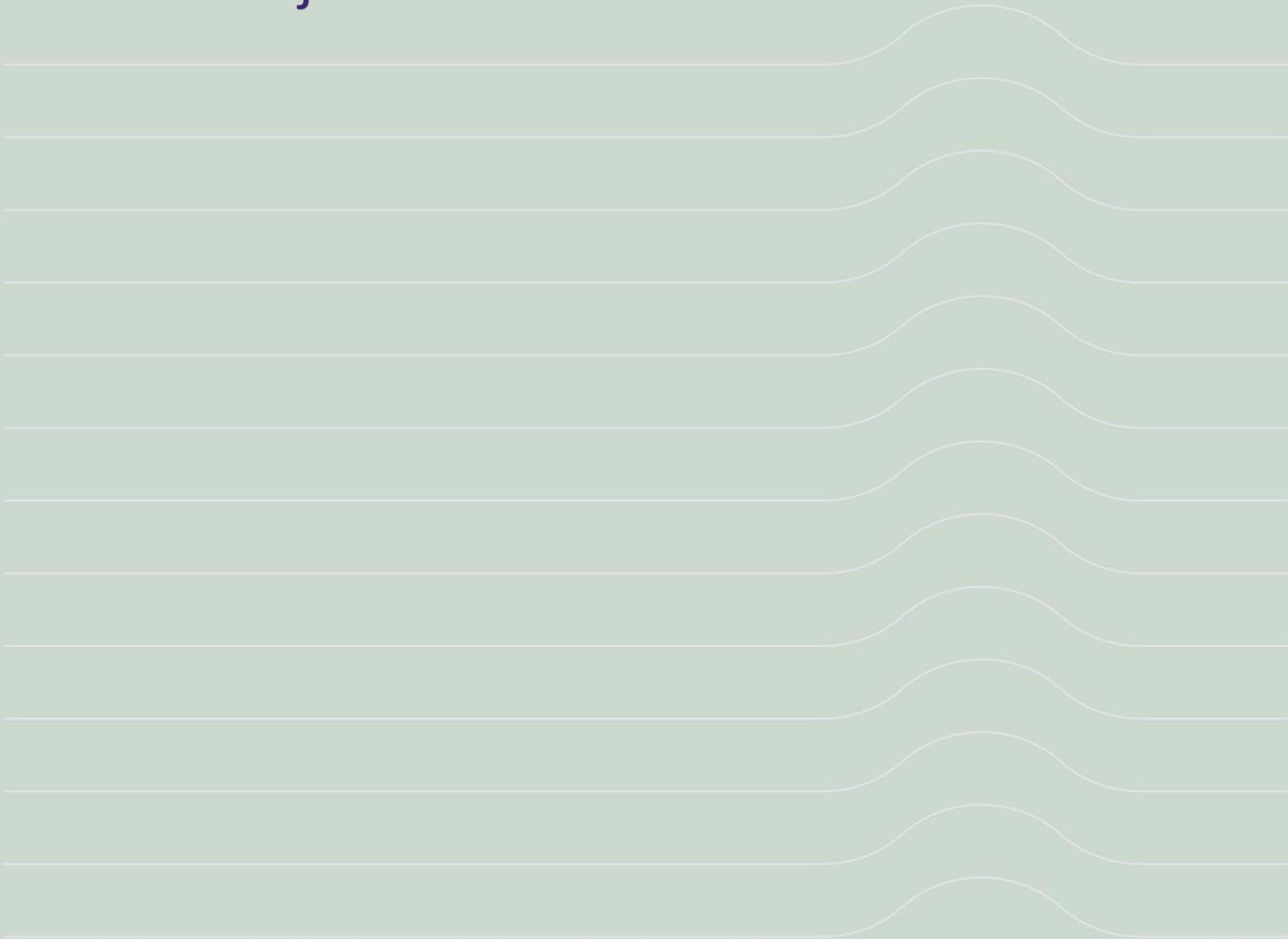


# Social Innovation and Management Programme 2025 Course Projects





NGO Academy was founded in 2013 to help strengthen the social sector in Central and Eastern Europe. It offers a range of high-quality capacity building programmes for executive managers and key staff of NGOs and social enterprises. By doing so, it supports the organisations themselves and indirectly also their stakeholders by transferring knowledge, imparting skills and helping them build up networks.

The Social Innovation and Management Programme combines practice-oriented training with a solid base of expert knowledge. The customised, three-week programme, which is held in English, provides participants with the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills required to manage their organisations and to use expert input to work on specific challenges relating to their organisations.

In the course of the Social Innovation and Management Programme 2025, participants developed individual projects. This curricular element is a crucial feature in the programme design. It aims at helping participants to develop skills by directly applying new insights and methods to a real-life project. Hence, it explicitly contributes to the further development of their organisations.

Each participant was asked to develop an individual project. Its basic requirements were a direct connection to the participants' job, their special interest in it, and its relevance for their organisation. The projects were expected to arise out of new or underdeveloped ideas and to tackle existing challenges such as the development of new products or services, the expansion into new markets, new business models or new internal processes.

In the course of Module I, participants were exposed to topics in the field of innovation management and acquisition of resources. Subsequently, they were asked to develop a project idea, create a project draft and discuss it with stakeholders such as colleagues, potential customers, and project partners by Module II. Each project draft received profound feedback by external coaches and peers in the beginning of the second module. In Module II participants worked on the topics of project management as well as impact measurement. In addition to that a range of tools supporting project planning and implementation was introduced. It enabled participants to transform their project drafts into implementable planning documents. These documents were again feedbacked by experts and peers in Module III.

By presenting all executive summaries, this booklet provides an overview of the individual projects. Thereby, it gives insights into the very heterogeneous challenges that non-profit organisations and social enterprises are currently facing in Central and Eastern Europe and potentially innovative approaches to tackle them.

