

# Youth Initiative for Human Rights Croatia

## 15 YEARS OF RESISTANCE



## PROGRAM REPORT 2023



YOUTH INITIATIVE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS  
INICIJATIVA MLADIH ZA LJUDSKA PRAVA  
NISMA E TE RINJVE PËR TË DREJTAT E NJERIUT

# YOUTH INITIATIVE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS CROATIA 2023 IN NUMBERS

200+

activity participants

40+

press mentions

35+

participation in conferences

28+

participations in workshops and educations

4

employees

10

activists



YOUTH INITIATIVE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS  
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# 15 YEARS OF RESISTANCE

In 2023, the YIHR network marked two special anniversaries.

20 years of the YIHR regional network was celebrated with a conference in Belgrade and the publication of the “My Initiative” monography.

15 years of YIHR Croatia was marked in Zagreb, Croatia with the premiere screening of the documentary “They are Coming” and a public panel followed by a get-together of old and new YIHR activists and supporters.

The past year has been a year of generational renewal for YIHR Croatia, remembering where we came from and reimagining where we are going.

2023 started with the launch of the Activist Network which gathered over 20 young, passionate human rights defenders who over the past year participated in advocacy and memorialisation activities. We have also accepted new young members in the Assembly and our staff has been filled with new and bright transitional justice enthusiasts who will continue to carry on the mission and values of YIHR to the next generation.

We thank everyone who has supported us and our efforts over the years and are excited to witness the heights that the new generation is set to accomplish!



# STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK 2022-2025

## VISION

The Croatian society has learnt the lessons from its past and strives towards a positive future based on the respect of human rights, civic values and the rule of law.

## MISSION

Our work addresses the legacy of the 1990s, aims to prevent the recurrence of conflict and build a society based on the respect of human rights. We do so by enabling young people to become tolerant citizens who think critically about the past and who actively hold institutions accountable through effective advocacy and activism.

## VALUES

Responsibility  
Antinationalism and Antifascism  
Inclusion  
Courage  
Solidarity



# STRATEGIC GOALS 2022-2025

## SG1

*Encourage and enable youth to shift attitudes and combat rising nationalism stemming from the 1990s and its consequences*

## SG2

*Ensure that key institutions take steps to responsibly deal with the past, including through the effective implementation of transitional justice mechanisms*

## SG3

*Empower youth to develop critical thinking, self-organise and enact positive social change with a special focus on youth at risk of marginalisation and youth from war-affected communities*



# PROGRAMS 2022-2025

## DEALING WITH THE PAST AND ADVOCACY PROGRAM

is focused on structured, continuous monitoring and public advocacy related to the legacy of the 1990s war in Croatia and the implementation of transitional justice mechanisms.

As a human-rights watchdog, we monitor high-ranking government officials' attitudes towards convicted war criminals, war crimes committed during military operations, the creation of a memory policy as well as their attitudes towards the application of the constitutional right to protect and promote the rights of minority peoples.

We cooperate with the YIHR regional offices and other partners who share our values and vision of respecting and advocating for human rights.

In this strategic period, we will focus on raising public awareness, educating young people, and realizing advocacy initiatives related to the involvement of the Croatian military and political leadership in the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-1994) and their responsibility for the perpetrated war crimes.

Through memorialization activities at the national and regional level, we will address the events marking the 1990s that are deliberately bypassed by nationalist dominant narratives of memory and represent an obstacle to a better connection of once closely related societies. We will also preserve the memory of all civilian victims of the war and design inclusive and responsible memorial practices. Through this, we aim to encourage decision-makers and high-ranking officials to adopt good approaches to building a culture of memory developed by civil society.



# PROGRAMS 2022-2025

## YOUTH EDUCATION AND ACTIVISM

We design, organise and realize informal educational programs for young people using improved and new educational programs, methodologically focused on various forms of interactive workshops and lectures on the events of the 1990s.

We are focused on incidents of mass violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, individuals and movements that tried to preserve and maintain peace, successful practices in the field of symbolic reparations, perspectives and needs for improving institutions, and comparative practices of inclusive commemorations.

Our non-formal education programs aim to build the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary to identify and solve complex problems in the community. This type of education includes structured educational programs, workshops and webinars, study visits and training. They are primarily intended for young people coming from economically deprived areas and especially those exposed to the rise of nationalism closely related to the unresolved legacy of the 1990s wars.

