

Academy for Young Leaders in Civil Society

Name of the organisation

Schuler Helfen Leben

Website of the organisation

<https://www.schueler-helfen-leben.de/>

Location of the organisation

Hamdije Kresevljakovica 18, 71000 Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Good practice aspect(s)/themes of youth work

- Competence development of youth workers
- Non-formal education/-learning
- Active citizenship/activism

Good practice category

A practice of processes and methods

Good practice aim & purpose

The Academy for Young Leaders in Civil Society in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been designed to merge the gaps in formal education. Firstly, it seeks to diminish xenophobia, homophobia, and prejudice among young people from diverse backgrounds, fostering tolerance and acceptance. Secondly, the project aims to promote critical thinking and constructive dialogue among young leaders regarding past and future issues in the country.

Another goal is to facilitate reconciliation within Bosnia and Herzegovina by providing new role models for young people, thereby contributing to healing divisions within society. The project also strives to reduce societal divisions by offering meaningful mobility opportunities to youth from various ethnic, religious, and political backgrounds.

Furthermore, the Academy project intends to prevent extremism and potential future conflicts by connecting future leaders from different ethnic groups, promoting unity and understanding. It also supports young leaders in addressing issues within the legal system and revitalizing democratic civic participation mechanisms. Lastly, the project aims to combat brain drain by showcasing opportunities for success within the country, encouraging talented young individuals to stay and contribute to the nation's development. Overall, the Academy project seeks to empower young leaders, promote tolerance, and foster positive change in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Good practice description

The Academy is a comprehensive year-long program designed to empower young activists with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to drive meaningful change in their communities and society. It consists of 220 contact hours, a one-month internship, and 50 hours dedicated to project work.

At the heart of the Academy lies the Activism module, which equips young individuals with the tools and insights needed to initiate lasting change in their local communities and broader society. This module blends strategic thinking with tactical planning, offering a deep dive into various methods and techniques in activism. Its objectives include raising awareness, motivating candidates for activism, and training them to create effective actions and campaigns. Recognizing the innate drive and idealism of young people to address societal issues, this module provides the necessary structure and tools for effective social engagement.

Complementing the core module are five satellite modules that enhance candidates' critical thinking, engagement, and ability to take meaningful action.

One module offers a cross-sectoral perspective on the state, encompassing economics, law, and politics. It provides insights into foundational elements often missing in formal education. Understanding the political, financial, and legal systems in Bosnia and Herzegovina is vital for effective civic participation, enabling candidates to advocate within political and administrative frameworks, with a particular focus on local self-government.

Another module delves into the narratives and collective memories shaping Bosnian and Herzegovinian society. It analyzes how these narratives can isolate ethnic groups and aims to promote dialogue by examining and discussing them. The module encourages students to identify inaccuracies in stories, facilitating a deeper understanding of events and deconstructing imposed political segregation myths.

The third module centers on deconstructing social realities, urging students to challenge mainstream narratives and assume civic responsibility. It addresses the need for social and political action to transform ethnic conflicts into functional, trans-ethnic relationships rooted in principles of freedom, equality, and civil solidarity.

The fourth module, Future Studies, encourages participants to envision a desired and sustainable future for Bosnia and Herzegovina. It fosters discussions about personal visions, values, and aspirations, culminating in a manifesto expressing intentions, motives, and views on the country's evolution within the European family.

A twinning module on personal development and leadership concentrates on values such as empathy, equality, and leadership. It enhances emotional intelligence, behavior, and motivation, enabling participants to reach their full potential and contribute to societal growth on cognitive, social, and emotional levels. The module underscores the importance of self-awareness and strong personal values in effective leadership.

A significant component of the project involves student projects, guided, and supervised by lecturers. These projects adhere to service-learning principles, where students apply the knowledge acquired through the Academy to implement specific ideas in real-world settings. Students collaborate in groups on these projects, showcasing their ability to plan, execute, and report project activities.

Through internship participants gain insights into power dynamics within communities and the experience of working outside one's community, promoting reflection and comparison of different contexts for civic engagement and peacebuilding.

Good practice result & concrete effects

With five generations and more than 180 participants, we managed to establish solid ground for leadership education in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Our alumni are now active in both the civic and private sectors. The academy empowers participants to champion vital social causes. For instance, our former student established the Association of Forgotten Children of War, first of its kind worldwide. This focuses on addressing the social and legal visibility of children born during the war, particularly those born as a result of wartime rape. Our first-generation student completed a transformative two-month internship with the citizens' association "Why not" in Sarajevo. This experience led to his professional engagement with the association and his current role as the editor of the fact-checking portal Raskrinkavanje. He has expanded his impact regionally by collaborating with partner organizations from neighboring countries and launching a regional fact-checking network. Our fourth-generation student seamlessly integrates her passion for addressing social issues with her career as a professional actress at the National Theatre Tuzla. Her Academy journey focused on combating violence against women, resulting in the creation of a poignant mini-documentary and an activist theatre performance dedicated to this pressing issue.

The Academy for Young Leaders in Civil Society is a grass route and practice-based learning-by-doing highly networked program designed to build the leadership skills of youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina to navigate the various challenges faced in a divided, post-war and third-world country-labeled society.

The Academy places a strong emphasis on collaboration with municipalities and local NGOs to realize its mission of dual impact, both in learning and change action. This is done through three major dimensions: firstly, by participant selection and engagement, secondly, by teaching and learning; and third, by practical work students perform throughout the program.

Participants:

The Academy for Young Leaders in Civil Society is dedicated to recruiting a diverse group of students representing various local communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The selection process is based on merits, prior civic involvement, individual motivation, and the geographical location of the applicants, without any ethnic bias. By adopting this inclusive approach, the Academy ensures a diverse and well-rounded cohort comprising individuals from varied ethnic, social, and economic backgrounds and hailing from different regions of the country. The program works toward building solid networks among participants, lecturers, other youth, NGO networks in the country and worldwide, and local educational and cultural institutions towards building a community of practice. This approach creates an environment where participants learn together, challenge prejudices and stereotypes, and actively contribute to creating a democratic society.

Education:

The Academy is a rare place where oppressive and ethnocentric narratives within Bosnian and

Herzegovinian society are challenged and deconstructed. To confront these omnipresent narratives negatively affecting the everyday lives of youth, the program provides students with comprehensive tools and an educational framework. The curriculum delves into various aspects of peace work, resilience building, and critical and systemic analysis of social reality. It opens the perspective on active civic participation as an essential tool for meaningful engagement. Through these educational components, students develop critical thinking and analytical skills to challenge and transform these narratives. This educational approach equips them to be effective advocates for positive change in their communities.

Practical Work:

The Academy is a live learning platform based on practical, student-driven initiatives. Participants develop projects within the Academy under the guidance and supervision of lecturers, trainers, and Academy staff. These projects adhere to service-learning principles and are designed to bring tangible benefits to both students and the local communities they represent. The knowledge gained through the Academy is actively applied as students implement specific ideas in real-world settings. This hands-on approach empowers students to plan, execute, and report on project activities, making a real and lasting impact in their local communities. This practical component of the Academy's curriculum ensures that students are not just learning but actively applying their knowledge to address issues that matter to their communities. In this effort, we partner with more than 30 partnering organizations from local communities across Bosnia and Herzegovina in which students will carry out their internships. The internships foster the mobility of youth throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, which has been particularly low since the war. For most participants, the internship allows them to discover a new local community, get into direct learning, and foster its own community of practice.

Good practice chapter of the European Charter on Local Youth Work

Core principles of youth work