Vienna, June 2025

The Team of NGO Academy



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## Aleksandra Podrebarac

CARPE DIEM Association – Escape Rooms as a Tool for Youth Work



The project *Escape Rooms as a Tool for Youth Work* is a groundbreaking educational and social innovation developed by the Carpe Diem Association. Founded in 2005 in Karlovac, Croatia, Carpe Diem is a respected civil society organization specializing in youth work, non-formal education, and community development. Building on two decades of experience and over 150 implemented projects, the organization now aims to revolutionize how young people learn, engage, and participate through an immersive and scalable educational tool – the educational escape room and portable escape box.

The escape room is a physical space for immersive, scenario-based learning, while the escape box is a mobile toolkit designed for portability, allowing the program to reach schools, youth centers, libraries, and events across Karlovac County and beyond. Each game includes reflection components and facilitator-led discussions, ensuring educational outcomes are integrated and meaningful. The flexibility of the escape box format enables implementation even in rural or resource-limited settings, promoting territorial equity in youth access to quality learning experiences.

What sets this project apart is its holistic impact:

- **For youth:** It provides a highly engaging, gamified environment for developing 21st-century skills and exploring social issues. Participants are not passive consumers but active contributors who gain practical tools for understanding and addressing challenges in their communities.
- **For educators and youth workers:** It delivers a ready-to-use, innovative method with training and support. The methodology is modular, adaptable, and aligned with cross-curricular themes such as civic education, sustainability, digital literacy, and inclusion.
- **For communities:** It promotes inclusion, dialogue, and local development. Through public events, co-creation workshops, and volunteer opportunities, the project engages families, local authorities, and civic actors.
- **For policy and education systems:** It offers a scalable model aligned with EU and Croatian strategies for civic education and sustainable development. It contributes to objectives outlined in the Youth Strategy, Education for Sustainable Development, and the EU Youth Goals.

The Carpe Diem Association brings together a multidisciplinary team with expertise in youth work, education, design, and community engagement. Its existing programs – such as the Grabrik Youth Center, the volunteer center VolonterKA, and the community hub Prostor(i)ja – provide strong foundations for implementation and growth. The team's approach is grounded in inclusive pedagogy, experience-based facilitation, and democratic participation.



## **Andrea Martinková**

Future Generation Europe – Digital Platform to prevent brain drain in Slovakia



Future Generation Europe, a youth-led civic organization based in Slovakia, is planning to launch an innovative platform to counter one of the most pressing challenges in the country today: youth brain drain and regional disengagement. Each year, thousands of young people from Slovakia's towns and rural areas leave for opportunities abroad or in capital cities, often feeling they must choose between ambition and staying connected to their roots. The result is a widening social, economic, and democratic divide.

Our project proposes a digital and community-based solution: an interactive, user-friendly platform that maps opportunities in Slovakia for young people, including internships, mentoring, local projects, scholarships, training programs, civic engagement options, and job offers. These will be curated by region, interest area, and life stage.

This initiative targets high school and university students, early-career professionals, and youth at risk of social exclusion. By showcasing the real, diverse, and often hidden opportunities available across Slovakia, especially in less visible regions, we empower young people to make informed and hopeful decisions about their future.

Unlike previous databases or state initiatives, our approach is deeply youth-driven and locally rooted. We engage young people as co-creators and ambassadors of the platform, use inclusive storytelling and smart filtering tools, and build on FGE's proven track record in youth participation and regional outreach. Partnerships with local NGOs, municipalities, schools, and employers will ensure both content quality and sustainable impact.

The long-term goal is to shift both perception and behavior—from passive resignation to informed exploration. We envision a Slovakia where staying or returning becomes not a compromise, but a choice supported by visible pathways and a shared sense of purpose. Through this project, we aim to reconnect young people with their communities and foster a future where mobility is a right, not a necessity.



## Andreea Nistor

Digital Nation – Sustainable revenue diversification strategy for Digital Nation



As Digital Nation prepares to scale its literacy and youth upskilling programs nationally, this project outlines a clear plan to diversify funding and increase the organization’s annual budget from €500,000 in 2024 to €2 million in 2026.

The strategy evaluates 30 revenue streams—some well-known, others largely unexplored in Romania, such as social bonds and donor circles. Each has been scored based on parameters like return on investment, feasibility, mission alignment, innovation, and risk. This evaluation relies on strong data gathered through extensive research and stakeholder input.

Over just two months, our development team conducted over 200 discussions with private companies, grant-making bodies, and peer NGOs. These conversations provided realistic cost projections, insights into fundraising practices, and valuable benchmarking data. Many interactions arose organically through fundraising activities, while others were pursued specifically for this project.



In addition, consultations with NGO Academy and local nonprofit leaders helped assess the true operational effort behind each revenue stream. This led to a practical understanding of what implementation would require in terms of time, staffing, and integration with current operations.

While many Romanian NGOs default to structural grants or SMS-based giving—often unaware of the hidden costs and rigidity—this project explores more adaptable, strategic options. The NGO Academy offered alternative funding models, many of which align well with the needs of an agile, tech-based organization like ours.

This is not a generic fundraising plan. The scorecard and prioritization matrix are designed specifically for Digital Nation’s model, values, and strategic goals. They reflect our strengths in corporate partnerships, our mission focus, and our ambition to remain innovative and scalable. Applying this matrix to other organizations would likely yield different priorities and conclusions.

The result is a strategic, evidence-based roadmap that opens new avenues for sustainable growth. It supports our ability to scale impact and reach thousands more children, educators, and young people—faster, smarter, and with the funding to match our ambition.



## Arnold Kovács

Mareena – Consolidated Financial Planning Practices for Organisational Impact

Mareena is a Slovak civic association established in 2017 with the mission to promote social cohesion in Slovakia by fostering inclusive environments for refugees and other foreigners where they can fulfill their personal and professional goals and develop a sense of belonging. Mareena strives to fulfill this mission by providing comprehensive integration services in the fields of volunteer engagement, inclusive community activities, education and professional development, and awareness-raising. As one of the main local actors in the Ukraine emergency response in Slovakia, Mareena underwent a period of rapid, unprecedented growth in 2022 in order to respond to the urgent needs of refugees arriving to the country which was followed by a gradual descaling from the beginning of 2024 until mid-2025 in line with the protracted nature and gradual development of the situation in Ukraine and neighboring Slovakia.