We encourage and strengthen youth activism, we provide mentoring and partner support for advocacy initiatives as well as the development of knowledge and skills that young people can invest in further, positive development of their local communities.

Through the connection and coordination of young activists, we build a stable and sustainable activist network that can preserve and support their motivation for activism in the field of human rights and the creation of more responsible societies that successfully deal with the burden of the past.



# **SG1: ENCOURAGE AND ENABLE YOUTH TO SHIFT ATTITUDES AND COMBAT RISING NATIONALISM STEMMING FROM THE 1990S AND ITS CONSEQUENCES**

We provide opportunities for young people from Croatia and the region to meet, exchange experiences and learn from their peers, experts and activists of different ethnic backgrounds and ideological profiles.

We want young people to have factual knowledge about human rights violations and crimes committed in Croatia and the region during the 1990s. We want to equip them with knowledge and critical thinking skills which will enable them to recognize the role that their own country played in those violations.

We also equip young people with the skills, knowledge and tools to fight ethnic discrimination and advocate for reconciliation at the local, national and regional levels.

We inspire young people to embrace and/or create fact-based narratives as well as inclusive memorialization practices related to the 1990s. We hope to motivate young people to work on encouraging their local communities to participate in the process as well.

In our efforts to do so, we held the following activities in 2023:





# SG1: ENCOURAGE AND ENABLE YOUTH TO SHIFT ATTITUDES AND COMBAT RISING NATIONALISM STEMMING FROM THE 1990S AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

## YOUTH REMEMBERS THE FORGOTTEN

In January 2023, we attended the “We Choose Peace” event in Vukovar together with our activists. We commemorated the end of the Peaceful Reintegration of the Croatian Danube region which was organized by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the Europe House Vukovar. In March, we screened and discussed the movie “Crimes Before the ICTY: Central Bosnia” ahead of the 30th anniversary of the war crimes in Ahmići.



In February, we organized the Educational-Activist Day “Young People Remember the Forgotten.” Through this event, we informed generations born after the wars of the 1990s about the events from the recent past which they do not learn about in school or hear about through public discourse. We wanted to encourage them to work on building a society based on solidarity, tolerance, and human rights by learning the complete truth about the 90s wars and by paying respects to all civilian war victims regardless of their nationality or ethnicity. After learning the facts about the crimes committed in the City of Zagreb, we visited the unmarked sites of human rights violations, including the Pavillion 22 of the Zagreb Fair, as well as locations at the Poljanička Street and Gajeva Street. We have summarized the entire experience in a video.

One of the participants of the Educational-Activist Day pointed out while reflecting on the event: “Remembering the innocent victims of war, conflicts, and human rights violations is not only about looking back to the past but also looking towards the future.”

# SG1: ENCOURAGE AND ENABLE YOUTH TO SHIFT ATTITUDES AND COMBAT RISING NATIONALISM STEMMING FROM THE 1990S AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

## YOUTH REMEMBERS THE FORGOTTEN

In April, together with YIHR BiH and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation from Bosnia and Herzegovina, we organized a study trip to Ahmići and Trusina on the eve of the 30th anniversary of the war crimes committed in those places in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

During the “Youth Remembers the Forgotten” study trip, we met with representatives of victims' associations and religious communities to discuss the war crimes committed in April 1993 and the consequences of those crimes for society today.

Before the visit to Ahmići and Trusina, we gathered young people from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo to learn about those war crimes and the judicial processes that followed as well as about the societal consequences of the crimes and the problem of institutional oblivion.

The participants pointed out that they feel a duty to inform themselves and share the acquired knowledge with others, their families, friends and the wider community because they believe the change starts with each of us.



A participant of the trip and a member of the Activist Network, Dora Tomljanović, took photographs during the trip and then produced a one-minute film "Minuta šutnje" (Moment of silence). The film was selected for the official selection for the grand prix at the Croatian Festival of One-Minute Films in Požega. Dora's film was among the best 60 films from over 400 submitted one-minute films.

