

YOUTH INITIATIVE FOR
HUMAN RIGHTS

ANNUAL REPORT 2023



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



INSTEAD OF INTRODUCTION

Covering an entire year in one article is challenging. It is even more so when reflecting on the year 2023 in the context of Serbia. The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights' report ['Dealing with the Past for a Better Future'](#) affirmed what we at YIHR have been emphasising for years when it comes to our core issues. However, despite difficulties, YIHR has chosen to respond with even greater resolve. This year, we celebrated the 20th anniversary of our organisation, determined to shine a light where there is darkness, and to continue striving for a different future over the next 20 years.

Kosovo-Serbia relations were in the focus of YIHR's work over the past year. At the beginning of the year, a new agreement was introduced, sparking a public debate on the French-German proposal for dialogue that lasted for several months. While the proposal of the new European agreement faced criticism from many, we viewed it as an opportunity to shift the dynamic of normalisation in a positive direction. Our reason for supporting this agreement, along with 19 other organisations and individuals, remains unchanged. We strongly believe that our societies need mature and responsible political action that fosters exchange at all levels, and transforms the entrenched ways in which we have viewed each other for more than three decades.

The new agreement, along with its Annex, which represents an addition to the previously reached agreement in Ohrid, has been accepted. However, the political situation, as well as the situation on the ground, continued to deteriorate. Tensions and hostilities culminated in an armed paramilitary attack in Banjska, with those responsible yet to be brought to justice. Aware that peace has no alternative, we continued to call things by their real name, dedicating our work to fostering a peaceful future that will not come on its own.

We have addressed topics such as the issue of missing persons and the return of displaced persons. Throughout the year, we have worked continuously with young people. We have defended academic cooperation, erased calls for war from public spaces, remembered victims, and called for accountability for war crimes and responsible public discourse. We view our role in this process as essential for preserving established relations and connections, as well as for intensively working to bring young people from Kosovo and Serbia closer together. Despite the challenges, I believe we have succeeded, as evidenced by our results.



Early May brought the unimaginable. The mass shooting of pupils by their peer is a crime that shook the entire region. Serbia has not recovered from this event, and I am not sure whether we as a society are moving in that direction. The culture of remembrance, which we have never established, remains equally non-existent when it comes to the victims and families directly affected by this crime. In Kosovo, the 'Mirëdita, dobar dan!' festival started in Prishtina on 4 May; the programme of the festival was altered in response to the tragedy. The festival began quietly, with a minute of silence. At the central square in Prishtina, we lit candles together with citizens in memory of the children killed at Vladislav Ribnikar school. This action resonated across the region, highlighting the importance of connecting people, fostering empathy, and showing solidarity in the most difficult times.

Throughout the year, the programme at the Endžio HAB provided space for discussions and knowledge that are often neglected in the public sphere. This ranged from exhibitions of Russian artists, anti-war activists, and those who were mobilised but refused to participate in Russia's war against Ukraine, to the screening of films such as '20 Days in Mariupol' in cooperation with Beldocs. And while the aggression against Ukraine continues, the world is now confronted with a new conflict in the Middle East, which also affected our region. Every day, we witness destructions and mass human rights violation live via social networks, as well as futile calls for ceasefire, while Palestinian victims number in tens of thousands. 'Red lines' no longer exist. This means that we need even more commitment, reason, and effort to achieve peace.

We have worked with young people from the country and the region at various locations, such as Belgrade, Banja Koviljača, Šabac, Kragujevac, Hrtkovci, Petrovo Selo, Rudnica, Kiževak, Mitrovo Polje, Stajicevo, Begejci, Novi Pazar, Preševo, Tuzla, Sarajevo, Srebrenica, Prishtina, Prizren, Daruvar, and Nice. Youth mobility and acquiring various experiences have always been of great importance to us; thus, in 2023, we were proud to be part of the advocacy process which resulted in abolishing visas for citizens of Kosovo travelling to the European Union.

The end of the year witnessed elections in Serbia marred by proven manipulations, illegal activities, and abuses, prompting doubts about the true reflection of citizens' electoral will in the outcome. When fair and free elections, fundamental to democracy, are compromised, it becomes the duty of citizens to engage in disobedience. With that spirit in mind, I conclude this introduction. Thank you for your interest in our work.

Sofija Todorović, Programme Director



CONVERSATION: THE STARTING POINT

In what way can art instigate reconciliation in the region?