While the continued interest from international donors provided a stable flow of funding and thus reduced the organization's focus on donor diversification and multi-annual financial planning, this short-term stability left Mareena vulnerable to sudden shifts in donor priorities and external funding reductions. To effectively address this challenge, the current project focuses on developing a comprehensive and structured internal process aimed at facilitating multi-annual financial planning in line with the organization's mission and long-term strategic direction as well as priorities. The overarching goal is to create a dynamic financial planning framework that not only supports sustainable growth but also enables adaptive responses to changing operational and funding environments.

The multi-annual financial planning process will be initiated by a strategic planning retreat resulting in the establishment of strategic priorities for a three-year period, followed by the development of multi-annual and annual programmatic plans and budgets leading to the creation of a multi-annual organizational budget. The introduction of three budget scenarios will enable Mareena to define clear budget baselines, establish contingency plans accordingly, and develop a multi-annual fundraising and grant development plan based on stakeholder and donor landscape analysis. To translate the strategic and fundraising plans into financial projections, Mareena will prepare a multi-annual income forecast and likelihood assessment tool leading to informed decision-making and proactive resource management. Finally, with the support of monitoring, evaluation and learning mechanisms, agility and flexibility will be ensured in order to allow Mareena to adjust its priorities in the case of major external changes directly affecting the work of the organization.





## Carmen Andresoi

FDP Protagonists in education association – AcCES EduHUB, a Safe Learning Space for teenagers



In a national context where 41% of youth having 15 years old are illiterate, when 1 of 4 children in Romania is abandoning school, a call to give wings for future by enabling access to education becomes a call for all, for the future of our nation.

Special educational needs (SEN) and vulnerable children are part of exclusion, school drop-out, a system where parents need always to find solutions “to fix the child” in order to have their child included in education, to offer them access to a dignified future.

If we listen to teenager’s voice from our programs regarding how safe they feel in a formal school (looking at the results of questionnaires that were applied by FDP staff between February -March 2025 to 14 teenagers included in FDP programs), 70% of children are not really feeling welcomed in school, friendly furniture and interactive methods responses are the most obvious transformations requested by children. 30,8% children have mentioned that if they have a problem, they have no one to talk to, no one has mentioned the school counselor, only 15% of them talk to a trustful teacher.

They not only request friendly furniture and interactive methods, but they also pointed clear explanations, experiments, discussions, games, a place where mistakes are accepted.

The change we want to contribute to through this project is: enabling 200 SEN and vulnerable teenagers/per year and children from Bucharest outskirts communities to develop skills for a future with dignity, through creating conditions for developing young people’s agency and wellbeing through meaningful participation in education and in their local community in **AcCES EduHUB, a Safe Learning Space (SLS) for teenagers.**

The SLS includes healthy spaces for learning, building connections and positive growth. The SLS seek to enhance the agency, empowerment and resilience of teenagers providing them with educational, entrepreneurial and protection resources. The 3 axes of the SLS approach are:

- technology and digital inclusion, experimenting vocational activities,
- *protection and psychosocial wellbeing through a creativity area (art therapy, theatre etc)*
- *innovation and education for sustainable communities, for promoting healthy relationships and civic values and youth involvement in local community development, solutions to different local problems – \_through escape room methodology*



## Gyöngyvér Kiss

Civil Impact Nonprofit – Civil Impact LAB and Tér-Erő (Space-Force) Program



Civil Impact Nonprofit Ltd has been committed to helping civil organizations establish corporate partnerships thereby strengthening their economic sustainability and stability for over 10 years. There is a growing demand for Civil Impact's work in Hungary where social support for organizations still lags behind potential, and where the nonprofit sector faces shrinking resources and serious political challenges. Building corporate relationships based on partnership and cooperation represents an opportunity for the nonprofit sector, but civil society organizations face a number of obstacles in this. In addition to the difficulties of civil-corporate connections, it is also apparent that civil organizations operating in different areas work in isolation from each other, with little knowledge of each other and of potential points of connection.

Civil Impact has been successfully running its Civil Impact Academy program for 10 years on the basis of which it is creating two new programs aimed at opportunities for corporate and civil partnership cooperations.



Civil Impact LAB – is a series of practical, one-day workshops for civil society organizations aimed at developing the skills and knowledge necessary for corporate cooperation (sales, proposal writing, negotiation techniques) for those who wish to successfully build and develop their corporate cooperation system in the long term, even with new innovative solutions and services. The program is made possible by the involvement of corporate experts and Civil Impact mentors.

Tér-Erő (Space-Force) Program – Connect. Build. Develop. – a series of networking and relationship-building events aimed at encouraging cooperation between civil society organizations and expanding their capacity through a targeted and structured "pitch" format. It builds bridges between civil society organizations that do not work in the same field but can still create valuable programs through cooperation or help each other through joint collaborations.

As a result and impact of the programs, we expect nonprofits to create new services and partnerships. The sector's corporate revenue will grow, thereby strengthening its operational stability. Cooperation between non-profits will strengthen civil communities, expand their knowledge, and enable more effective knowledge sharing between areas.

The implementation of the projects is supported by the revenues of Civil Impact Nonprofit Ltd from corporate partnerships, thus creating an accessible and sustainable training and development model for the nonprofit sector. The programs will start in the fall of 2025 as pilot projects.



## Irma Rešidović

Youth council in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina – Youth Investment Fund



The Youth Investment Fund marks a fundamental shift in how society supports young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In a country where youth policies are often merely symbolic and young people are excluded from decision-making processes, the Fund introduces a new paradigm: youth-led, inclusive, sustainable investments in the ideas, voices, and futures of the next generation.

Grounded in institutional legitimacy and fueled by grassroots innovation, the Fund operates as a collaborative platform where government institutions, the private sector, and civil society collaborate. The Fund unites all pillars of society around a shared mission: building stronger communities and creating a stable, supportive environment for current and future generations. This is institutional investment in its truest form, one that doesn't speak about youth but acts with them.