# SG1: ENCOURAGE AND ENABLE YOUTH TO SHIFT ATTITUDES AND COMBAT RISING NATIONALISM STEMMING FROM THE 1990S AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

## YOUTH REMEMBERS THE FORGOTTEN

From April 29th to May 6th, 2023, we participated in the organization and realization of the interdisciplinary study trip "Places of Remembrance of Cultural Traumas". During the trip, we visited places of suffering in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina from the period of World War II and the wars of the 1990s. This study visit was the result of cooperation between the components of the University of Zagreb, the Faculty of Media and Communications of Singidunum University in Belgrade, and civil society organizations. The participants were young people from Croatia and Serbia.

These are some of the impressions they shared with us:

*"More than conveying messages, I would like to apply experiences from the trip in everyday life - to position myself more actively and critically towards every form of nationalism, chauvinism and imperialism."*

*"Tell all the confessions, make an effort to correct misconceptions, discover things that have no place in the public space and, after all, spend some time in contemplation."*

*"The (visit to) Ahmići destroyed me. I feel empty and ashamed, but as we did before, we have the tools in our hands to never allow this to happen again."*



# SG1: ENCOURAGE AND ENABLE YOUTH TO SHIFT ATTITUDES AND COMBAT RISING NATIONALISM STEMMING FROM THE 1990S AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

## YOUTH REMEMBERS THE FORGOTTEN

In September, the 30th anniversary of the suffering of civilians during the military-police operation Medak Pocket was commemorated. As part of our "Youth Remembers the Forgotten" study visits, we, together with the Serbian National Council, organized a study trip to the area around Gospić. Young people from Serbia and Croatia joined us in visiting the nearly deserted places of Divošelo, Medak, and Počitelj. We also attended a joint commemoration on September 16th.

Through the "Youth Remembers the Forgotten" study trips, we contribute to deconstructing the prevailing notion of "our" and "their" victims based on nationality. By educating ourselves about the crimes committed, visiting the places of suffering, and engaging in conversations with residents and victims' families, we aim to learn more about wartime events and demonstrate that there are representatives of younger generations born after the war who want to preserve this memory. Even when the memory refers to shameful parts of our past.

By visiting the surrounding area of Gospić, where war crimes were committed in 1993 and subsequently extensively documented in court, we seek to foster a sense of empathy, critical reflection on past events, and respect for all war victims. We also advocate for authorities to approach the memorialisation of these crimes responsibly and inclusively.



# SG1: ENCOURAGE AND ENABLE YOUTH TO SHIFT ATTITUDES AND COMBAT RISING NATIONALISM STEMMING FROM THE 1990S AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

## YOUTH REMEMBERS THE FORGOTTEN

We remembered the civilian war victims by participating in the commemoration organized by the Serbian National Council and held on August 3rd in Doljani. In the presence of the victims' families, we delivered a speech in which we extended our apologies to those who went through some of the most difficult periods of their lives during and after Operation Storm. In doing so, we emphasized:

“Through this apology, we aim to contribute to the building of a different Croatia. We want Croatia to be a community founded on the rule of law, legal security, truth, equality, democracy, and human rights. We want Croatia to be a reconciled society that is not afraid of its past but learns lessons from it for the future.”

The entire speech we delivered on that occasion can be found [here](#).



# SG1: ENCOURAGE AND ENABLE YOUTH TO SHIFT ATTITUDES AND COMBAT RISING NATIONALISM STEMMING FROM THE 1990S AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

## YOUTH REMEMBERS THE FORGOTTEN

In December, we organized the fourth educational and activist school of transitional justice for 17 young people from Croatia in Karlovac.

The school featured lectures by local and international experts, interactive workshops, field trips and conversations with contemporaries of the wartime events in Karlovac.

One of the participants' reflections testifies to the importance of conducting educational programs aimed at encouraging a comprehensive understanding of historical events: "The community I belong to is homogeneous, this kind of school is very important for my academic development and refinement of ideas."

The attitude of one of the lecturers from the school coincides with the opinion of the young people who participated in the program: "The School of Transitional Justice is certainly the only educational program in Croatia where young people can acquire knowledge about the wars of the 90s in the region that are based on facts."



# SG1: ENCOURAGE AND ENABLE YOUTH TO SHIFT ATTITUDES AND COMBAT RISING NATIONALISM STEMMING FROM THE 1990S AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

## YIHR'S ACTIVIST NETWORK

In 2023, we formally launched our Activist Network. Through this Network, we want to open yet another door for all those seeking an opportunity to express themselves and share their thoughts and dilemmas; those who want to practically apply their knowledge, acquire new information about topics related to the past and understand how they influence their present and their future. We envision it as an opportunity for those who want to creatively express themselves because they are motivated to build an environment based on solidarity, mutual understanding, and tolerance.



