

ANNUAL REPORT 2025



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INSTEAD OF AN INTRODUCTION

The relativization of historical facts, the tolerance of hate speech, and the absence of an institutional response to open attacks on constitutional values marked the year 2025 in Croatia. Instead of consistently insisting on the rule of law and the protection of human rights, we witnessed the postponement of responsibility and political calculations in matters that should have been above day-to-day political interests. Where responses had to be clear and unequivocal, they were absent. And without a clear response, there is no trust in institutions, no real protection of the rights of all citizens, nor a democracy founded on accountability.

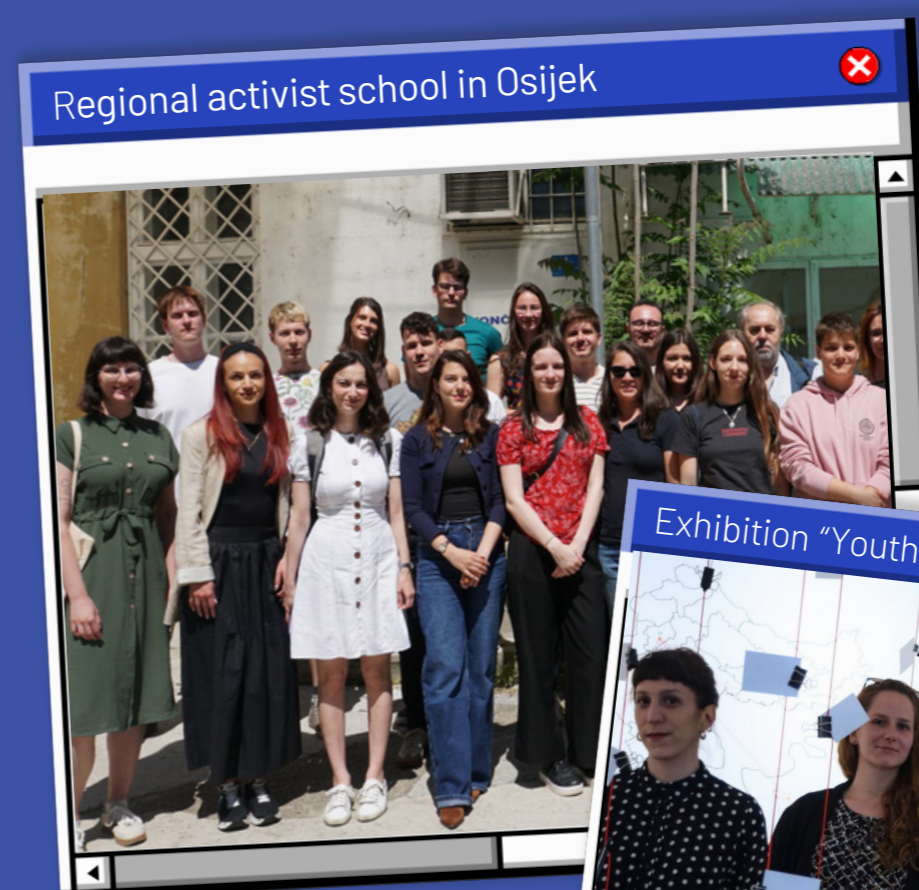
In a year in which the largest (pro)fascist gathering in Europe since the Second World War was held, there was no decisive and unequivocal institutional condemnation or sanctioning of the unconstitutional messages and symbols that were publicly displayed and expressed there. This not only called into question public order, but also the fundamental values of the constitutional order of the Republic of Croatia. Instead of clear and principled protection of the Constitution, space was opened for the normalization of ideologies that are in direct opposition to the antifascist foundations of contemporary Croatian statehood.

Such a political climate gave the impression that the protection of constitutional values is not a priority, but rather a matter of political assessment. This is an approach we do not accept. The defense of human rights, equality, and the dignity of all people cannot be selective or conditioned by interests. Faced with threats, attacks, and attempts to intimidate cultural and political actors, for the first time in seventeen years of our work we published a Warning on the State of Human Rights in Croatia. We warned of the de facto narrowing of the space for political and cultural freedoms and called on the competent institutions to restore the constitutional order in its full sense, not only formally but also substantively. We did not accept silence.

Our response, however, did not remain at the level of public reactions.

During 2025, we implemented a series of programs, exchanges, and study visits for young people, aimed at strengthening awareness of the importance of justice for human rights violations committed during the wars of the 1990s. In a time of growing revisionism and simplified narratives, it is necessary to open space for critical reflection on the past and to emphasize the importance of dialogue, inclusive commemoration, and reconciliation processes, especially in communities affected by conflict and division.

The regional activist school in Osijek brought together young people from Croatia and Serbia, creating a space for the exchange of experiences and for confronting different interpretations of the recent past. Study visits to Trusina and Ahmići, with participants from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, enabled direct engagement with sites of suffering and personal stories that often remain outside dominant narratives.



Through the initiative Young Remember the Forgotten, young activists from Croatia researched and documented war crimes, torture, and killings, including cases for which no one has been held accountable even after several decades. As part of the initiative, an exhibition of the same name was presented, created after visits to more than thirty sites of suffering and remembrance. Through personal testimonies of victims, the exhibition enabled participants to gain a deeper understanding of the conflict and the importance of preserving memory while simultaneously advocating for justice.

We also organized the online program Dialogues without Filters: Youth Conversations on the Wars of the 1990s and Digital Memory, providing a structured and safe environment for the exchange of views and the questioning of dominant interpretations of the past. We also presented the autobiography I Am Alen, which conveys the experience of a child born as a consequence of wartime sexual violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This event opened space for discussion on topics that had been suppressed for years and emphasized the importance of regional cooperation in transitional justice processes.

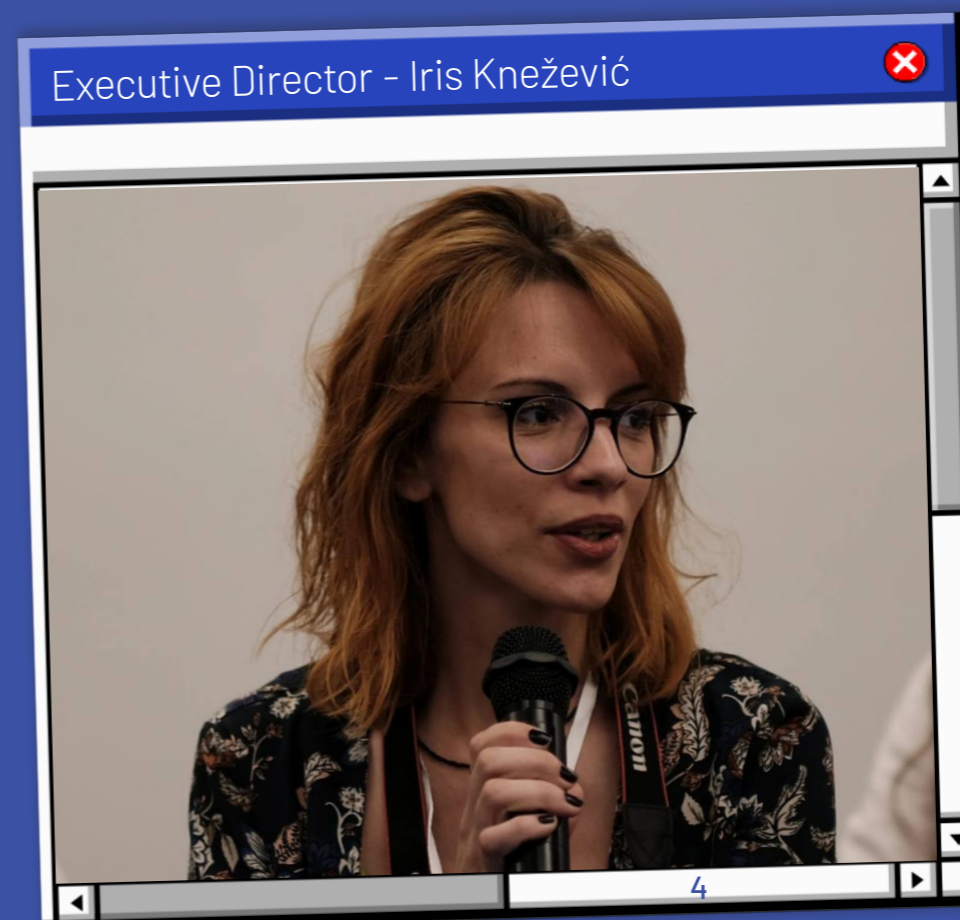
We understand memory as an active social process that requires acknowledgment of facts, empathy, and responsibility. We marked the thirtieth anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica and the thirtieth anniversary of the military-police operation Storm, seeking to raise awareness among young people of the importance of an inclusive approach that recognizes all victims, regardless of their ethnic or national affiliation. We also drew attention to unmarked sites of suffering in Dvor and Kerestinec. We believe that reconciliation without justice lacks credibility and that lasting peace can only be built through acknowledgment, taking responsibility, and respect for all affected communities.

Alongside programs aimed at young people, we continued our advocacy activities focused on the protection of fundamental constitutional values and the strengthening of institutional accountability. We called on the competent institutions to consistently apply the law and to prosecute unlawful acts. We publicly reacted to instances of hate speech, including those at football matches, and participated in peace initiatives, seeking to contribute to dialogue, reconciliation, and the prevention of violence in post-conflict societies.

Despite the challenges, 2025 was also marked by young people who refuse to accept hatred as a social norm. Young people who demand accountability, who defend public space, and who understand that democracy is a process that requires active participation. This is precisely why working with young people, in Croatia and the region, remains at the core of our work.

While responding to concerning social processes, we simultaneously shaped a new strategy and defined clear programmatic directions for the coming decade. In a time of rising tensions and divisions, we decided to further invest in long-term processes of reconciliation, justice, memory culture, and democracy. The Initiative has been and will remain unequivocal in the defense of human rights and civil liberties. We will continue to support legal struggles, strengthen young actors of social change, and create safe spaces for dialogue and solidarity.

Because responsibility is not only a socio-political stance; it is the foundation of every democratic society.