The Fund's launch signals the beginning of a systemic, long-term transformation, not as a temporary intervention, but as a generational commitment to equity, participation, and impact. Most importantly, young people themselves set the priorities and lead decision-making processes. Through access to microgrants, mentorship, innovation labs, and a digital capacity-building platform, they gain the tools to turn their ideas into action and their vision into lasting change.





## Jelena Likić

Association Bioteka – STEM & Sustainability Fund

In Croatia, educational inequality remains a persistent challenge, especially in rural, mountainous, island and war-affected regions. These areas, many of which fall under the designation of Areas of Special State Concern, suffer from limited infrastructure, under-resourced schools, and a lack of qualified STEM educators. Students in these regions face reduced access to quality education, which directly impacts their PISA test scores but, most importantly, their future opportunities for equal growth as their peers. Also, although girls often outperform boys in school, they remain underrepresented in STEM fields due to cultural stereotypes, lack of role models, and insufficient support. Gifted students, too, are underserved, with inconsistent identification and support across the education system.



To address these challenges, Association Bioteka, a Croatian nonprofit dedicated to STEM and sustainability education, has developed the STEM & Sustainability Fund which aims to



reduce educational disparities and promote inclusive, high-quality STEM learning for students aged 11–19, with a special focus on girls and gifted youth in disadvantaged areas as well as multi-sectoral co-creation in providing real-world and labor market-ready education. The Fund will provide mentorship, teacher training, financial aid, and direct access to hands-on learning experiences over the course of years to come.

The Fund's implementation is structured around three core areas:

- Engaging corporate funders and community stakeholders to build a sustainable support system through a multi-sectoral advisory board.
- Upskilling teachers through online communities and in-person mentorship programs tailored to STEM and sustainability.
- Empowering students via online learning communities, educational camps, student-led projects, and mobile STEM lab visits to underserved schools.

Over the next 18 months, the project will focus on finalizing partnerships, securing initial funding, and piloting key components. The full launch is planned for early 2027, with the goal of reaching at least 50 schools, 7.000 students, and 1.000 teachers in its first three years.

Through these activities, the Fund will build capacity, foster innovation, and create long-term systemic change in Croatia's education landscape.



## Jelena Višnjić

BeFem, feminist cultural centre – BeFem Media and Educational Lab



BeFem Media and Educational Lab is a transformative initiative by BeFem—Serbia’s pioneering feminist cultural center—created to ensure long-term sustainability and strengthen the impact of feminist advocacy through innovative media and educational strategies. Since its founding in 2009, BeFem has evolved from a festival into a regional platform for feminist thought, activism, and cultural production. In a context marked by growing anti-gender movements, political backlash, and reduced donor support, this project offers a proactive response to preserve and expand the space for gender equality and human rights.

The Lab introduces a twofold approach: (1) educational and media programs that challenge stereotypes, reshape public narratives, and promote gender equality, and (2) a values-driven, sustainable business model that generates income while advancing feminist principles. BeFem will develop and distribute feminist media content—such as podcasts, documentaries, and campaigns—and offer training, consulting, and communication strategies to institutions and organizations looking to adopt gender-sensitive practices.

The project places strong emphasis on research, knowledge-sharing, and policy development to support systemic change. Through collaboration with academic partners and experts, BeFem will design and implement educational programs and feminist policy frameworks that foster critical thinking, civic participation, and institutional transformation. At the same time, it will expand its activities to include gender-sensitive event management services such as conferences, seminars, and workshops—both to raise awareness and to generate new funding opportunities.

Key partnerships—with civil society, media, private sector, and donors—will ensure the project’s relevance and reach. By nurturing these collaborations, BeFem aims to build a strong, sustainable ecosystem for feminist action across sectors and borders.

Success will be measured through adoption of gender-sensitive policies, media engagement metrics, increased stakeholder collaboration, and the influence of BeFem’s work on public discourse and legislation.



In a climate of shrinking democratic space, BeFem Media and Educational Lab is a bold, forward-looking model that blends activism, education, media production, and sustainability. It enables BeFem to not only resist setbacks, but to grow stronger—amplifying feminist voices, reshaping institutions, and driving social change in Serbia and the wider region.



## Maja Ravanska

Association for research, communications and development  
PUBLIC Skopje – ZENici 2.0: A new generation of ethical leaders  
through media and soft skills education



In a world where traditional education systems fall short in preparing young people for the complex challenges of modern society, Face to face, a nonprofit, ethical media platform is stepping into a transformative role. Through ZENici 2.0, we are creating a multiplatform initiative designed to bridge the gap between formal education and the real-world skills needed for sustainable, human-centered leadership.

Rooted in the principles of empathy, ethics, and emotional intelligence, ZENici 2.0 offers a holistic and accessible learning ecosystem. The program combines storytelling, workshops, mentoring, peer learning, and community-based micro-projects, all amplified through our media channels: web, print, social media, and live events. What sets this initiative apart is our belief in media not just as a communication tool, but as a co-educator and catalyst for change. Participants will have real opportunities to contribute content (blogs, articles, photo-stories, video reels etc), that reflect their journeys and spark public dialogue on regenerative leadership and social justice.

Drawing inspiration from Otto Scharmer’s “Theory U” methodology, the initiative addresses three core disconnects: from nature (ecological), from one another (social), and from self (spiritual). Through experiential learning and storytelling, young people aged 18–29, particularly those disengaged from conventional systems or seeking deeper purpose, will gain the tools to lead with vision and integrity. The program’s key focus areas include emotional intelligence, ethical decision-making, systems thinking, and communication for impact.

This isn’t just a youth engagement initiative. It represents a movement. ZENici 2.0 is a response to the urgent need for soft skills development in North Macedonia, offering a values-driven alternative to superficial influencer culture. Our approach integrates content creation with real-world learning, helping participants turn knowledge into action and stories into influence. Alumni will be celebrated as changemakers, equipped to lead civic movements, social enterprises, and/or institutional reforms.

Our impact will be tracked through a gamified evaluation system, media metrics, and real-life outcomes, career changes, leadership roles, and public engagement. “Face to Face” will play a dual role: as a platform for youth voice and as an evaluator, publishing stories of transformation that capture the program’s reach and resonance.