During the first meeting of the Activist Network, we jointly brainstormed about activities that we want to organize, among which are: peer-to-peer knowledge exchanges, movie screenings, visits to museums and cultural events followed by discussions with guest speakers, a book club, research and writing, fact-checking, meetings with peers as part of regional youth exchanges, visits to the (un)marked sites of atrocities from the 1990s wars, conversations with victims and witnesses, developing creative advocacy strategies to improve the politics of memory and support an inclusive memory culture, empowerment workshops, organizing protests, etc.

# SG1: ENCOURAGE AND ENABLE YOUTH TO SHIFT ATTITUDES AND COMBAT RISING NATIONALISM STEMMING FROM THE 1990S AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

## ACTIVIST NETWORK

In June, the members of the Activist Network visited the exhibition "Objective of the NDH: Dangerous and Injurious to Public Order and Security" set up by the Jasenovac Memorial Area Public Institution and the Serbian National Council. The exhibition was set in the Museum of the City of Zagreb and based on police arrest records of citizens living in Zagreb in 1941 and 1942.

As a part of the knowledge exchange program on experiences and good practices in the field of dealing with the past, we hosted our colleagues from the Srebrenica Memorial Center who presented their work to our Activist Network. We also introduced them to our activities and goals in more detail, especially those dealing with the contribution of civil society to processes of building an inclusive culture of memory as well as those regarding informal youth education programs and creative advocacy activities.





# SG1: ENCOURAGE AND ENABLE YOUTH TO SHIFT ATTITUDES AND COMBAT RISING NATIONALISM STEMMING FROM THE 1990S AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

## ACTIVIST NETWORK

At the end of July and ahead of the anniversary of the civilian suffering and human rights violations perpetrated during and after Operation Storm, we participated in a meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, Ms Anja Šimpraga. During this meeting we attended with members of our Activist Network, we discussed topics related to the importance of building inclusive memory regarding the conflicts of the 1990s. We also touched upon trust- and reconciliation-building processes in the context of interethnic relations in post-conflict Croatian society and discussed perspectives for the new generations born after the 1990s wars. Finally, we discussed her work in the context of these topics.



# SG1: ENCOURAGE AND ENABLE YOUTH TO SHIFT ATTITUDES AND COMBAT RISING NATIONALISM STEMMING FROM THE 1990S AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

## POLITICAL YOUTH NETWORK (PYN)

PYN is a unique platform in the region that gathers young representatives from 42 political parties from seven countries (BiH, Montenegro, Croatia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Slovenia, Serbia).

In January and February, we held two webinars for politically active youth intending to foster conversations about current events among peers from neighbouring countries. The first webinar, "Let's Talk about What is New in the Western Balkans?", provided an opportunity for young people to hear more about the current events and regional challenges from an expert analyst on the Western Balkan countries, Adnan Ćerimagić.

To mark the year since the start of the aggression against Ukraine, we discussed the impact of that war on the peace and stability in the Western Balkans during the second webinar "A year after the start of the aggression against Ukraine: The consequences and impact on stability and relations among post-Yugoslav states." Opening remarks and discussion moderation were provided by Senada Šelo Šabić, a senior research associate at the Institute for Development and International Relations, whose research is focused on Southeastern Europe.

At the end of July, we successfully held the first in a series of Regional News Cafe webinars for politically active young people, organized as a part of the Political Youth Network (PYN).

Participants from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia attended the webinar titled "Transitional Justice: Key Concepts and Their Place in Post-Conflict Societies", which was conducted by our intern, Eve Jones from Newcastle University in the United Kingdom.



# SG1: ENCOURAGE AND ENABLE YOUTH TO SHIFT ATTITUDES AND COMBAT RISING NATIONALISM STEMMING FROM THE 1990S AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

## POLITICAL YOUTH NETWORK (PYN)

From May 10th to 13th, we organized the “Regional PYN conference for young people in Belgrade: Reconciling the Past, Building the Future.” The conference was attended by 46 young politicians and activists from eight PYN countries.