I firmly believe that art is a universal language capable of reaching every individual on Earth, capable of challenging even the most resolute minds, and stimulating thought. Consequently, art is an exceptional, perhaps the foremost, tool for fostering inter-ethnic reconciliation. Take music, for instance, which serves as a significant unifying force in this deeply divided region. Music, a form of art, often sets aside differences, focusing instead on our shared human experiences, and our collective enjoyment of sound. Other forms of art are equally beneficial, even when they do not directly engage with critical social issues. Art narrows the gap between people, enabling them to identify not only with what they observe, but also with one another.

In 2023, I witnessed several great artistic endeavours that contributed to regional reconciliation. These included the exhibition 'The Labyrinth of the Nineties', the 'Mirëdita, dobar dan!' festival, collaborative exhibitions between artists from Kosovo and Serbia, the play 'Peace Negotiations', and films like 'The Happiest Man in the World' or 'Lost Country'. Also, through YIHR Croatia's programme 'Šća ćemo sad? [And Now What?]', I had the opportunity to engage in a collaborative artwork focused on the theme of reconciliation. Unlike formal education and direct addresses - whose values I fully acknowledge - art has the power to convey ideas and emotions in a subtler and more creative manner, thereby fostering empathy. For these reasons, I maintain that art is indispensable, and should be prioritised as a key strategy in advocating reconciliation and building a brighter future.

Bojana Radojević



What is the significance of fostering a culture of remembrance?

Through YIHR's programmes, I encountered for the first time the events of the wartime period, and had the opportunity to visit sites of war crimes, which remain unmarked to this day. And these are the places where our fellow citizens and neighbours tragically lost their lives. For sites I was familiar with, I heard entirely different narratives. In discussions with researchers and experts on this subject, I realised that these narratives are incorrect. For this very reason, I believe it is essential to foster a culture of remembrance, to revive these difficult conversations and events, and to confront them directly. It is in these actions that the truth is revealed.

Due to monstrous atrocities committed during and after the wars, many were tragically deprived of the opportunity to leave their mark on Earth. We are not. For these reasons, out of respect for victims and a sense of responsibility towards our fellow citizens - to ensure that similar atrocities do not recur - it is essential to engage in dialogue, educate, and raise awareness among ourselves and others. It is important to ensure that the life stories of the victims are heard; those who did not leave a mark or legacy are as if they had never lived. We must remember because, as George Santayana stated, 'those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it'.

Katarina Šipoš

Through youth exchanges with Bosnia and Herzegovina, are we ‘a step closer to peace’?

In 2023, I visited Bosnia and Herzegovina several times to participate in exchanges and commemorations. In a way, these visits provided answer to this question. Youth exchanges are among the most effective ways for people to connect, dismantle deep-seated prejudices, and advance towards peace. Impressively, what I realised during these visits is that, despite severe hardship and pain endured during the 1990s, the people across the Drina River are eager to move forward and willing to forgive. During my interactions, I encountered no hostility, and I talked with many different people, both young and old. This experience, I believe, is not unique to me. It seems that those who suffered are often more prepared to forgive than those in whose name the atrocities were committed. Therefore, I assert that exchanges in the region are important as they offer young people, for whom peace is often an alien concept they do not want to hear about, a different perspective that encourage them to reflect on, and embrace the idea of peace.

Jovana Đurđević

Why is it crucial for state authorities to redefine the meaning of ‘hero’ in their narratives?