In the coming years, ZENici 2.0 aims to catalyze a cultural shift: strengthening civic engagement, reclaiming media’s role as an educational force, and empowering a generation of leaders who influence through integrity, not status. With growing interest from partners, institutions, and donors, the groundwork is set for a scalable, transformative initiative that blends education, media, and purpose.



## Marijana Ivanić Vuga

House of Hope – CRO Pathway model: Confidence, Resilience & Opportunities

In a time of rising homelessness, social fragmentation, and economic instability, *Cro Pathway* offers a hopeful, human-centred response. Developed by **Dom nade**, an NGO which runs a grassroots Daily shelter for the homeless in Zagreb for 13 years, this project aims to **redefine pathways to inclusion, dignity, and recovery** for people affected by homelessness.



At its core, *Cro Pathway* builds on our **established day shelter model** by introducing a set of **creative and participatory interventions**: drama therapy, life skills workshops, peer mentoring, and community storytelling. These elements go beyond basic services and address the **emotional, psychological, and social dimensions** of homelessness—helping individuals rebuild identity, resilience, and self-worth.

The project is grounded in a **strong, multi-sectoral network** involving volunteers, artists, therapists, social workers, and former beneficiaries. Its inclusive and collaborative design empowers participants as co-creators of change. The project is built around a clear progression of steps that address both urgent needs and long-term transformation.

**Phase 1: Outreach & Trust-Building.** Through daily shelter services, basic needs such as hygiene, food, and psychosocial support are provided, creating a safe and dignified environment. Trained mentors establish trust and begin individual assessments.

**Phase 2: Stabilization & Social Mentorship.** Participants receive tailored social mentorship, including support in accessing healthcare, obtaining identification, and applying for social rights. Collaboration with institutions like the Croatian Employment Service and social welfare centers ensures legal and systemic support.

**Phase 3: Education & Skills Development.** With the support of national vouchers and partner organizations, beneficiaries enter accredited training programs (e.g. forklift operation, caregiving). Certified educators and NGOs facilitate this, focusing on market-relevant skills.

**Phase 4: Employment Mediation & Reintegration.** Participants are supported in finding jobs through partnerships with socially responsible employers. Housing mediation is initiated, connecting beneficiaries to transitional or supported housing options.

**Phase 5: Community Engagement & Sustainability.** Cultural programs (e.g. *Culture & Popcorn*) and volunteering strengthen social bonds and reduce stigma. Built-in sustainability includes continued mentorship and institutional cooperation to support long-term independence.

Importantly, *Cro Pathway* is also **scalable and transferable**. It builds on our recent achievement of launching a second day shelter—developed by Dom nade and successfully transferred to a partner NGO—demonstrating our capacity for innovation and growth. We believe that this project will amplify the voices of the excluded and turn recovery into a shared, public journey.



## Markéta Vinkelhoferová

Thematic Network for Social Economy – Holistic Environmental-Social Accelerator Programme



The Czech Reuse Federation proposes the creation of a pioneering Holistic Accelerator Programme that supports the growth of small-scale initiatives at the intersection of social impact, environmental sustainability and circular economy. The programme addresses a clear gap in the Czech Republic's support ecosystem: the absence of long-term, hands-on educational and mentoring opportunities for leaders of NGOs, micro, small and social enterprises, and grassroots organisations working toward ecological and social sustainability.

The target group includes current and aspiring founders of environmental-social initiatives — particularly in the reuse, repair, and sustainable production sectors — who often face chronic underfunding, strategic isolation, and leadership burnout. Through field-based learning, somatic methods, peer support, and applied knowledge, the programme will help them design or transform their projects into resilient, mission-aligned organisations capable of long-term impact.

The first pilot cycle (2025–2026) will be launched in Czech language and hosted across partner reuse centres, environmental social enterprises and community spaces. It will consist of modular workshops, field visits, mentoring, and online sessions — all tailored to the real needs of local changemakers. A CEE-wide English version is planned for 2026–2027. The programme will be coordinated and facilitated by experienced leaders from The Czech Reuse Federation's network, including social entrepreneurs, environmental educators, other platforms and association of sustainable businesses and organizations as well as policy advisors and advocating bodies.

The project is designed to be scalable, inclusive, and financially sustainable over time, with funding from private foundations, EU programmes, and in-kind partnerships. The Czech Reuse Federation — as a national platform for reuse centres and furniture banks — provides a strong institutional base and access to a living community of practice. This initiative will not only build stronger projects, but restore and empower the people behind them — cultivating a generation of environmental-social entrepreneurs and NGOs capable of leading systemic change in Czechia and beyond.



## Petra Boić Petrač

WWF Adria –

WWF-Adria, established in 2015 as part of the global World Wide Fund for Nature network, operates across eight countries in Southeast Europe, including both EU member states and Western Balkan countries. The organization's mission is to protect freshwater, seas, wildlife, and forests, working closely with local communities and promoting sustainable economic practices as a cornerstone of nature conservation.



Over the past decade, WWF-Adria has achieved significant milestones, including the creation of the UNESCO-recognized Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve (Amazon of Europe), halting harmful hydropower projects, removing illegal river barriers, and advancing marine protection. These successes highlight the region's rich biodiversity, which now faces growing threats from climate change, unsustainable development, and political challenges.

In response, WWF-Adria has developed a new conservation strategy with ambitious 2030 goals: protect 30% of the region's land, restore 250 km of rivers, support a resilient Adriatic Sea, drive policy changes for biodiversity and climate, and enhance climate resilience for 2 million people. To support these objectives, WWF-Adria has launched a new communications strategy aligned with its conservation plan. The strategy aims to:

- Engage at least 500,000 people in the region as active supporters, including citizens, activists, donors, and conscious consumers.
- Position WWF-Adria among the top three most recognized nature conservation organizations in the region, as measured by independent surveys.