The topics covered through guest lectures, workshops and panels during the conference included: transitional justice and the issue of missing persons, everyday political activity in communities and societies in post-Yugoslav states, recognition of the negative consequences of nationalism and its distinction to patriotism, advocacy and lobbying for the promotion and protection of vulnerable social groups’ rights as well as the forms of activist activity ranging from civil disobedience to institutional resistance. The Annual Assembly of the Political Youth Network was also held during the conference.



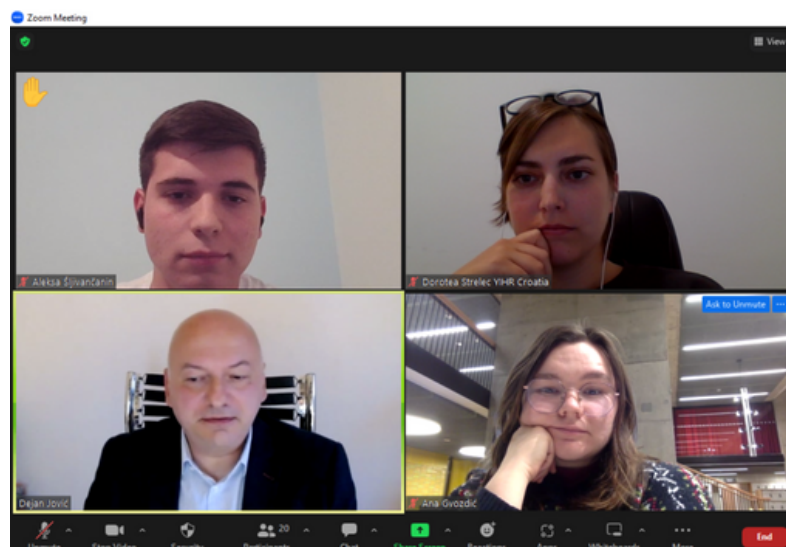
# SG1: ENCOURAGE AND ENABLE YOUTH TO SHIFT ATTITUDES AND COMBAT RISING NATIONALISM STEMMING FROM THE 1990S AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

## POLITICAL YOUTH NETWORK

In October 2023, we held our second Regional News Cafe webinar “International Relations and Foreign Policy Analysis of Western Balkan Countries” led by a distinguished scholar in the field, Professor Dejan Jović.

The event garnered substantial interest, with 18 enthusiastic young participants coming from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, the Philippines, the United States, and Serbia. Professor Jović gave a thorough introduction to international policy and questioned the widely held notion that economic interests are the primary drivers of foreign policy by highlighting the importance of ideas and identities as significant forces shaping international interactions.

The differentiation made by Professor Jović between foreign and domestic policy was one of the highlights of his presentation. Professor Jović debunked the popular belief that political parties unite for the sake of national interest in foreign policy. He emphasized that foreign policy can be an issue of dispute given that nations frequently present diverse identities and goals on the international scene. Professor Jović leaned on Henry Kissinger’s expertise to emphasize that a nation’s status as a great power doesn’t solely rely on a grand foreign policy vision but on its ability to prioritize and engage strategically with specific international issues.



## **SG2: ENSURE THAT KEY INSTITUTIONS TAKE STEPS TO RESPONSIBLY DEAL WITH THE PAST, INCLUDING THROUGH THE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE MECHANISMS**

We draw the public's attention to individuals who opposed the war in the nineties and we publicly commemorate the civilian victims of the war regardless of their ethnicity and national origin.

We want to strengthen public awareness of the institutions' responsibility to deal with the past responsibly through mechanisms of transitional justice.

We create and promote fact-based narratives about the role and actions (including crimes) of the Croatian political and military leadership in the Republic of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina during the 1990s.

In our efforts to do so, we held the following activities in 2023:



# SG2: ENSURE THAT KEY INSTITUTIONS TAKE STEPS TO RESPONSIBLY DEAL WITH THE PAST, INCLUDING THROUGH THE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE MECHANISMS

## ADVOCACY

We continued our advocacy efforts during the first three months of 2023. Together with the Youth Initiative for Human Rights Bosnia and Herzegovina, we reacted to the attacks and violence at a sports competition in Ilidža (Bosnia and Herzegovina). We informed the wider public about the details of the attacks, strongly condemned the violence, and pointed out the urgent need for the authorities to react in cases of hate speech and hate crimes.