1. HIGHLIGHTS OF 2025

During 2025, the institutions of the Republic of Croatia repeatedly failed to protect the Constitution and the values it promotes, as well as to prevent violations of and safeguard the human rights it guarantees.

It was a year marked by the largest (pro)fascist gathering held in Europe since the Second World War, but also by threats, attacks, and other patterns of behavior that seriously restrict the freedom of political and cultural expression.

For us, it was a year in which we persistently reminded the public of what the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, particularly its Article 3, clearly prescribes, demanded action in accordance with these principles, and warned that ignoring the duty to protect constitutional values threatens the regression of Croatia's hard-won democracy.

Freedom, equality, national equality and gender equality, peacemaking, social justice, respect for human rights, inviolability of ownership, preservation of nature and the human environment, the rule of law, and a democratic multi-party system are the highest values of the constitutional order of the Republic of Croatia and the basis for the interpretation of the Constitution.

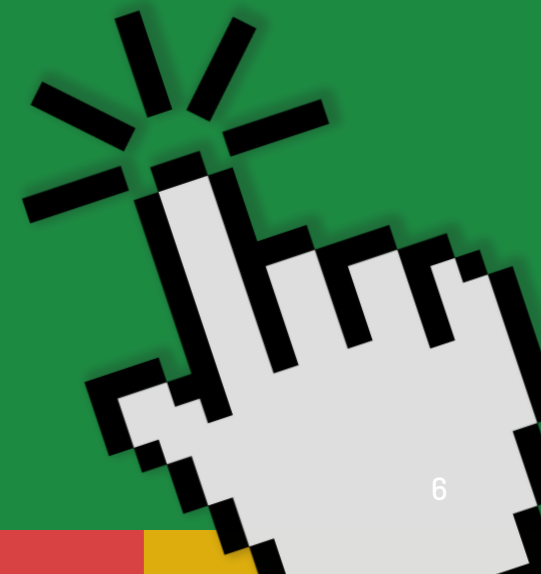
- from Article 3 of the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

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1.1 ANTIFASCISM IS THE GREATEST CONCEPT IN THE WORLD

The concert by Marko Perković "Thompson," held at the Zagreb Hippodrome, represents the most massive attack on the constitutional values of the Republic of Croatia from the end of the 1990s to the present day. It constitutes a direct attack on the fundamental values of the European Union and a serious threat to the long-term sustainability of the democratic order in Croatia.

Ahead of the concert held in July in Zagreb, we placed billboards across the city with the message **"Antifascism is the greatest concept in the world."** With this, we sought to remind the public that modern Croatian statehood is founded in opposition to the proclamation of the NDH, that is, in opposition to fascism and Ustashism.

A multi-day mobilization marked by symbols and messages of hate culminated in the public chanting of the Ustasha slogan in front of hundreds of thousands of people, making this event the largest (pro)fascist gathering held in Europe since the Second World War.

On this occasion,  **we called** on the Government of the Republic of Croatia to sanction the display of symbols and the public expression of unlawful and unconstitutional messages in public space. We called on the Mayor of the City of Zagreb to condemn hatred in a special address and to announce measures to protect and reassure the citizens of Zagreb. We called on the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the City of Zagreb to support civic education measures in line with the fundamental values of the constitutional order of the Republic of Croatia. We called on the President of the Republic of Croatia to condemn, in a special address, the mass display of symbols and the public expression of unlawful and unconstitutional messages, and on the European Parliament and the European Commission to ensure increased funding for education, youth exchanges, and programs for the protection of the Union's fundamental values in Croatia.

Antifascism is the greatest concept in the world



1.2 WARNING ON THE STATE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

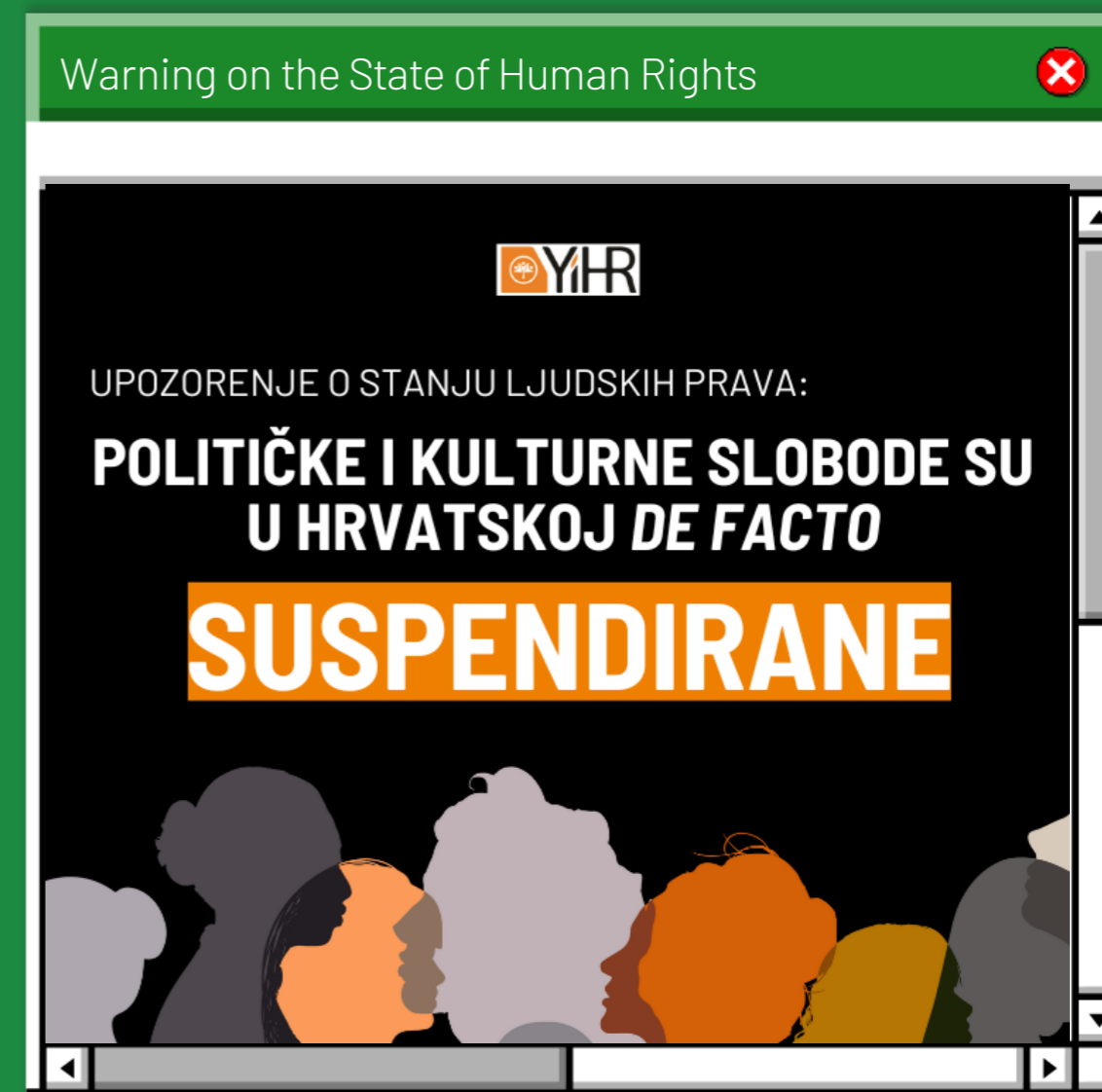
For the first time in seventeen years of our work, we published a **Warning on the State of Human Rights in Croatia**, in which we warned that political and cultural freedoms in the country are de facto suspended. We requested that the competent authorities restore the constitutional order and guarantee freedom of expression, as well as initiate constitutional proceedings to ban the political party Domovinski pokret due to its openly unconstitutional actions. We called on the President of the Republic, Zoran Milanović, to invite the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Croatia to initiate proceedings against Domovinski pokret.

During the year, we witnessed numerous threats, attacks, and other patterns of behavior that restrict the freedom of political and cultural expression. There were cancellations of festivals and cultural events due to threats of violence, publicly expressed threats and hate messages directed at citizens, politicians, artists, and activists, as well as increasingly pronounced self-censorship caused by fear of violence.

The culmination of the suspension of cultural and political freedoms occurred in November, when the program of the Days of Serbian Culture in Split was interrupted. At that moment, a pro-fascist group of men dressed in black entered the venue where the program was to take place and, shouting "Za dom spremni," violently disrupted it.

Given that the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia guarantees political and cultural freedoms, and that these are further protected by international instruments and domestic legislation, we reminded the public of the responsibility of Croatian institutions to ensure these guarantees for all citizens and persons under Croatian jurisdiction, and we called on the competent authorities to take this assessment of the de facto suspension of political and cultural freedoms seriously and to undertake decisive measures to restore public order in which these rights are guaranteed to all.

Therefore, we called on the President of the Republic of Croatia to instruct his Office for Defence and National Security to conduct an urgent assessment of the functioning of the security and intelligence system in relation to the threats and violence that led to the de facto suspension of political and cultural freedoms, and to inform the public of the findings in a special address. We also called on the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister to urgently convene the National Security Council to discuss these threats to fundamental freedoms, including the task of the security and intelligence system to identify and monitor the activities of organizations and individuals who effectively prevent the exercise of constitutional rights and freedoms. We called on the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, and the Minister of the Interior to ensure the restoration of public order through the effective protection of fundamental constitutional rights and freedoms throughout the country, including the consistent application of the law and the prosecution of unlawful acts.