Amazon of Europe - Kopački Rit in Croatia © Mario Romulić

To achieve these goals, WWF-Adria will run at least three major campaigns annually, expand its communications team, and invest in both digital and traditional outreach. The strategy targets diverse audiences, including the general public, policymakers, youth, local communities, businesses, and the media, using tailored messages and a mix of communication channels.

Despite notable achievements, WWF-Adria's brand awareness remains limited, with only a quarter of surveyed citizens recognizing the organization. Communications efforts are constrained

by limited staffing and funding, as well as a challenging political climate where environmental issues often take a back seat to economic concerns. The organization is restructuring its communications and outreach to better align with fundraising, increase public engagement, and strengthen its position as a leading conservation organization in the region. WWF-Adria's vision is to make the Adria region a global model for ecological resilience and sustainable human-wildlife coexistence, where healthy ecosystems drive both community well-being and economic progress.



## Radu Meirosu

The Group for Education and Active Citizenship – VOICE OF CHANGE: Innovative Community-Building and Fundraising Initiative

Voice of Change (VOCE) is an innovative community-building and fundraising initiative that leverages the universal appeal of music and karaoke to tackle pressing social issues affecting Romania's senior population. The project aims to raise awareness about the challenges faced by the elderly, foster intergenerational connections, and generate sustainable funding for Senior Card – a groundbreaking digital application providing discounts and benefits to enhance the quality of life for Romanian pensioners, who receive some of the lowest pensions in the European Union.



Through monthly karaoke events organized in Bucharest, Voice of Change cultivates a fun and inclusive environment where corporate partners, community members, and seniors unite to celebrate music while championing a vital social cause. This initiative transforms entertainment into meaningful social impact, fostering a stronger, more inclusive community and addressing systemic challenges faced by Romania's aging demographic.



The overarching purpose of Voice of Change is to establish a sustainable, engaging fundraising platform that supports the development and expansion of Senior Card, simultaneously building a community of advocates for Romania's elderly through music and intergenerational connections.

Key objectives include:

- **Fundraising Excellence:** Generating €10,000 annually through monthly karaoke events to financially support Senior Card and other elderly-focused initiatives.
- **Community Building:** Creating an inclusive community of at least 500 supporters who actively participate in and advocate for elderly welfare initiatives.
- **Corporate Engagement:** Establishing partnerships with at least 8 companies annually that participate in and sponsor events through CSR initiatives and matching donation programs.
- **Awareness Generation:** Increasing public awareness about the challenges faced by Romania's senior citizens, reaching at least 50,000 people through social media, press coverage, and word-of-mouth marketing.
- **Volunteer Mobilization:** Recruiting and training a team of 25 dedicated volunteers who support event organization and contribute to the broader mission of elderly support.
- **Organizational Development:** Strengthening the association's operational capacity, visibility, and credibility to enhance its impact on the community and ability to implement future initiatives.



## Redion Qirjazi

Mary Ward Loreto Foundation – International Advice and Service Center (IASC) for Foreign Workers in Albania



### The Challenge

Albania's growing sectors—tourism, agriculture, construction—depend on foreign workers from nations like the Philippines, India, and Nepal. This influx has led to exploitation through debt bondage, illegal wage deductions, abuse, poor living conditions, and internal trafficking. Institutional gaps and limited civil society focus exacerbate the crisis, threatening Albania's reputation and EU accession efforts.

### Our Solution

The IASC will protect and empower vulnerable foreign workers through:

- Protection: Legal aid, psychosocial counseling, housing, healthcare referrals, and emergency response.
- Prevention: Awareness campaigns, training for officials, and tailored information for new arrivals.
- Strategic Partnerships: Collaboration with government and promotion of ethical employment practices.
- Research and Advocacy: Annual reports, field research, and policy recommendations.

### About Mary Ward Loreto Foundation

Mary Ward Loreto Foundation is a trusted Albanian non-profit with over a decade of experience in combating human trafficking and promoting social justice.

### Why Now

Albania has a unique opportunity to address this growing issue, strengthen its EU prospects, and set a regional example by protecting vulnerable workers and promoting systemic change.





## Ruxandra Burcescu

The Social Incubator – Gen C: Generation – Civic

Gen-C is an offline civic education program targeting one of Romania's most vulnerable groups and the core beneficiaries of The Social Incubator — young people exiting the child protection system. Europe has seen a rising tide of young people radicalized and politically extremist and Gen-C is tackling the root causes: isolation, disinformation, and deficiency in civic awareness.



In addition to that, in Romania, public discourse often overlooks young people—but radical parties do not. When mainstream institutions leave this space vacant, others step in to occupy it. With limited civic engagement efforts targeting youth, extremist groups are increasingly filling the gap, offering a sense of identity and belonging that democratic institutions have failed to provide.

Gen-C bridges the gap between being and being truly socially integrated. They are taught actual historical facts, democracy, rights, and responsibilities in real life through experiential workshops, field exposure, debates, and engaging with communities. They are also instructed in basic life skills like public speaking, media literacy, and first aid.

The project will also include a research component in order to gain a better insight into why and how young people are drawn towards extreme ideologies. By gathering data on participants' attitudes, risk factors, and social influences, Gen-C intends to contribute to the general European debate on how to prevent radicalization and to inform future policy and educational initiatives.

Gen-C complements our existing digital project—the AI Civic Education Platform (in partnership with Google)—with a face-to-face, hands-on learning component that is essential. It can be used on its own or as a bricks-and-mortar component of the beta test group, with



real-world incentives and community involvement tied into the online modules.

At its core, Gen-C helps young people not just participate in society, but shape it—with confidence, clarity, and purpose. Essentially, Gen-C allows young people to be part of society, not just interact with it, to make a positive impact on it—with confidence, clarity, and purpose.



## **Saranda Murturi**

Kosovar Organization for Talent and Education, TOKA – Training Program on Experiential Learning Methodology for Preschool and VET Teachers



The training program on the “Experiential Learning” methodology has been implemented by TOKA in partnership with the Faculty of Education of the University of Prishtina “Hasan Prishtina” since 2020. The aim of this training program is to enhance teachers’ capacities in using effective teaching methodologies and to improve the learning process in the classroom. The program is accredited by the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation and provides 30 credit hours. This methodology is used to: Encourage active student engagement; Support the development of critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving skills; Enable learning through real-life experiences, not just theoretical instruction; Strengthen awareness and reflection on the learning process. This project aims to expand the implementation of the Experiential Learning Methodology (ELM) to preschool and VET teachers, targeting new educator groups.