In response to the hateful graffiti in Čapljina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, we reminded the public about the crimes committed in Camp Dretelj, close to where the graffiti was placed. We encouraged the Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković and President Zoran Milanović to show their support for the development of Bosnia and Herzegovina under European values and international standards of human rights by taking responsibility for the political and military mistakes of their predecessors.

At the invitation of the Center for Nonviolent Action, we joined former inmates in camps established during the 1990s. Peace activists, journalists, and war veterans made a joint visit to five unmarked sites of detention, torture, and execution in Bosnia and Herzegovina and supported a public appeal about the importance of showing equal respect to all victims.

At the invitation of the Memorial Center in Srebrenica, we participated in a study visit to the Memorial Center to acquaint ourselves with their work and exchange knowledge in the field of dealing with the past. We also strengthened our cooperation in the fields of memorialization and the fight against revisionism and genocide denial.



## SG2: ENSURE THAT KEY INSTITUTIONS TAKE STEPS TO RESPONSIBLY DEAL WITH THE PAST, INCLUDING THROUGH THE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE MECHANISMS

### ADVOCACY

The process of establishing the Croatian Defense Council's (HVO) museum commenced at the end of February near Mostar. The museum is being set up in a place which was a detention camp in the 1990s known as "Heliodrom" in which the members of the HVO imprisoned, mostly Bosniak but also Serb, war detainees, and civilians. To initiate dialogue around this problem and inform the public about the victims' perspective regarding the establishment of this museum, we interviewed Emir Hajdarević, the President of the Association of Mostar Detainees and a former detainee of the Heliodrom Camp.



# SG2: ENSURE THAT KEY INSTITUTIONS TAKE STEPS TO RESPONSIBLY DEAL WITH THE PAST, INCLUDING THROUGH THE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE MECHANISMS

## ADVOCACY

In May 2023, together with the Youth Initiative for Human Rights Serbia, we jointly remembered the civilians who died in the area of western Slavonia and Zagreb in May 1995. We demanded from the highest officials for May 2nd to be declared a memorial day in Croatia for all civilian victims of war and to enable its marking in a suitable place.

We pointed out that the war criminal Dario Kordić has no sympathy for the victims thirty years after the massacre in Ahmići even after serving his prison sentence for the crime. We also demanded for the Croatian President, Zoran Milanović, to provide support and visibility for the victims of war. Moreover, we demanded recognition that the crimes were committed as well as for Kordić to be stripped of the honorary national decorations he previously received.

We joined efforts with our Activist Network to commemorate May 8th, the significant date marking what would have been Aleksandra Zec's birthday. We advocated for the installation of a memorial honouring the murdered members of the Zec family in Zagreb. Our advocacy efforts emphasized the importance of adhering to responsible standards in commemorating civilian victims of war.





## SG2: ENSURE THAT KEY INSTITUTIONS TAKE STEPS TO RESPONSIBLY DEAL WITH THE PAST, INCLUDING THROUGH THE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE MECHANISMS

### ADVOCACY

This December, our activists, Nikola Kožul and Senna Šimek, held their joint commemorative speech at the commemoration of the murdered members of the Zec family in Sljeme, Zagreb. Members of our activist network also participated in the commemoration, symbolizing the importance of the role of new generations in preserving the memory of civilian victims of minorities in Croatia.

This commemoration will be especially remembered for the unveiling of a memorial plaque at the former Adolfovac mountain lodge marking a physical, public mark of the place of the Zec family's suffering.

The perpetrators of the crime are also mentioned on the memorial plaque, representing a precedent in commemorating the suffering of the Serbian minority during the wars of the 1990s in Croatia. The murder of Marija, Mihajlo and Aleksandra Zec was a hate crime, and the direct perpetrators of this murder were never held accountable.

Our advocacy efforts and the importance of cooperation with civil society in building an inclusive culture of remembrance were also recognized by the City of Zagreb which installed the commemorative plaque and publicly highlighted the merits of YIHR.



**SG3: EMPOWER YOUTH TO DEVELOP  
CRITICAL THINKING, SELF-ORGANISE AND  
ENACT POSITIVE SOCIAL CHANGE WITH A  
SPECIAL FOCUS ON YOUTH AT RISK OF  
MARGINALISATION AND YOUTH FROM  
WAR-AFFECTED COMMUNITIES**

We want young people from war-affected and/or economically deprived areas to think critically and understand deep-rooted problems in their communities.