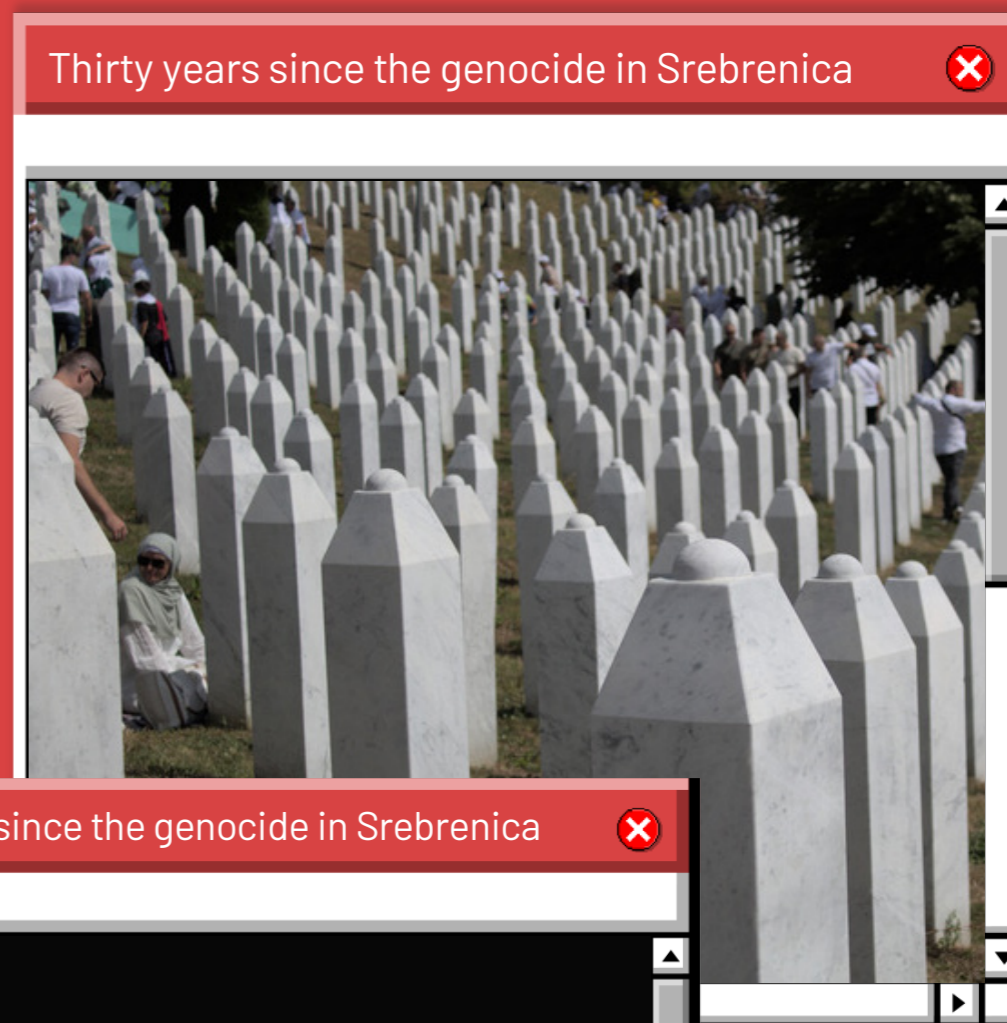
2. A YEAR OF COMMEMORATIONS

2.1 THIRTY YEARS SINCE THE GENOCIDE IN SREBRENICA

Our Executive Director, then an activist of the Initiative, Iris Knežević, participated in the Summer School of the Post-Conflict Research Center, during which she stayed in Potočari and took part in the commemoration marking thirty years since the genocide in Srebrenica.

On the occasion of this anniversary, she wrote a text in which she reminds us of the role of young people in the region in preserving the memory of the genocide in Srebrenica and in fighting against nationalist and malicious narratives that prevent or slow down the process of dealing with the past and reconciliation.

„Srebrenica, thirty years later, shows how important it is to preserve memory. Nurturing a culture of remembrance and recalling what happened is not only an act of respect towards the victims, but also a necessary step towards building peace, dialogue, and conscious citizens—those who learn from the past.”



2.2 THIRTY YEARS SINCE OPERATION STORM

For the authorities in Croatia and Serbia, victims are merely an ornament of chauvinistic politics.

On the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of Operation Storm, together with the Youth Initiative for Human Rights in Serbia, we issued a joint statement warning that the authorities in both Croatia and Serbia used the commemoration of this anniversary to, each in their own way, demonstrate chauvinism and a complete abandonment of responsibility towards the victims.

We called for a responsible approach towards the victims of Operation Storm and reminded the public that the Youth Initiative for Human Rights in Serbia had already, in 2022, submitted a request to the Commission for Street and Square Names of the City of Belgrade to rename the street of war instigator Brana Crnčević after Ružica Markobašić, a victim of a war crime committed against Croatian civilians and prisoners of war at Ovčara.

We also reminded the public that the Youth Initiative for Human Rights Croatia, exactly 15 years ago, installed a plaque of apology to civilian victims of Operation Storm in Knin, and that on the thirtieth anniversary we called on the City of Knin to engage in dialogue on the official installation of such an appropriate memorial to civilian victims.



2.3 THIRTY-TWO YEARS SINCE THE CRIME IN AHMIĆI

“The most striking for me was the grandmother in Ahmići who said that she is still afraid. We told her that we would not allow something like that to ever happen again.”

“I understood this study trip as a call for togetherness, acceptance of diversity, a culture of remembrance, and the fight for lasting peace.”

– Reflections of participants of the study visit to Ahmići

In Ahmići, on 16 April 1993, members of the Croatian Defence Council (HVO) and the special unit of the HVO Military Police, the so-called “Jokers,” committed a mass crime against civilians, killing 116 Bosniak civilians, including eleven children and thirty-two women. The youngest victim was only three months old, and the oldest was 82 years old.

On the same day, 16 April 1993, in Trusina, members of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ARBiH) killed 22 Croats, including 15 civilians and seven captured soldiers of the Croatian Defence Council (HVO). Four civilians were wounded, including two children.

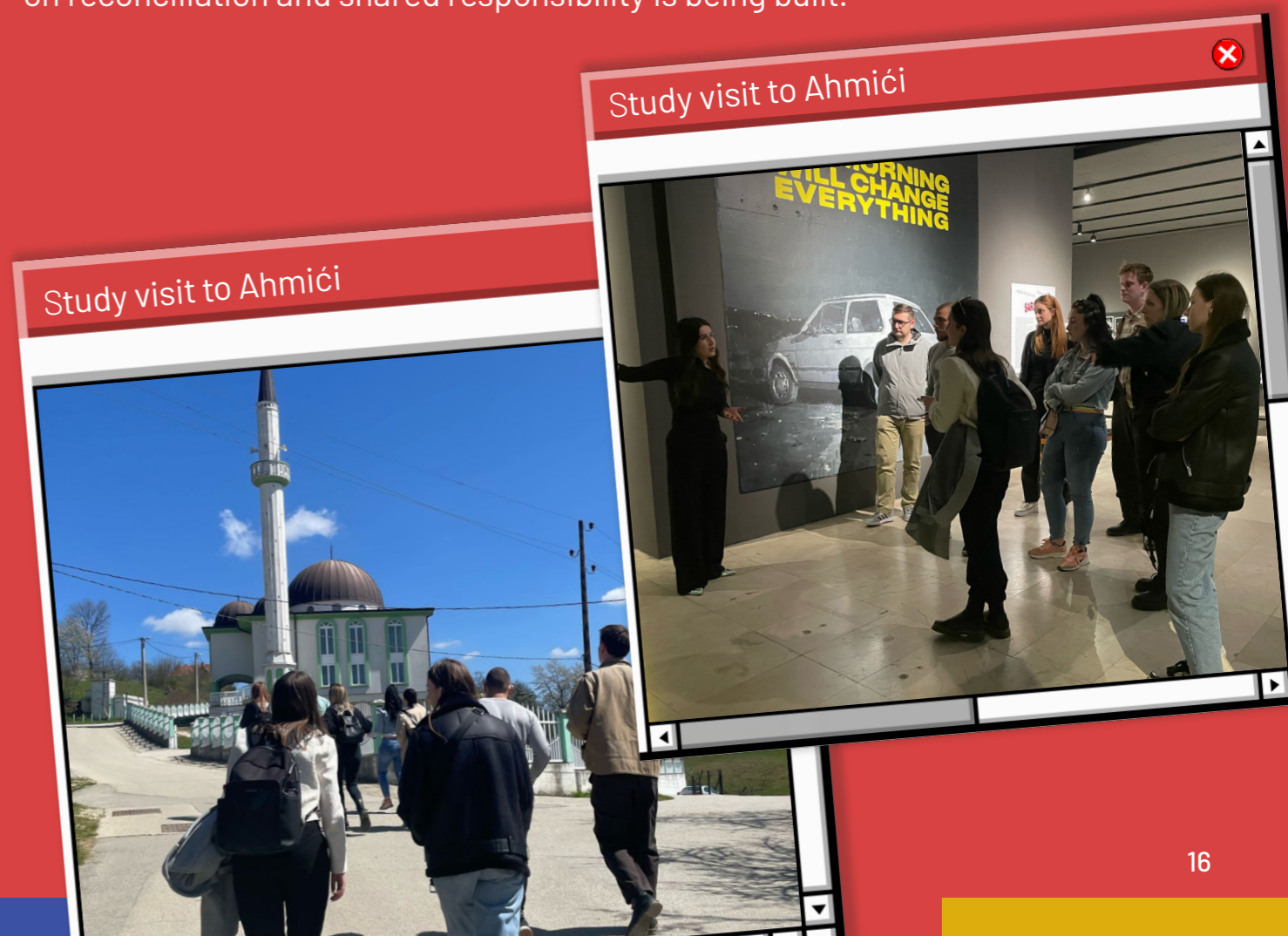
In cooperation with the Youth Initiative for Human Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we **organized a study visit** to Ahmići and Trusina in April 2025. The visit took place during the weekend preceding the joint anniversary of the crimes committed.

Alongside this experience, it is important to highlight the impressions of the then-activist of the Initiative, and now Executive Director, Iris Knežević, who participated in a partner program of the Post-Conflict Research Center in Sarajevo. During her visit to Ahmići, learning about the atrocities committed by members of the HVO, Knežević felt a strong personal responsibility, as a young person from Croatia, to speak about this crime and not turn away from the past.



In her report, she emphasized that visiting sites of suffering does not only bring knowledge of judicially established facts, but also teaches us the importance of responsibly confronting the past. Such an approach actively contributes to the development of inclusive memorialization and strengthens awareness of the need to commemorate all victims, regardless of ethnic affiliation, she concluded.