### **What problem does this project address?**

1. Low Quality of Preschool Education
  - Preschool teachers lack professional training to implement modern, child-centered methodologies.
  - Teachers are currently using three separate documents causing confusion and inconsistency
  - Lack of training in New Curriculum of Educators
2. Misalignment of VET education with labor market needs
  - VET teachers often have strong technical knowledge but lack pedagogical skills.
3. Poor Integration of Modern Teaching Methodologies
  - Classrooms often rely on traditional, lecture-based approaches.

### **What is our Solution**

A structured training & mentoring program to integrate the Experiential Learning Methodology (ELM) into preschool and VET classrooms.

- 3 day training by trainers from TOKA staff and professors from the Faculty of Education
- 2-month classroom mentoring (support, feedback, 2 visits/teacher)
- Practical tools, accredited certification (30 hours)

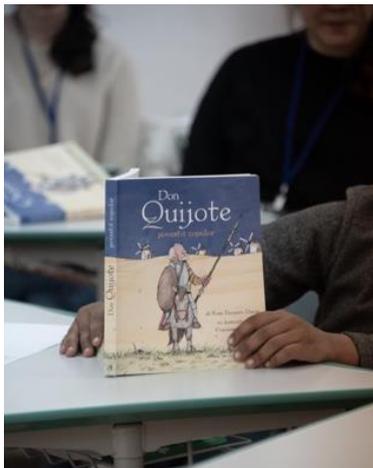


## Simona Florina Beldiman

Bosch Romania Foundation – The Bosch Reading Fund

The Bosch Reading Fund, an initiative of the Bosch Romania Foundation responds to a growing national concern: over 40% of Romanian students cannot comprehend what they read, placing Romania at the bottom of EU rankings in literacy.

Initially launched in 2023, in partnership with the “Curtea Veche” Association, the Bosch Reading Fund aimed at promoting and raising awareness of the importance of reading among students. Encouraging children to read for pleasure and developing their reading habits were supported through book donations and the organization of reading festivals. The fund enabled the donation of thousands of books to primary and middle school students in public schools across Alba, Cluj, and Timiș counties, with a focus on rural and small urban areas. The “Narativ” Reading Festival offered children aged 5 to 14 workshops which explore reading through diverse themes. Divided into two categories - fiction and non-fiction - the workshops provided participants with the perfect opportunity to develop their artistic and practical skills, critical thinking, creativity, and general knowledge.



The Bosch Reading Fund – Version 2.0 represents a strategic shift from promoting reading to tackling the deeply rooted issue of functional illiteracy among Romanian students. Version 2.0 transforms the Bosch Reading Fund into a comprehensive intervention model, aiming to reduce functional illiteracy rates in partner schools to align with the European average of 15–20%.

Rather than create new tools, the Bosch Reading Fund integrates and scales initiatives already tested successfully including: (1) Teacher & Librarian Training; (2) Student Literacy Workshops; (3) Continuous Literacy Assessment. These interventions complement and build upon the program’s original components: book donations, Bosch Library renovations, and the “Narativ” Reading Festivals.

The project is led by a cross-functional team from the Bosch Romania Foundation and other NGOs (eg. InfnitEdu Association, “Curtea Veche” Association).



## Stela Vasluian

Amici dei Bambini Moldova – The School of Adoption: Building Belongings Together

Adoption is more than a legal act — it’s a journey of healing, connection, and trust. In Moldova, while national policies have improved adoption procedures, adoptive families still face the process largely alone, especially after welcoming a child into their home. Many adoptive parents report feeling unprepared for the emotional, behavioral, and relational challenges that arise post-adoption. This lack of support too often leads to family stress, adoption disruption, and in some cases, child re-abandonment.



The School of Adoption is a bold, innovative initiative that addresses this critical gap. Led by Amici dei Bambini – Moldova, the program offers structured, trauma-informed training and support to adoptive families at every phase of the journey — from preparation and matching to long-term post-adoption life.

The program combines in-person and digital formats, making it accessible to families across Moldova, including those in rural areas. It features:

- Expanded preparatory training for prospective adoptive parents;
- Ongoing post-adoption support, including counseling, workshops, and family resources;
- Peer mentoring by experienced adoptive parents;
- A digital platform offering video lessons, toolkits, and a moderated support community.

With over 1,000 prospective adoptive parents trained since 2011, Amici dei Bambini – Moldova brings both experience and credibility. This project builds on that foundation to create a national model of adoption support. By strengthening parents’ knowledge, emotional resilience, and community ties, the School of Adoption will improve outcomes for children and families — and reduce the risk of breakdown.



At its heart, this project defends every child’s right to grow up in a safe, stable, and loving family. It envisions a Moldova where no adoptive parent feels alone, and no adopted child feels unwanted.



## Vesna Strlič

Slovene Philanthropy – Strategic framework for Programme of volunteering at SP



In 2023 alone, it was reported that over 200,000 volunteers dedicated more than 8 million hours of services across 2,500 organisations in Slovenia, highlighting the significant societal value of volunteering. This vital work in fields of social work, education, sports, health, and many others, was valued at over 79 million euros per year. Volunteering tackles diverse social issues, strengthens communities, and consistently provides first response to crises, often preceding state structures. The extensive network relies on volunteers, as well as their mentors and organizers, for its successes. More than 2,000 of these organisations are connected through the Slovenian network of volunteering organisations, which is coordinated by Programme of volunteering of Slovene Philanthropy (SP).

SP and the Programme of volunteering had significantly shaped the field of volunteering in Slovenia since it was established in 1992. The programme has built a network of partners, engaging diverse stakeholders from individual volunteers and beneficiaries to organisational partners, institutions, and businesses, all committed to the development and promotion of volunteering in Slovenia.