We motivate them and provide them with the skills and applicable knowledge needed to develop and realize activities that can lead to social change in their communities.

We want young people to be brave and equipped to fight the rise of nationalism and build inclusive communities through local human rights advocacy.

In our efforts to do so, we held the following activities in 2023:



# SG3: EMPOWER YOUTH TO DEVELOP CRITICAL THINKING, SELF-ORGANISE AND ENACT POSITIVE SOCIAL CHANGE WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON YOUTH AT RISK OF MARGINALISATION AND YOUTH FROM WAR-AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

## EDUCATION

YIHR and HERMES - Croatian Educational and Development Network for the Evolution of Communication organized a Training for Peace Activism Educators in Zagreb at the end of May and beginning of June this year for participants aged 18 to 30 from different parts of Croatia.

The participants of the training expanded their knowledge about human rights and peace activism during the 1990s in Croatia and the region to recognize and oppose the rise of nationalism and its consequences today.

By participating in the training, they further developed their skills in facilitation, working with young people, organizing events in the local community and achieving positive social changes through the development of critical thinking and self-organization skills, as well as youth work and facilitation skills.



# SG3: EMPOWER YOUTH TO DEVELOP CRITICAL THINKING, SELF-ORGANISE AND ENACT POSITIVE SOCIAL CHANGE WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON YOUTH AT RISK OF MARGINALISATION AND YOUTH FROM WAR-AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

## EDUCATION

With our support, trainer Karla Birkić utilised the knowledge and skills that we passed on at the Training for Trainers of Civic Responsibility, Human Rights and Peace Activism held in the spring by holding workshops for young people in three local communities. In Zadar, a workshop was held for high school students who did not have the opportunity to learn about peace activism and human rights through formal education. Their first encounter with participatory nonformal education methods introduced them to new concepts.



In Osijek and Slatina, the workshops were held on the premises of local associations: Dkolektiv - an organization for social development and the KRIK Youth Association, and were open to all interested young people, who showed a great desire to learn and actively participate in the discussions.

In Zagreb, we held a workshop for youth at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Student Club. We decided to bring the facts related to that period closer to the student population by holding the “Nineties War” quiz. We also used this opportunity to educate them about peace activism. The use of quizzes as a learning method proved to be extremely successful as the venue was filled and seven teams actively participated.

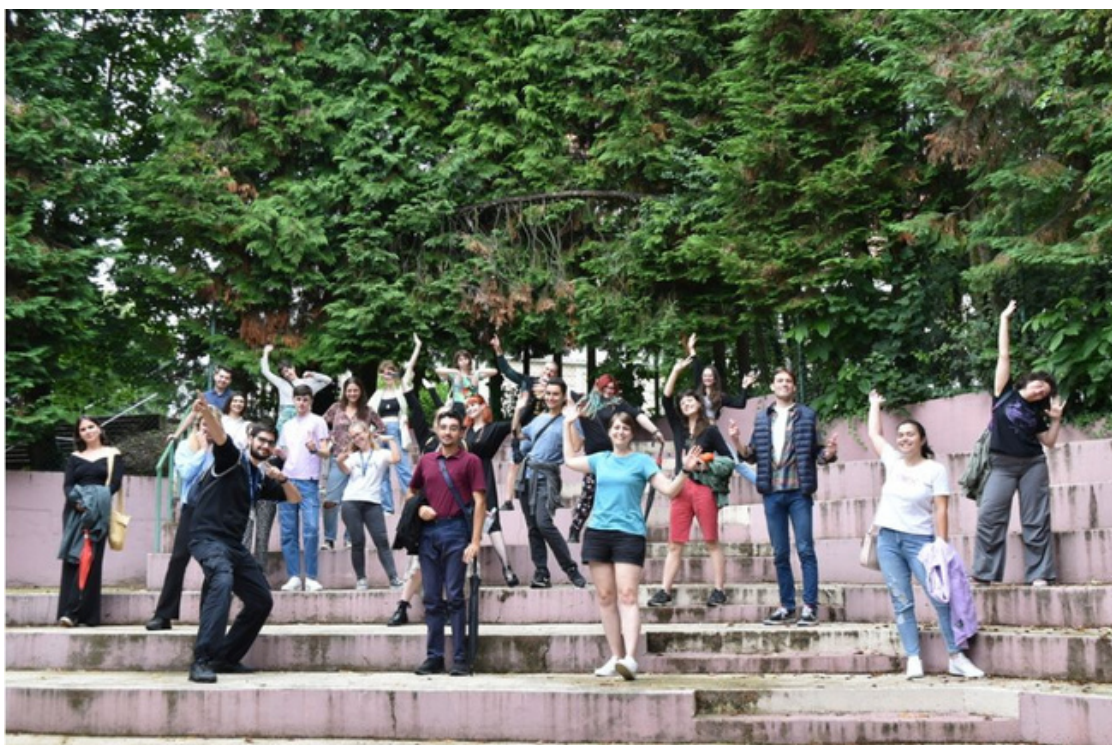
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## **EDUCATION**