According to her experience, justice for victims does not mean only punishing the perpetrators, but also public acknowledgment of the crime, the presence of politicians at commemorations, and the undertaking of necessary measures against those who deny crimes and glorify perpetrators in public discourse. Only through such active confrontation with the past can it be demonstrated that the suffering of victims remains acknowledged and that a society based on reconciliation and shared responsibility is being built.



2.4 UNMARKED SITES OF SUFFERING

During 2025, in cooperation with peace activists from the Center for Nonviolent Action Belgrade–Sarajevo and the Youth Initiative for Human Rights in Serbia, we visited and marked unmarked sites of suffering.

Across the region, sites of suffering, camps, and mass graves remain systematically forgotten, reshaped, or completely non-memorialized. In December 2025, young people from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia participated in an action **marking former detention facilities and sites of killings in Šljivovica, Stajićevo, and Begejci in Serbia, at Alipašino Polje in Sarajevo, as well as at Kerestinec Castle and in Dvor na Uni in Croatia.**

Our participants also visited and marked sites of suffering in Dvor na Uni and Kerestinec Castle.

Since 2015, the Center for Nonviolent Action has been implementing actions to mark unmarked sites of suffering in Bosnia and Herzegovina, within which more than 150 locations have been marked to date. The Youth Initiative for Human Rights Croatia had joined this action on several occasions before, while in 2025 it was carried out for the first time with the participation of activists from all three organizations and across the territory of three states.

Sites of suffering are not forgotten by chance. In all three countries, they have been systematically neglected, silenced, and buried. Young people in Croatia today often do not know that near the places where they live, only thirty years ago, people were tortured, killed, and disappeared.

The Initiative sees inclusive memorialization as one of the fundamental pillars of its work—as a way to ensure that places which were attempted to be erased from collective memory are not forgotten, that victims are honored, and that new generations are reminded of their responsibility in the process of confronting the past, acknowledging crimes, and ensuring justice.

As part of the joint action, the following sites were marked:

The barracks of the former construction company Planum, Šljivovica, Republic of Serbia

The facilities of the abandoned barracks of the former construction company Planum in the village of Šljivovica, near Užice, in the period from August 1995 to 10 April 1996, served as a place of detention for persons of Bosniak nationality, who were forcibly brought there, mostly after the fall of the enclaves of Srebrenica and Žepa. (ONMS source)

Hunting Lodge, Begejci (Torak), Republic of Serbia

The facility of the Hunting Lodge in Begejci, from 1 October 1991, served as a place of detention for persons of Croatian and Serbian nationality from Osijek, Vukovar, Vinkovci, and surrounding areas, most of whom were detained after the fall of Vukovar in November 1991. (ONMS source)

Agricultural Estate Stajićevo, Republic of Serbia

The facilities of the agricultural estate Stajićevo, near Zrenjanin, in the period from 18 November to 22 December 1991, served as a place of detention for persons of Croatian nationality, forcibly brought after the fall of Vukovar. (ONMS source)

Kerestinec Castle, Kerestinec, Republic of Croatia

The facility of Kerestinec Castle, from December 1991 to May 1992, served as a place of detention for persons of Serbian and Croatian nationality, mostly brought after the closure of the detention facility in Gajeva Street in Zagreb. (ONMS source)

Primary School Dvor, Republic of Croatia

Into the former Primary School "1 May," today Primary School Dvor, on 5 August 1995 during Operation "Storm," around fifty residents of a psychiatric hospital and a home for the elderly from Petrinja, of Serbian and Croatian nationality, were evacuated. Nine of those who remained, persons with severe physical and mental disabilities, stayed in the school. On 8 August 1995, during the battle for Dvor, a group of unidentified soldiers entered the school and killed the remaining civilians. (ONMS source)

Former headquarters of TO "Stela," Alipašino Polje, Bosnia and Herzegovina

In the Sarajevo neighborhood of Alipašino Polje, from mid-April to August 1992, several detention sites for Serbian civilians were established. The former café "Borsalino," premises of the local community office, butcher shops, and other facilities were used for unlawful detention, abuse, and torture of civilians, including the rape of women. Several persons were killed, and some are still listed as missing. (ONMS source)

Marking of unmarked site of suffering



Marking of unmarked site of suffering



Marking of unmarked site of suffering



Marking of unmarked site of suffering



2.5 APPEAL AGAINST HATE SPEECH AT FOOTBALL MATCHES

In December 2025, in cooperation with colleagues from the Youth Initiative for Human Rights Montenegro (YIHR Montenegro), **we issued an appeal warning about frequent cases of hate speech during football matches of regional national teams, including those of Croatia and Montenegro.** The appeal emphasized the importance of promoting messages of peace, coexistence, and mutual respect, and recalled the legacy of anti-war activists and resistance movements in the former Yugoslavia—individuals who courageously opposed ethnonationalist hatred, often exposed to pressure from political actors, discrimination, or public condemnation.

Referring to historical examples, such as the slogan of the organization Women in Black, “Not in Our Name!”, we highlighted the continuous need to reject violence and hatred, to nurture a culture of reconciliation, and to actively promote dialogue among communities. In the context of rising nationalism and the presence of violent messages, visible also in football stadiums, this appeal further confirms the urgent need to strengthen coexistence, critical thinking, and collective responsibility. In conclusion, we emphasized that lessons from the past must guide all our present and future efforts in building a more tolerant and just society.



3.



3.1 YOUTH EDUCATION AND ACTIVISM

3.1.1 Exhibition “Youth Remembers the Forgotten”

“This is not an exhibition about the past – it is a call for responsibility in the present. Because memory is not just an act of remembering, it is always an active and determined resistance to forgetting.”

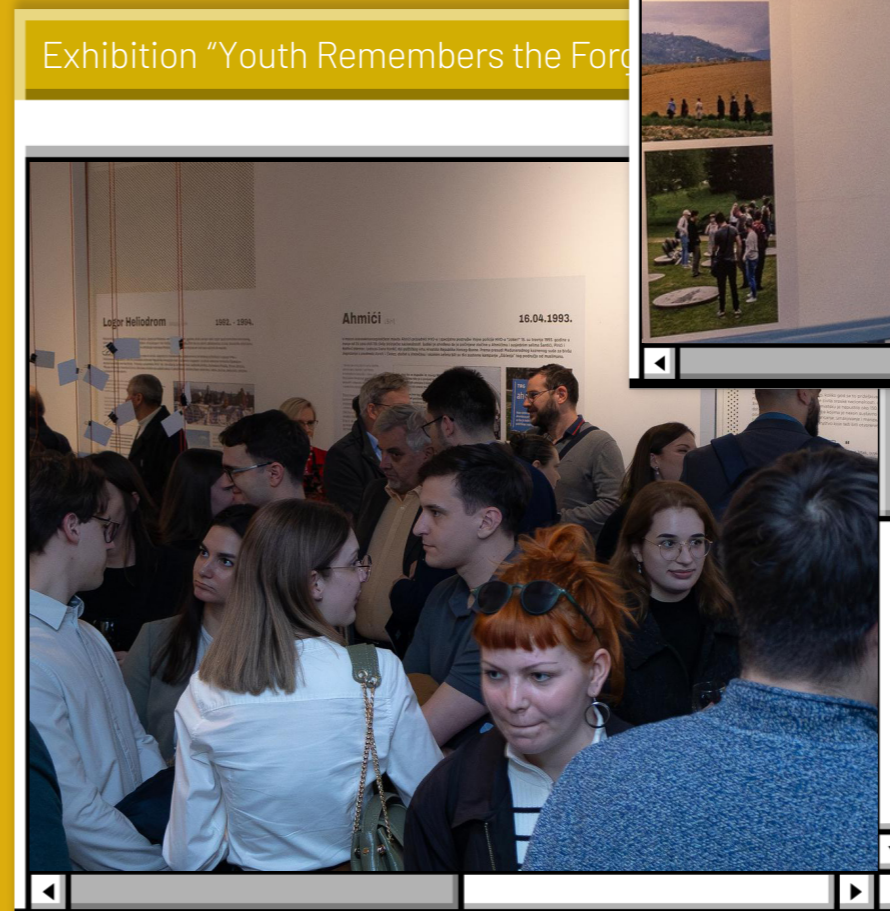
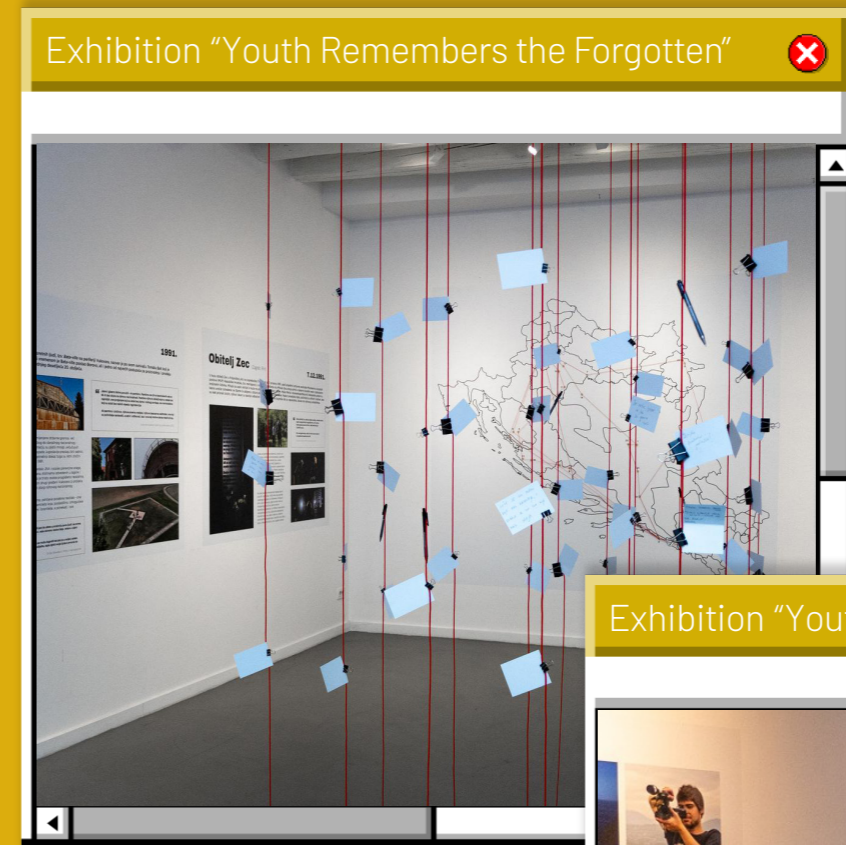
– Concluding remark at the exhibition opening



In March 2025, we opened the **exhibition Youth Remembers the Forgotten**, which presented how generations born after the wars of the 1990s perceive their devastating impact, with particular emphasis on often overlooked victims. The exhibition included personal stories developed following visits to nearly thirty sites of suffering and remembrance related to the Second World War and the wars of the 1990s in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro.