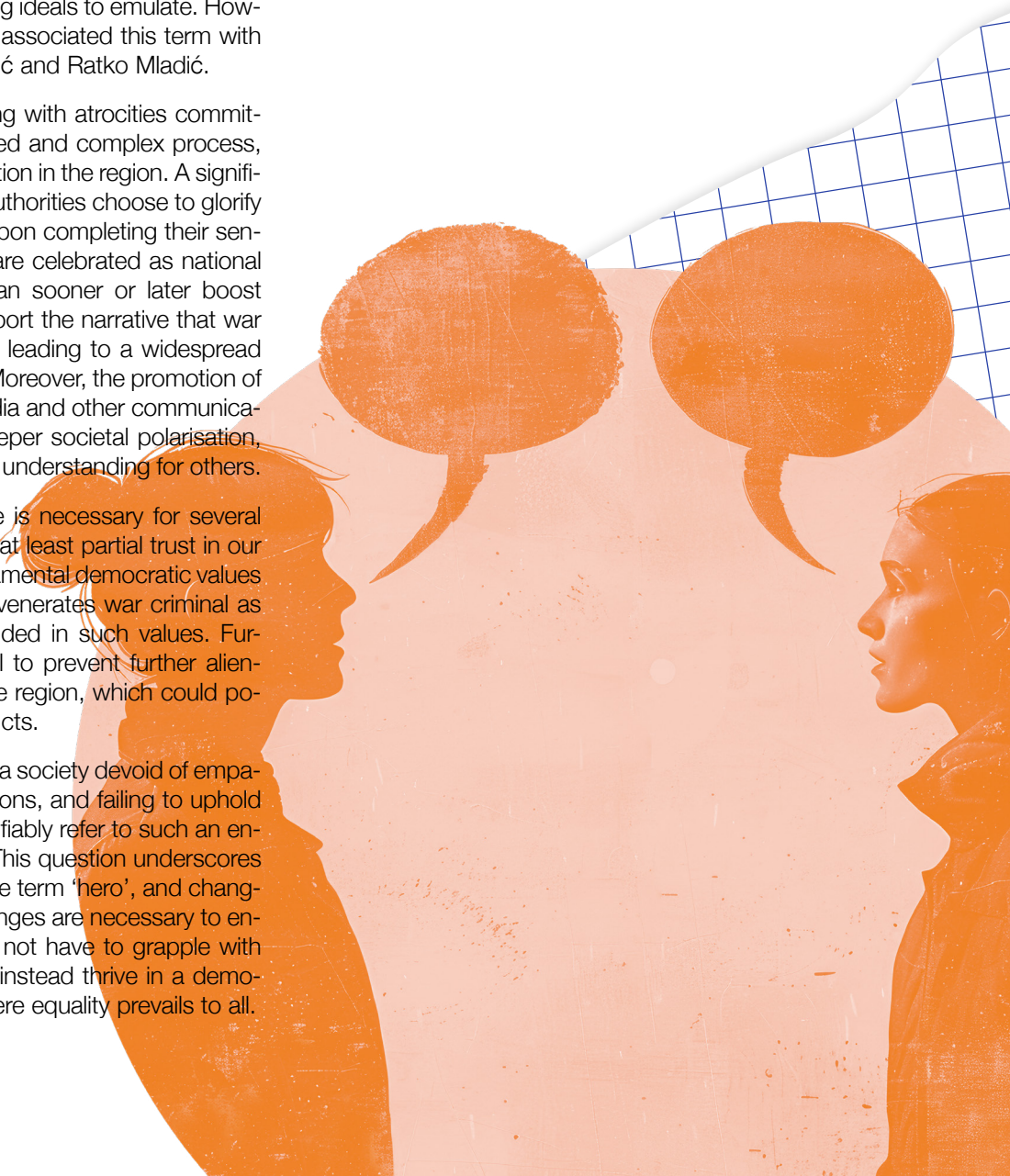
Traditionally, we have been taught that heroes are Superman, Ninja Turtles, or Mulan – characters who are brave, courageous, and just, embodying ideals to emulate. However, in Serbia, authorities have associated this term with individuals like Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić.

Addressing the past, and dealing with atrocities committed during the war is a prolonged and complex process, essential for achieving reconciliation in the region. A significant concern arises when our authorities choose to glorify convicted war criminals, who, upon completing their sentence and returning to Serbia, are celebrated as national heroes. Such endorsements can sooner or later boost the number of people who support the narrative that war criminals are heroes, potentially leading to a widespread lack of empathy within society. Moreover, the promotion of such denial politics through media and other communication channels contributes to deeper societal polarisation, increasing tension and reducing understanding for others.

The change of public discourse is necessary for several reasons, ranging from restoring at least partial trust in our institutions to reintegrating fundamental democratic values into our society. A society that venerates war criminal as heroes is undeniably not grounded in such values. Furthermore, this change is crucial to prevent further alienation among the countries in the region, which could potentially escalate into new conflicts.

Therefore, if we find ourselves in a society devoid of empathy, lacking democratic foundations, and failing to uphold basic human rights, can we justifiably refer to such an environment as a ‘society’ at all? This question underscores the critical need for redefining the term ‘hero’, and changing official narratives. These changes are necessary to ensure that future generations do not have to grapple with these same concerns, but can instead thrive in a democratic and emphatic society where equality prevails to all.