Together with YIHR Serbia, we organized the Regional Summer Activist School “I Šća ćemo sad?” in Daruvar from the 2nd to the 8th of July. Over 25 young people from Croatia and Serbia participated in the school. Over five thematic working days, participants had the opportunity to gain knowledge in promoting and protecting human rights, specifically the rights of national minorities. They also became aware of prevalent prejudices and stereotypes towards “others.” Moreover, they learned how to distinguish concepts such as nationalism and patriotism, facts and narratives, and understand how these affect the realization of individual and collective human rights, both in the past and today.

At the end of the program, we gathered many positive impressions from the participants, and here is one of them:

*“I heard first-hand what the post-war atmosphere was like in Daruvar. I was genuinely glad to hear how the community started coming together and living together again through cultural and entertainment events. Through conversations, I realized that war is definitely not a conflict between entire states but a conflict among high-ranking individuals, and civilians are the ones who suffer the most in every sense.”*



# SPECIAL MENTIONS

The Program Director of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights, Branka Vierda, received the "Ordinary Heroes" recognition from the Post-Conflict Research Center (PCRC) for actively promoting the values of justice, peace, and reconciliation. In an interview with Portal Novosti, she pointed out the following: "Our wish is to have no work in the future because that would mean that those who bear the burden of the greatest responsibility, namely those in positions of political power, have recognized that the value of peace, of quality (co)existence, tolerance and understanding is the only path that brings all-round prosperity to society."



Branka was also the 2023 laureate of the "Krunoslav Sukić" award for promoting peacemaking, nonviolence and human rights awarded by the Center for Peace, Nonviolence and Human Rights Osijek. The award is reserved for exceptional individuals who, through their actions, leave a mark in the efforts of building sustainable peace and a culture of nonviolence in the Republic of Croatia and its surroundings.

# SPECIAL MENTIONS

At the invitation of the Post-Conflict Research Center and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, we participated in a consultative meeting on "Reparative strategies and Transitional Justice in the Western Balkans". The meeting was a part of the Western Balkan Coalition for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Crimes which we attended together with over 20 civil society organizations from the region.

Among other things, we pointed out that it is important to observe the building of trust and reconciliation in the area of the Western Balkans through the implementation of transitional justice mechanisms at the national and regional levels. To improve the reconciliation process, the Western Balkans region should also include Croatia. Although Croatia marked ten years of its membership in the European Union on July 1st, the processes of transitional justice in Croatia are far from complete.



Together with colleagues from YIHR Serbia and YIHR Kosovo and other experts in the field of building an inclusive culture of memory, we participated in the first international school on conflict transformation and peacebuilding. The school was organized in the city of Derry, Northern Ireland, by the Bloody Sunday Trust, the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience and Ulster University International. During the seminar, we learned and discussed approaches, methods and challenges of dealing with the violent past in Northern Ireland and the Western Balkans.

# SPECIAL MENTIONS

We are extremely pleased that the work of young people involved in the activities of our Activist Network has been recognized in the region! On July 10th, 2023, for the fourth time, the "Nino Ćatić" journalism award was presented at the Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial Center in five categories. On this occasion, our activist Aurora Rakić was awarded a special recognition for her contributions to promoting the truth about the Srebrenica genocide.



Finally, the Regional Stability in South East Europe Study Group issued recommendations to the European Union and the United States of America to support the Youth Initiative for Human Rights Regional Network's project Shared Narratives. They encouraged donor communities to finance and promote this project as a flagship civil society project.





# THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT IN 2023



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