However, the success of our Programme, reflected in substantial growth of both its scope and impact, has also brought about new complexities. Our team now faces fragmented focus and increasingly complex workloads, often operating reactively rather than proactively. This prevents us from fully leveraging our internal strengths, experience, and professionalism to achieve meaningful and lasting impact.

To address these challenges, I propose implementing a Strategic planning framework for the Programme of volunteering. It will encourage us to take a proactive approach to prioritising relevant topics, ensuring that our efforts are aligned with a unified vision. The framework is intended to be a participatory process for the programme's 11-member team, enabling us all to share ownership and shape the future development of the programme together.

This transparent, internal strategic approach will establish us a more credible partner in shaping the future development of volunteering. By implementing a four-year strategy, grounded in researched internal and external challenges and opportunities, we intend to strengthen our support for various stakeholders of volunteering in Slovenia.

This will further enhance our capacity to contribute to policy and advocacy on both national and EU levels, thereby increasing the overall impact of volunteering on social inclusion, civic participation, and community resilience, and will support the development of a stable and empowered volunteering ecosystem.



## Voltiza Prendi

AMAD – Cross -Border Initiative for Staff Well-Being and Motivation

The Cross-Border Initiative for Staff Well-Being and Motivation addresses one of the most pressing yet underacknowledged challenges in the civil society sector: the emotional burnout and declining motivation of youth workers, NGO professionals, and educators. These individuals are often at the frontline of social change – working with vulnerable communities, under resource constraints, and high emotional demands – yet their own well-being is rarely prioritized within organizational strategies.



This initiative brings together AMAD, a well-established NGO in Albania, and Gemeinsam Impakt, a newly founded youth-focused organization in Austria, to co-develop and pilot an innovative, people-centered model for preventing burnout and building emotional resilience within mission-driven organizations. The partnership bridges experience with innovation, combining AMAD's long-standing expertise in human rights and inclusion with Gemeinsam Impakt's fresh, visionary energy and transnational outlook.

The project focuses on three interconnected components:

- Capacity Building – Staff and youth workers from both organizations will take part in expert-led trainings on stress management, emotional literacy, and motivational leadership.
- Peer Learning and Exchange – Through staff mobility between Tirana and Vienna, participants will engage in job shadowing, reflective practices, and intercultural knowledge exchange.
- Wellness Toolkit and Retreats – A multilingual Wellness & Motivation Toolkit will be co-created and tested during two well-being retreats – safe, regenerative spaces designed for emotional renewal, storytelling, and group coaching.

The project is grounded in evidence. It draws on recent fieldwork conducted by the lead expert in both Albania and Austria, including direct engagement with young people and teachers in Vienna's vocational schools. The findings confirm that burnout and emotional strain affect professionals across geographies, generations, and sectors—making this initiative timely, relevant, and transferable across Europe.

The expected impact is twofold: internally, it will empower staff to work more sustainably and mindfully; externally, it will offer a replicable model that other NGOs, youth organizations, and educators can adopt. The initiative aligns strongly with both partner organizations' missions, fostering a culture of care, sustainability, and dignity within civil society.

In a time when the world demands more from changemakers, this project responds with a clear message: to care for others, we must first care for ourselves.



## Yllza Nikqi

Center for Information and Social Improvement – Mad Café

Mad Café is an innovative social enterprise based in Prishtina that intends to transform mental healthcare rehabilitation by providing inclusive employment opportunities. It will be the first café in Kosovo operated by individuals living with mental health conditions, who currently live in mental health residential facilities. Mad Café addresses a critical gap in employment opportunities for individuals struggling with mental health conditions, as the current job market does not offer opportunities tailored to the needs of individuals experiencing various forms of mental health distress.



The café will operate as a cooperative where employees are empowered to participate in decision-making regarding the space, operations, menu design, event planning, and profit allocation. This model encourages people to take ownership and combat the long-standing stigma that people with mental health conditions encounter.

Mad Café will be in the service of a wider and more diverse audience, including local residents, individuals and community members who support meaningful causes. Besides offering beverages, the café will earn revenue from workshops and events. This mixed revenue model, which combines café operations with grants and donor partnerships, will ensure long-term financial sustainability.

We will collaborate closely with mental health institutions to identify potential employees and to support the overall well-being of staff throughout their time at the café. Through collaborations with civil society organizations and community members the café will serve as a hub for public events focused on mental health awareness. The goal is to foster open dialogue, challenge stigma, and promote inclusivity.



Mad Café is not just a place. It is a safe space, a chance for a fulfilling way of living, a community and change for individuals who are currently denied the opportunity for full social participation. The project has future plans to replicate this model in other cities which have mental health residential facilities. In addition, the Café holds the potential to influence mental health recovery and rehabilitation practices as well as inclusive employment policies across Kosovo.



## Zsuzsanna Mester

Profilantrop Association – Sustainable Community-Based Tourism:  
Charity Shop Innovation

The Profilantrop Association has operated a community-focused charity shop in Hungary for over a decade, providing affordable access to second-hand goods, creating inclusive social spaces, and promoting conscious consumption. In response to increasing economic hardship, a growing demand for low-cost clothing, and the challenges of sustaining operations, the organization aims to develop a new revenue-generating model that links sustainable tourism, education, and local empowerment.



This initiative seeks to integrate community-supported tourism with the existing circular economy model of the charity shop. By developing educational and cultural experiences for both local and international visitors, the project leverages the social value of reuse, storytelling, and solidarity. It also responds to the growing interest in sustainable and ethical travel, while addressing the limited awareness and misunderstanding around charity shops in Central and Eastern Europe.

The project will be piloted with international volunteers, workshops, and small group tours. It builds on previous experiences in community engagement and seeks to diversify income streams through low-threshold services, educational programs, and international cooperation—while ensuring the shop remains accessible to the local low-income community. The concept is well-aligned with EU priorities in youth participation, green transition, social inclusion, and sustainable entrepreneurship. Its goal is to create a replicable and scalable model that combines social impact with financial sustainability in the charity shop sector.





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