The digital segment of the exhibition presented a broader perspective on victims and crimes, including the murder of the Čengiđ family in Ervenik; the Morinj camp in Montenegro, where civilians from the Dubrovnik area were detained; and crimes committed in Prijedor against primarily Bosniaks, but also Croats, as well as other cases the Initiative has addressed over the years. The physical segment of the exhibition presented five selected case studies. The exhibition also featured Ivan Validžić’s film *What Is It in a Person*, which follows students as they leave the safety of the classroom and embark on an emotionally demanding journey, meeting survivors of war crimes and exploring how collective memory of victims is formed.

The exhibition was held at the Cultural and Information Center (KIC) in Zagreb.



3.1.2 Program “Youth Remembers the Forgotten”


Within the Youth Remembers the Forgotten program, during the past year we published 24 articles addressing both marked and unmarked sites of suffering, as well as personal testimonies of survivors. The articles aimed to raise awareness about crimes, torture, and killings committed during the wars of the 1990s, including those for which no one has yet been held accountable, despite more than thirty years having passed since their occurrence.

The texts were prepared by members of our activist network through detailed research, field visits to sites of suffering, and interviews and discussions. All articles are publicly available on the Youth Initiative for Human Rights website and serve as a valuable resource for fostering dialogue on memory, responsibility, and human rights, as well as a platform for critical reflection among younger generations. Through this program, we actively encouraged young people to take on an active role as promoters of truth and critical engagement with the past. By participating in the research and documentation process, young people not only gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of historical events but also develop a stronger sense of social responsibility.

The Youth Remembers the Forgotten program demonstrates how youth engagement in processes of remembrance and education can contribute in the long term to building a more tolerant, responsible, and inclusive society, in which victims’ rights are recognized and violence and hatred are not repeated.



3.1.3 Regional Activist School “New Wave”

 **The Regional Activist School “New Wave”** was held in early May in Osijek. The program was jointly organized by the Youth Initiatives for Human Rights in Croatia and Serbia, and brought together 19 young people aged 18 to 30 from Croatia and Serbia.

The aim of the school was to strengthen the capacities of young people in the fields of transitional justice, understanding contemporary social and political processes, and promoting human rights. Through lectures, workshops, and guided discussions, participants explored topics related to the legacy of the wars of the 1990s, collective memory, interethnic relations, political accountability, and transitional justice, while developing practical approaches to combating discrimination and prejudice through civic and activist engagement.



“What impressed me most about YIHR’s work is precisely its approach, which is both informative and emotionally aware of the extremely complex topics of interethnic war, questions of legacy, justice, responsibility, coexistence, and the future. It reflects courage and determination in the idea that young people from Croatia and Serbia (and the entire region) deserve better. We deserve to know and hear the truth, or at least a sincere commitment to investigating it. We deserve better textbooks, better media, better journalists, and better politicians.

We deserve more opportunities for collaboration; we deserve bridges and open channels of communication; we deserve spaces in which we can speak, ask questions, and listen to one another. We deserve to receive more than just the heavy burden of the past placed upon our shoulders; if nothing else, we deserve to know what it contains, how to lighten it, and what (for heaven’s sake) to do with it.

We deserve a present free from the dripping of poison into our ears, an escape from the endless carousel that makes us all sick. We deserve to demand a better future—get out of our way while we build it!”

– Emphasized by a participant of the activist school

The participation of award-winning journalist Drago Hedl added particular value to the exchange. He provided participants with detailed insight into investigative journalism and the wartime history of Osijek, sharing experiences from the war period, including documenting war crimes and important local events. His lecture encouraged young people to critically reflect on the role of the media and social responsibility, opened space for constructive dialogue on activism and responsible engagement with the past, and further strengthened their motivation for community involvement.

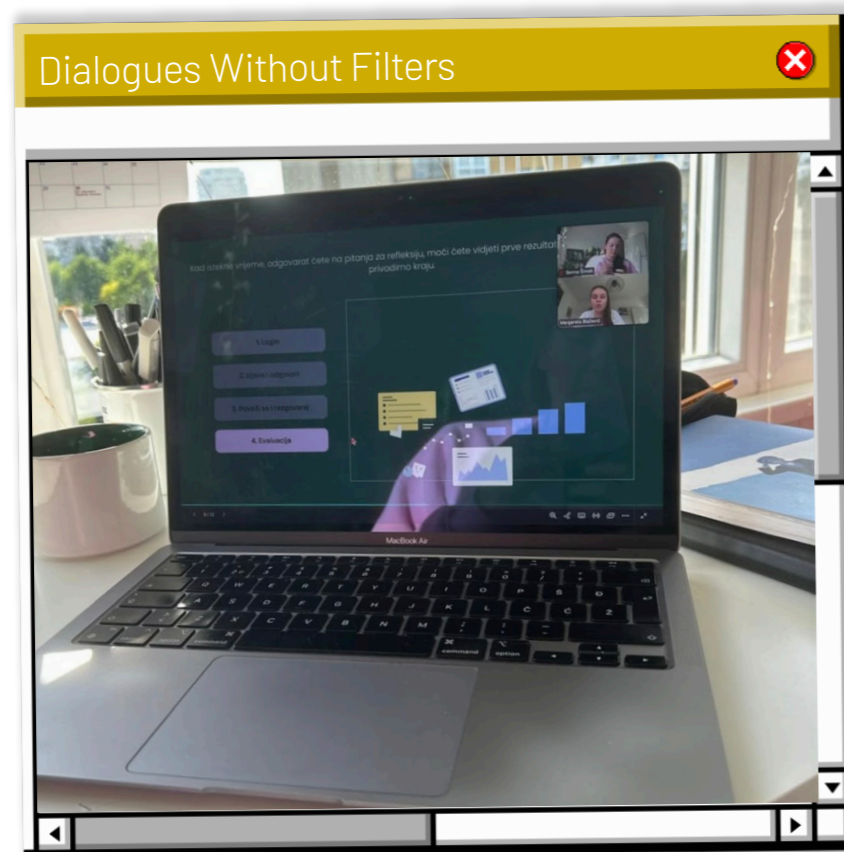


3.2 CONFRONTING THE PAST AND ADVOCACY

3.2.1 Dialogues Without Filters: Youth Conversations on the Wars of the 1990s and Memory in the Digital Space

The Initiative organized an online program, **“Dialogues Without Filters: Youth Conversations on the Wars of the 1990s and in the Digital Space,”** for 19 young activists and students in Croatia. The program provided participants with a safe space for anonymously sharing opinions on dominant narratives about the wars of the 1990s and structured dialogue with peers holding different views.

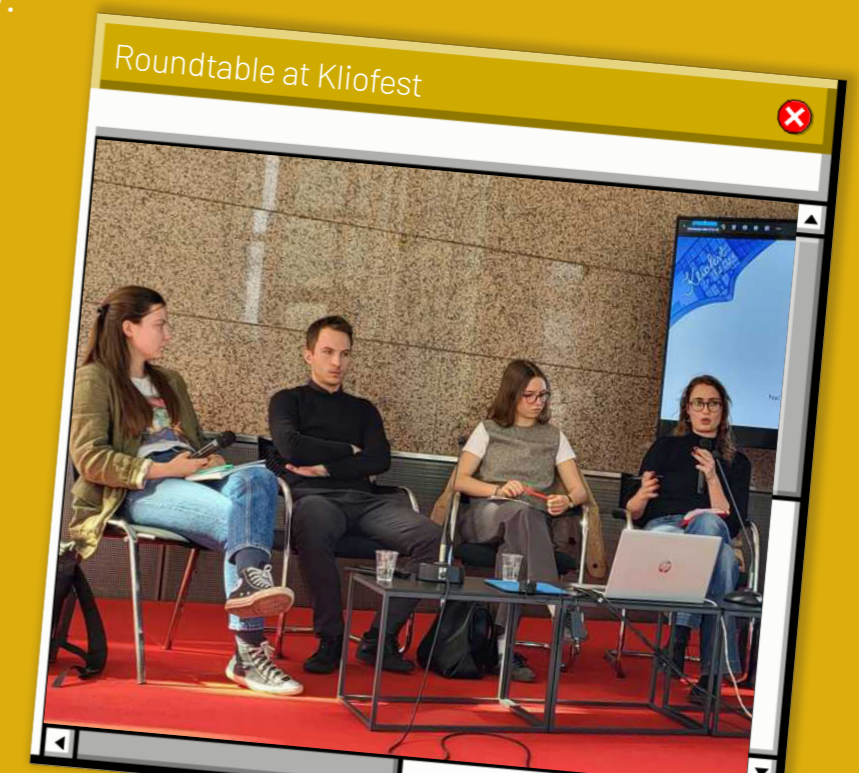
Participants responded to predefined statements and discussed their perspectives, fostering critical reflection, knowledge exchange, and a deeper understanding of the conflicts and their legacy in the digital environment. The program also represented the first phase of research on the attitudes of young people in Croatia toward the wars of the 1990s, aiming to encourage open dialogue grounded in evidence and mutual respect.



