of how such conflicts can be overcome.

The participants found his story very sensitive and thought long and hard about what they had heard. They noted that there was too little discussion about the Balkan war going on and conflicts in their societies are still prevalent. Especially their generation – the younger one – often avoids such topics in everyday life. After meeting with the witness and



discussing with him, they announced that they wanted to learn more about history and how important it is to talk about it with others and not remain silent.

The program concluded on **Day 4** with participants presenting their developed role plays on conflict scenarios and resolution strategies. This final session included group reflections and evaluations of the training experience, allowing participants to consolidate their learning and share feedback on the program.

Overall Results

- Participants have gained critical insights into peacebuilding and conflict transformation methodologies.
- The training has fostered intercultural exchange and collaboration.
- Participants have enhanced their didactic skills through individual and group exercises.
- Play writing, role plays and community theatre have proved effective for addressing sensitive topics and promoting awareness.
- The visit to Mostar has highlighted the ongoing challenges of post-conflict reconstruction and the importance of addressing historical narratives.

Participant Feedback

- The program has been praised for its engaging and practical approach.
- Personal stories and historical insights from Mostar have resonated deeply, emphasizing the value of reflection on past conflicts.
- The intercultural learning has deepened networking between the participants and enhanced intercultural understanding.

Conclusion

The training successfully equipped youth workers and activists with different concepts of conflict and peacebuilding and with tools – role-play and its analysis – to engage in peacebuilding and conflict transformation, encouraging their active participation in promoting democratic values and societal resilience in their youth communities in the Western Balkans, Switzerland and beyond.



RÉSUMÉ

This training program has successfully brought together youth workers and activists from the Western Balkans and Switzerland for a transformative learning experience on peacebuilding and conflict transformation. Through expert-led sessions, interactive workshops, and a visit to the historically significant city of Mostar, participants have been equipped with practical tools and methods to address conflict constructively. The program has also fostered intercultural exchange and collaboration as well as emphasized the importance of shared narratives and democratic engagement. Overall, the initiative has built the competencies of participants to be effective youth advocates for peacebuilding and democracy in their communities and among their youth peers.

Bern, February 9, 2025

Marie-Ursula Kind, Berenika Zeller, Michèle Häfliger



PHOTOS



Day 1 introduced the topics of conflict and peacebuilding. A yarn was used to illustrate the complexity of conflicts and the importance of cooperation between the various parties involved.



The various participants formulated their expectations of the training session and shared their concerns, as the topics of conflict and peacebuilding are anything but easy to discuss.



On **Day 2**, the young adults learned about key theories of conflict transformation and peacebuilding with the help of expert Gorana Mlinarević. In working groups, they consolidated their knowledge.



Participants were working in groups to delve deeper into the theories and concepts of peacebuilding.



The various concepts of peacebuilding were then discussed in plenary with the expert.



This session was followed by an input from the dramaturge Asja Krsmanović on theatre, role play and community theatre.



On **Day 3** in Mostar, the group met a local and witness to Mostar's troubled history.



On a city walk through Mostar with the historic bridge in the background, the realities of conflict set in.



The walk along different educational institutions in Mostar gave further input on the problem of divided curricula.



On **Day 4**, the participants practiced and presented their theatre plays.



Upon presentation, each group discussed the “conflict” within their play with the audience and received feedback on its performance and conflict resolution.



Group photo with participants, trainers and organizers on the last project day.

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