3.2.2 Roundtable “Perspective of a New Generation: The Breakup of Yugoslavia and the Wars of the 1990s” at Kliofest

Representatives of the Initiative and members of the Initiative’s activist network participated in the **roundtable “Perspective of a New Generation: The Breakup of Yugoslavia and the Wars of the 1990s”** as part of the 12th Kliofest History Festival. The roundtable provided young people with space to discuss the wars of the 1990s and reflect on the shared past of the region. Participants exchanged perspectives, shared knowledge, and engaged in dialogue aimed at fostering critical thinking about the legacy of the conflicts.

During the discussion, particular attention was given to how information about the wars is presented to young people, especially through school curricula. The legacy of the wars of the 1990s also appears in other subjects, such as geography, when explaining changes in ethnic composition or migration patterns. It was concluded that teachers play an important role in determining whether, how, and to what extent this period is addressed within the educational context. The discussion also addressed the representation of these topics in higher education, including at universities, as well as the level of student interest in them. Participants emphasized that the new generation of young people has an important role in developing a critical approach to the past through dialogue and activist engagement, thereby contributing to greater understanding and reconciliation in society.



4. WE CANNOT SPEAK OF WAR WITHOUT SPEAKING OF PEACE



4.1 THIRTY-FOUR YEARS SINCE THE ASSASSINATION OF JOSIP REIHL-KIR

It is time to place Josip Reihl-Kir in the historical context he deserves.

Josip Reihl-Kir, Chief of Police of the Osijek-Baranja Police Administration, was assassinated in an ambush on 1 July 1991 in Tenja. He was killed while, deeply committed to the idea of peace, attempting to ease tensions and remove barricades in villages affected by the early stages of the war in Croatia.

We participated in the commemoration marking the thirty-fourth anniversary of his assassination, organized by the Association of War Policemen of Osijek-Baranja County.

The Youth Initiative for Human Rights conducted research titled The Wars of the 1990s from the Perspective of Youth, which showed that more than half of young people in Croatia had never heard of Josip Reihl-Kir, while one in three respondents expressed neither a positive nor a negative opinion about him. These findings clearly indicate a lack of systematic education about peace activists and dedicated advocates of a democratic society grounded in tolerance and coexistence, such as Josip Reihl-Kir.

On the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of his assassination, the Initiative submitted a proposal to the competent committee of the City of Zagreb to name a street, square, or other public space after Josip Reihl-Kir. Such a gesture would place him within the historical framework he deserves and serve as a daily reminder of his courage, consistency, and commitment to peace.

By learning about peace activists, we contribute to ensuring that hatred, intolerance, conflict, and war are not repeated, and instead collectively build a society based on mutual respect, dialogue, and coexistence.

4.2 COMMEMORATIVE WALK: PATHS OF GORSKI PEACEKEEPERS

We participated in the second edition of the commemorative walk Paths of the Gorski Peacekeepers, held on 21 September 2025, the International Day of Peace, in Mrkopalj and Tuk.

The walk was organized by the Municipality of Mrkopalj and the initiative Paths of the Gorski Peacekeepers, which includes the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Rijeka. During the walk, participants revisited key moments of resistance to war violence in the Gorski Kotar region during the 1990s and paid tribute to local individuals who actively worked to preserve peace in their community.

Gorski Kotar is one of the few regions in Croatia in which Croatian and Serbian populations continued to live together throughout the 1990s, and where no armed conflict occurred between 1991 and 1995. As Josip Horvat noted, the only intolerance in Gorski Kotar was intolerance toward war. Thanks to the prudent actions of local leaders and residents, loss of life and destruction of property were prevented, neighbourly relations were preserved, and centuries-old traditions of cooperation and coexistence continued.

Despite numerous attempts to erase the memory of peace activism and those who actively worked to preserve peace during the wars of the 1990s, the Initiative recognizes the importance of remembering the individuals and groups who did not wait for others to act, but instead stood up and clearly said no to war.



4.3 PRESENTATION OF THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY I AM ALEN IN ZAGREB

In early November 2025, in collaboration with the Sarajevo-based association Forgotten Children of War, we organized **the presentation of the autobiographical book I Am Alen in Zagreb**. The event was attended by young people, activists, and interested members of the public.

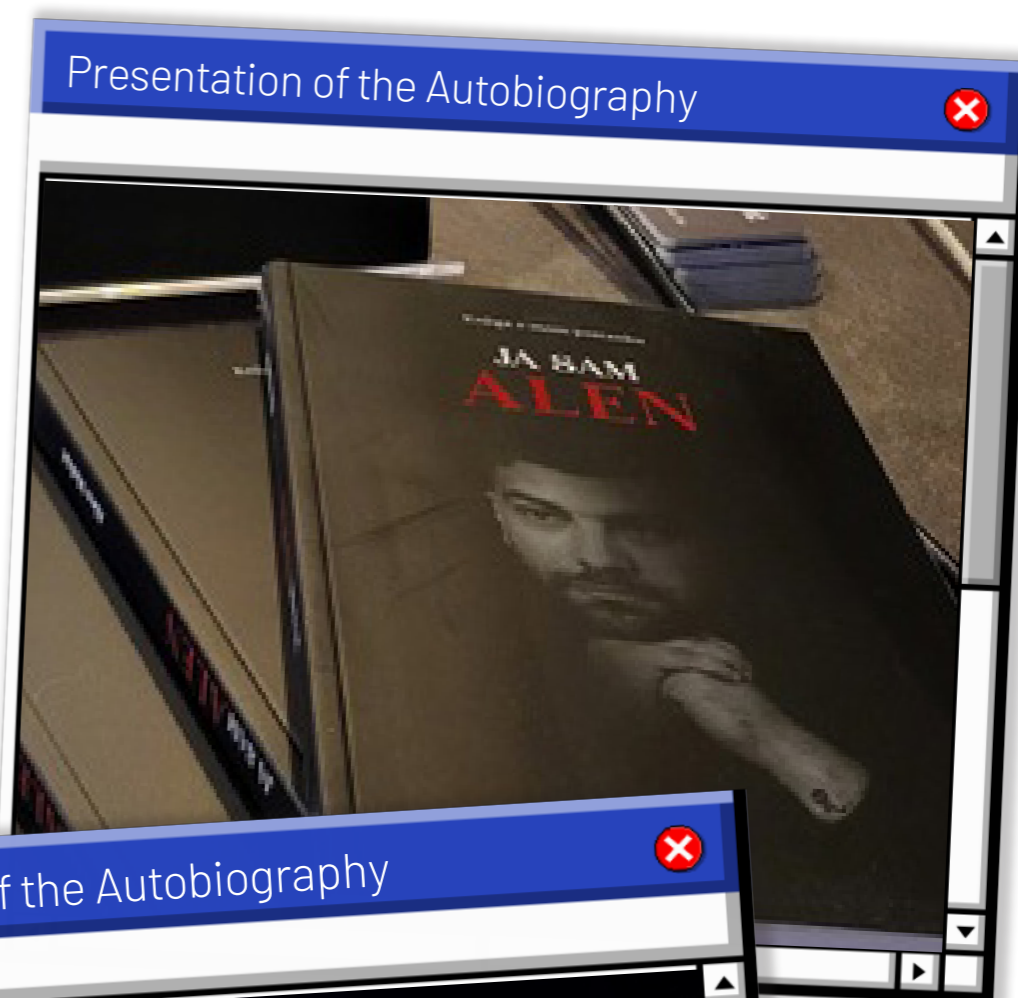
“Children born as a result of war are children whose birth would have been unlikely had armed conflict not occurred in a specific region.”

– Statement at the book presentation

The book, written by Alen Muhić, a person born as a result of wartime sexual violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina, was presented in Zagreb for the first time. Through a personal testimony marked by stigma, silence, and social injustice, the book opened space for dialogue about the long-silenced legacy of wartime sexual violence.

In addition to the author, the event was attended by the Ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina to Croatia, Elma Kovačević Bajtal, and the President of Forgotten Children of War, Ajna Jusić.

The discussion emphasized the importance of regional cooperation in transitional justice processes, highlighting that meaningful reconciliation in post-conflict societies requires open dialogue at the regional level.



5. AND FROM THIS YEAR...

Are you wondering what we have been doing in the final months of 2025, and why we have been somewhat quieter? We were preparing for the next – exceptionally impactful – ten years.

During 2025, we dedicated a significant share of our time, energy, and resources to shaping the strategic direction for the next decade. We assembled a new team of young professionals and, in the final months of the year, worked intensively on preparation, planning, and laying the foundations for a new strategic phase of the Initiative's work.

At a time marked by rising nationalism, tensions, and intolerance in the region, but also by emerging bonds of solidarity that gradually bring us closer to reconciliation, we recognized a strong need for structured, complementary, and long-term action capable of producing lasting social change.

Aware that an organization such as the Initiative – led by young people and working for young people – requires a clear and concrete plan with well-defined objectives, as well as the ambition that has always guided our work, we developed a new strategic framework.

5.1 AND WHAT DOES OUR NEW TEAM SAY ABOUT THE INITIATIVE?

"I joined the Initiative just over seven months ago, and the experience has differed from my expectations in many ways. The work has proven to be extremely dynamic and far more diverse than I had anticipated. If I had to describe working at the Initiative – and nonprofit work in general – in one word, it would be dynamic. Plans can change from week to week, and the organization must sometimes adapt quickly to changing circumstances. I do not consider this a negative feature, but rather an inherent characteristic of this field of work, and precisely what makes it intellectually stimulating and personally meaningful. At the same time, the Initiative is highly organized and demonstrates readiness to respond to both external and internal challenges inherent to its role.

It has provided me with fertile ground and ample space to work in ways that suit me best, while also offering an appropriate level of challenge that encourages me to give my best. From the interview process and first contact with colleagues to today – now that we have a fully functional and dedicated team – collaboration has been warm and supportive, while maintaining the highest level of professionalism. The dynamic nature of the work naturally opens many opportunities to gain new experiences.

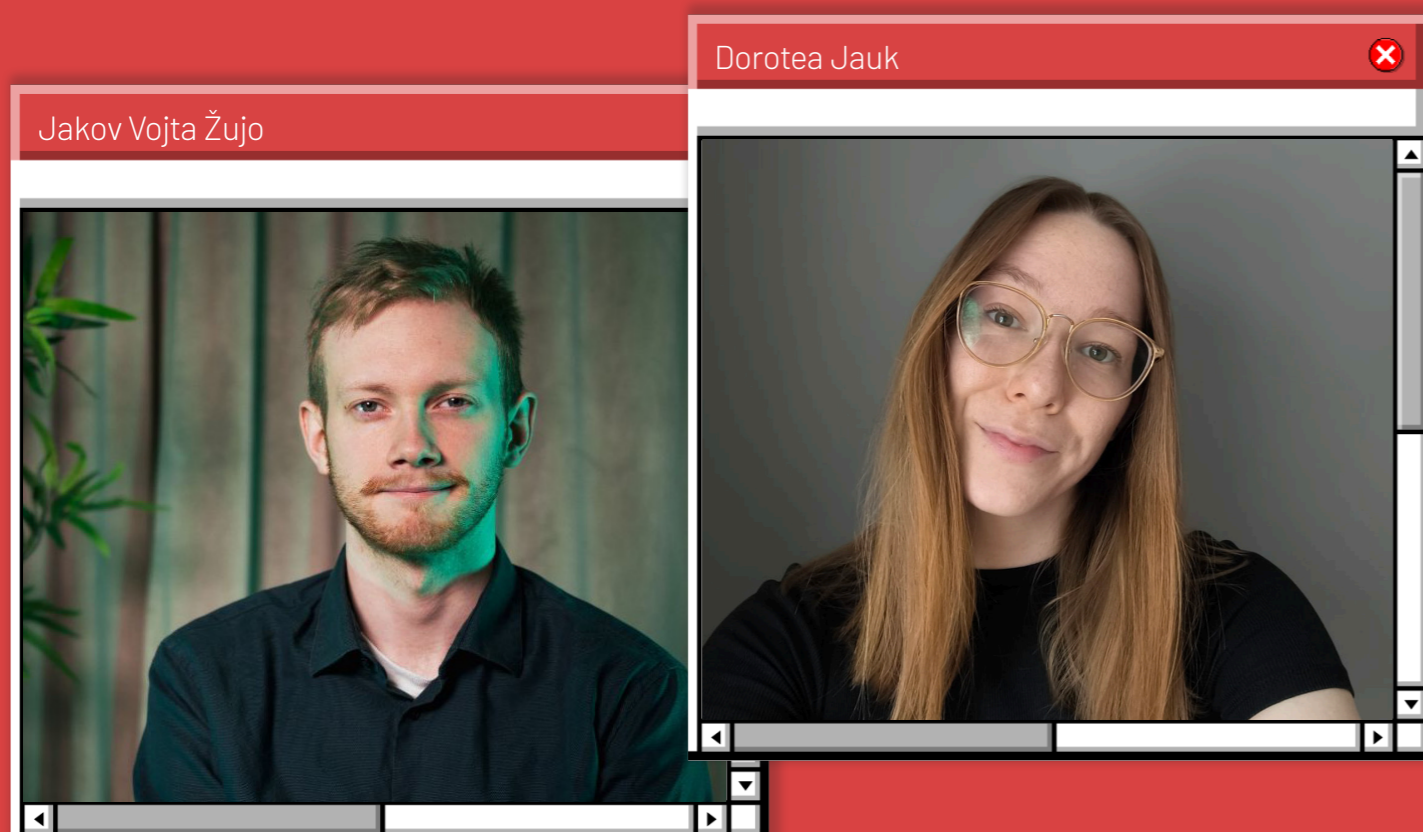
Soon after joining, I had the opportunity to participate in several conferences and study visits that broadened my perspectives not only regarding human rights but also in professional and personal terms. An additional dimension of working at the Initiative is the connection with partner organizations across the Balkans. YIHR operates across the region, and each office brings together highly capable individuals who contribute significantly to knowledge and practice in the fields of human rights, transitional justice, and reconciliation.

The Initiative collaborates not only with its sister organizations in the region but also with partners across Europe and globally. Learning about different conflict contexts and comparing experiences with those from, for example, Ukraine, Colombia, or Indonesia adds particular value and meaning to this work. Overall, I am very satisfied with my experience at the Initiative so far, with its dynamic and intellectually stimulating environment, and I look forward to contributing further through my future work."

– Jakov Vojta Žujo, Associate for Legal Research

"I have been working at the Initiative since October of last year, and my experience so far has been extremely positive. I believe that working at the Initiative offers numerous opportunities for learning, personal growth, and the development of a wide range of skills, which is particularly important to me. The tasks are dynamic and engaging, and some encourage stepping outside one's comfort zone. The working environment supports professional development, and each new situation provides an opportunity to gain additional knowledge and experience. For these reasons, I see working at the Initiative as an excellent opportunity for continued growth and improvement."

– Dorotea Jauk, Associate for Human Rights Education



5.2 NEW PROGRAM FRAMEWORK

Within the new strategy, we have defined four key programs:



- Reconciliation Program**
- Memory Program**
- Justice Program**
- Democracy Program**

These program directions build on the Initiative's previous work, as well as the identified needs of Croatian society, in line with our mission:

The Initiative promotes and protects human rights and civil liberties through activities aimed at the public, particularly in situations where dominant or widely disseminated social narratives relativize rights and freedoms or justify their violation. The Initiative also protects these rights through direct advocacy for individuals and social groups exposed to various, often systemic, forms of discrimination or exclusion.

In the coming period, through our programs, we will work to:

- institutionalize inclusive remembrance of civilian war victims as a permanent component of public space, education, and Croatia's collective identity
- enable sustainable reconciliation processes that connect divided narratives, communities, and political actors in Croatia and the wider region
- strengthen accountability and the rule of law through education, legal research, advocacy, and preservation of established legal facts
- embed human rights into democratic institutions and political culture, ensuring that democracy functions substantively, not merely procedurally
- empower young people as drivers of democratic change, ensuring intergenerational responsibility and institutional continuity.

5.3 NEW PROGRAM INITIATIVES

To achieve these objectives, we have developed new program initiatives while further strengthening existing ones. Below we highlight several key initiatives that will be launched in the upcoming period.

Independent Commission for Human Rights

“For me, the Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR) represents an effort to restore a credible, principled, and truly independent voice in the Croatian public sphere – one that reaffirms human rights as a foundation of democratic order, rather than as a subject of political disputes or ideological instrumentalization. I see the Commission as a form of collective moral authority which, drawing on the knowledge, experience, and public responsibility of its members, can help reconnect the fragmented human rights field, create space for reasoned dialogue, and speak clearly against injustice, even when doing so may be socially or politically unpopular. I believe the Commission can contribute to rebuilding trust in human rights institutions and, in the long term, strengthen a culture of responsibility, the rule of law, and social solidarity in Croatia.”

– Petra Amalia Bachmann, Coordinator of the Independent Commission for Human Rights

Today, Croatian civil society demonstrates a clear need for a human rights body that enjoys broad public credibility among both citizens and institutional actors. Many civil society organizations working in the human rights field have limited public reach, and their work is often publicly challenged or delegitimized by political actors.

For this reason, prominent intellectuals in Croatia, in dialogue with YIHR Croatia, proposed establishing the Independent Commission for Human Rights – a unique body bringing together individuals with distinguished public standing, including former holders of high public office, respected university professors, religious leaders, and other public figures with recognized professional and social contributions.

Through their experience and public credibility, Commission members can play an important role in promoting human rights and civil liberties, strengthening the presence of these values in Croatian public life. YIHR Croatia will provide strategic support in establishing and developing the Commission and will act as its technical secretariat, enabling the Commission to focus on substantive programmatic work without the need to develop its own administrative infrastructure.

Students’ Union for Human Rights

“For me, the establishment of the Students’ Union for Human Rights represents the creation of a stable and sustainable network through which new generations of students can continuously come together, learn, take action, and assume responsibility for the promotion and protection of human rights. I hope that, through its work, the Union will become a recognizable and relevant national actor in the fields of education, advocacy, and student organizing, and that the connection between human rights and accessible, high-quality education will become increasingly visible and acknowledged. At the same time, the Union will serve as a connecting platform for existing student organizations and engaged individuals, ensuring they know they are not alone and that they can rely on a supportive network for collaboration, solidarity, and the exchange of knowledge.”

– Lovro Turalija, Strategic Engagement Associate

YIHR Croatia has collaborated with student associations and organizations for many years, and students make up the majority of participants in our programs. At the same time, there are very few organizations at Croatian universities that systematically promote human rights.

For this reason, during the current strategic period, we will work with a core group of students from several universities across the country to establish the Students’ Union for Human Rights. With technical support from YIHR, this organization will provide students with opportunities to learn about human rights through various activities, connect with national and international partners, and actively engage in advocacy aimed at promoting and protecting human rights.

Academy for Human Rights and Transitional Justice

“The establishment of the Academy for Human Rights and Transitional Justice represents, for me, the creation of a shared space in which knowledge, resources, and discussions on human rights are accessible to all. It will be a space that continuously reflects on, critically examines, and questions human rights, connecting theory, practice, and lived experience. I hope the Academy will contribute to strengthening a culture of human rights in Croatia as a foundation for democracy, accountability, and social solidarity.”

- Dorotea Jauk, Coordinator of the Academy for Human Rights and Transitional Justice

In order to strengthen the capacities of young people from diverse backgrounds to contribute to the promotion and protection of human rights and civil liberties, YIHR Croatia, in cooperation with Human Rights House, will establish the Academy for Human Rights and Transitional Justice.

The Academy is conceived as a comprehensive hybrid educational program to be implemented annually. Leading experts from Croatia and abroad will deliver lectures on a wide range of topics in the fields of human rights and transitional justice, incorporating multidisciplinary perspectives and practical exercises. Participants will gain applicable knowledge, building on YIHR Croatia’s more than fifteen years of experience in designing and implementing educational programs.

The program will bring together university professors in law, political science, philosophy, sociology, and history, as well as practitioners working in human rights, artists, activists, and legal professionals. To further enhance its relevance and recognition, partners will also work toward securing formal accreditation of the Academy in cooperation with educational institutions in Croatia and abroad.

Museum of Memory of Civilian War Victims

“I see the Museum of Memory of Civilian War Victims (MoM) as a potentially key public and educational platform for ethical, inclusive, and fact-based engagement with the legacy of war, placing civilian suffering at the center of a culture of remembrance, beyond selective national or political narratives. As a participatory and multiperspective space that connects individual testimonies with the principles of transitional justice, the Museum has the potential to contribute to the realization of the right to truth, the recognition of responsibility, and the development of social empathy — particularly among younger generations who know the war only through fragmented and often distorted interpretations. I believe that such an approach can strengthen democratic culture in the long term, reduce social polarization, and contribute to sustainable reconciliation based on knowledge, responsible remembrance, and respect for the human dignity of all civilian victims.”

- Petra Amalia Bachmann, Coordinator of the Museum of Memory of Civilian War Victims

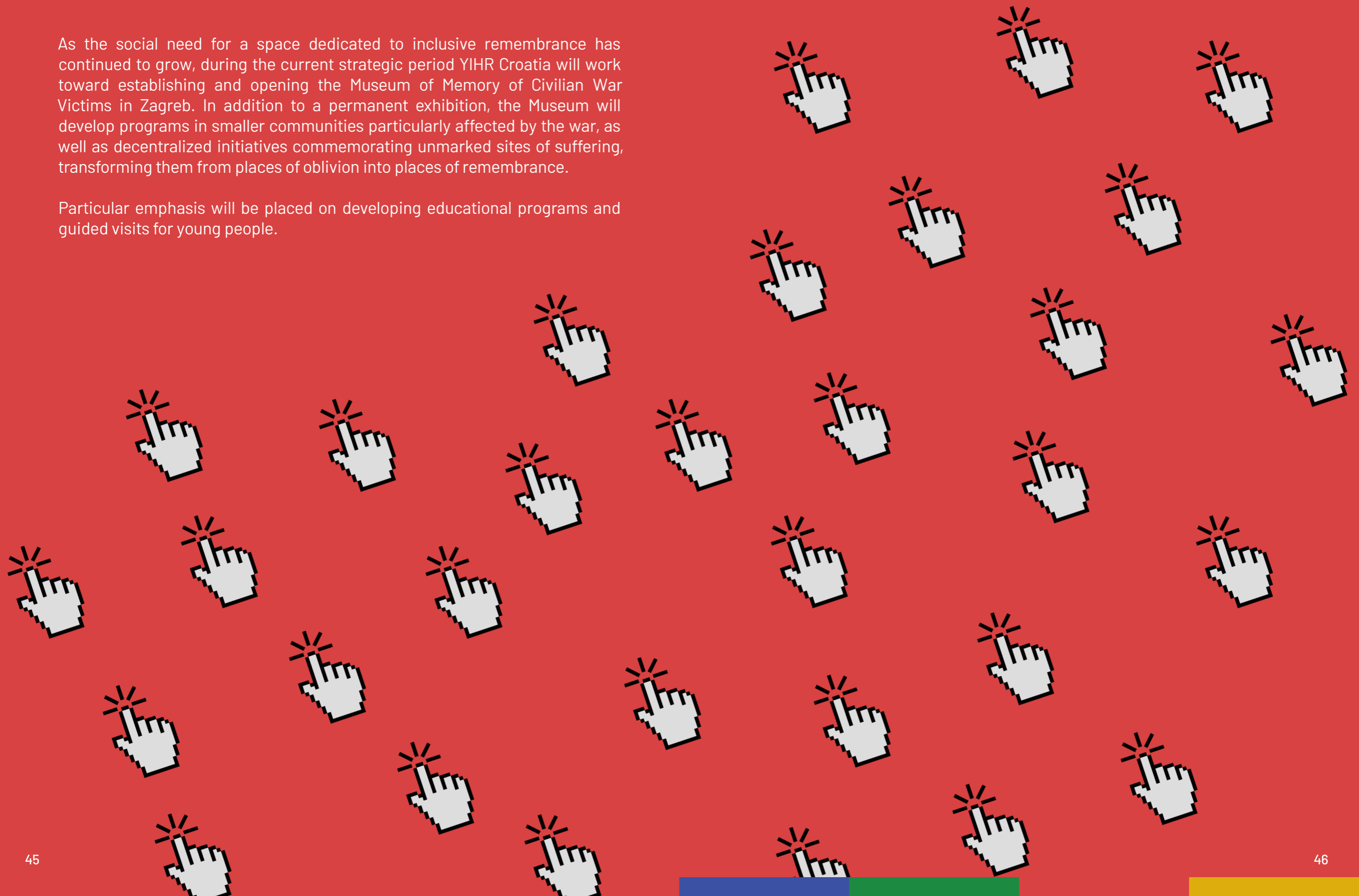
Initiatives promoting inclusive remembrance remain relatively rare and are largely driven by civil society organizations. Institutionally supported forms of commemoration are often one-sided and primarily focused on combatants, while civilian victims, especially those belonging to minority communities, are frequently marginalized or overlooked.

For this reason, YIHR Croatia initiated an advocacy process several years ago aimed at establishing the Museum of Memory of Civilian War Victims, with mentorship support from the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience and financial support from the Franco-German Cultural Fund. The Museum is envisioned as a dynamic institution dedicated to collecting, researching, and preserving the memories of civilians, as well as those of their families and communities.

Although the initiative initially received support from key institutional actors, including the President of the Republic of Croatia and the Ministry of Culture, the City of Petrinja, where the museum was originally planned, withdrew its support under pressure from nationalist political actors.

As the social need for a space dedicated to inclusive remembrance has continued to grow, during the current strategic period YIHR Croatia will work toward establishing and opening the Museum of Memory of Civilian War Victims in Zagreb. In addition to a permanent exhibition, the Museum will develop programs in smaller communities particularly affected by the war, as well as decentralized initiatives commemorating unmarked sites of suffering, transforming them from places of oblivion into places of remembrance.

Particular emphasis will be placed on developing educational programs and guided visits for young people.



What is the role of young people in the process of reconciliation with the past and remembering the wars of the 1990s, and how can reconciliation with the past contribute to the development of democracy?

“Young people born after the wars of the 1990s are fortunate in that they were not direct subjects of the traumatic events that devastated entire communities and shaped countless individual lives. At the same time, they face the risk of being instrumentalized through national mythologies that attempt to transform them into participants in symbolic conflicts – loyal nationalists bound to a violent past and encouraged to reproduce inherited ethnic divisions.

Their role in confronting the past therefore requires a conscious effort to step outside narrow and potentially harmful narratives of moral superiority and exclusive victimhood attributed to their own nation. Instead, young people have the opportunity to approach the causes and consequences of past conflicts with empathy, openness, and a willingness to understand their broader historical context.

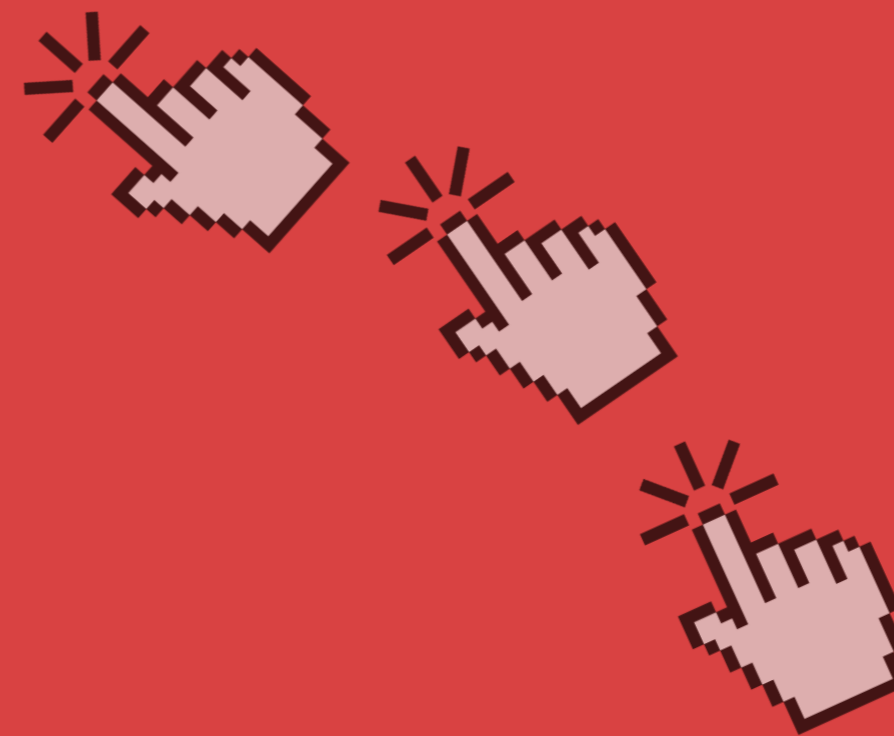
Through learning, dialogue, and engagement in the field of transitional justice, young people can contribute to building a future that is not subordinated to violent episodes of the past, but rather grounded in strengthening constructive relationships between communities that remain culturally interconnected. I strongly believe that young people living in conditions of peace possess significant transformative potential. It is our responsibility to challenge the binary logic of division into “us” and “them,” which confines communities within rigid identities and burdens individuals with inherited narratives of guilt and victimhood.

Without the emancipation of young people from one-dimensional interpretations of history, symbolic conflicts risk escalating into renewed forms of open violence. Functional liberal democracies rest on the premise that every individual, regardless of identity, possesses equal dignity and fundamental human rights. Processes of reconciliation with the past reinforce this principle by creating space for dialogue in which diverse experiences of trauma can be articulated and integrated into a shared understanding of history.

Such emancipation lays the foundation for more tolerant societies and reduces the space for political actors who derive influence primarily from promoting fear and hostility toward perceived Others. Regardless of how justice is ultimately understood, it cannot be achieved in societies closed to plural interpretations of history.

If we truly wish to regard history as a teacher of life, its lesson is not to remain trapped in the past, but to work together to build societies that will not repeat the mistakes that once led to destruction.”

- Tomas Kurbanović, activist



PARTICIPANT REFLECTION

**AS FOR
EVERYTHING
ELSE WE WILL
DO IN 2026...**

WELL, YOU'LL SEE.