Doroteja Antić



THEY SAID ABOUT US

How much do we truly learn about what happened in Kosovo through formal education?

A look at history textbooks used in 8th grade primary school or 4th grade of secondary school reveals a stark contrast between the content presented there, and information shared in YIHR's programmes. In formal education, the narrative predominantly portrays one side as solely the victim, caught in a purported joint conspiracy involving the international community and the ethnic groups with whom we shared Yugoslavia. The approach of self-victimisation and a denial of any responsibility for atrocities and conflicts aptly describes the current state of contemporary history curricula.

In my view, one of the greatest qualities of YIHR's youth initiatives is their ability to encourage young people to view difficult events from our past through the eyes of 'the other', who is often depicted as the enemy in formal education. This approach is particularly relevant to the interpretation of events in Kosovo. School curricula typically paint a picture of eternal conflict and hatred between Serbs and Albanians, suggesting that the only outcome of such relations is inevitable conflict. However, YIHR faces a monumental, yet crucial, task. By connecting youth from Kosovo and Serbia, debunking long-standing myths and prejudices, and challenges decades of biased education, YIHR is laying the groundwork for reconciliation. Ultimately, our hope is that the future will echo with sounds of love, tolerance, and unity flowing along the Ibar, Bistrica and Drim Rivers, rather than the echoes of conflict.

Aleksandar Radin

Throughout my career as a journalist, I have seldom seen organisations and individuals uphold their credibility as steadfastly as YIHR does. Often, many yields to societal condemnation for confronting uncomfortable truths about the past, succumb to donor influence, or seek political backing. YIHR, however, remains unwavering.

In a country caught in an endless cycle of electoral campaigns, where the echoes of civil war linger, and history is falsified for political gain, life is arduous for its citizens—especially the youth. Yet, it appears that YIHR has deftly resisted the surge of populism and the shift to the right. Through its proactive stance, vocal advocacy, and commitment to defending the endangered human rights of each individual, YIHR has managed to preserve the remnants of dignity that still persist.

YIHR demonstrates a courage that surpasses our own, without calculating with the image of Serbia they want to live in, despite often facing physical attacks for their stance. They make no distinction among people; they are the only ones who never divide us – be it by religion, nationality, sexual or political orientation – always siding with the human being who most often find themselves alone. They remind us that although the wars have ended, the atrocities committed are not forgotten, and war criminals cannot buy peace with the sentence they have served.

Through its activities and non-conformist approach, YIHR has fought for respect. They are young, credible participants in any dialogue, always ready to defend their beliefs in freedom and equality. The generation that meets your gaze directly, a challenge that few can reciprocate.

Suzana Trnić



Hannah Arendt once wrote that in the context where falsehood pervade discussions on important matters, the act of telling the truth becomes a form of activism, whether intentional or not. For the past twenty years, the young members of YIHR have been doing just that - consciously and meticulously speaking truths about significant societal issues, thus contributing to our collective improvement.

Unwaveringly in their commitment, they stand firm in defence of human rights across various facets of life. Whether it involves commemorating the victims of the 1990s war, condemning the glorification of war criminals, or protecting the rights of minority groups facing discrimination, YIHR is always there to remind us that the foundation of a democratic society must be built on the universal respect for human rights – irrespective of ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, etc. In a society that has faced numerous challenges in all these areas over the past two decades, YIHR has acted as a vital corrective force. Regrettably, the need for such a corrective seemed greater in 2023 than ever before.

The role of YIHR in education and in connecting young people from the region is crucial to me. Their efforts in imparting knowledge about the mass human rights violations that have scarred our recent history are invaluable. Thanks to YIHR's educational programmes, successive generations of young people have found answers to questions that are rarely posed in society, let alone addressed. This is the best strategy to combat the pervasive manipulations present in our discourse. Similarly, by connecting young people from the region, these initiatives provide them with the opportunity to meet and understand 'the other ones', who are often portrayed as enemies. I am convinced that such connections lay the groundwork for enduring changes that will pave the way for a peaceful future.

Rodoljub Jovanović



IN THE SPOTLIGHT

The year 2023 marked a significant milestone for our organisation as we celebrated our 20th anniversary. Founded with the objective of building bridges among young people in a region scarred by the wars of the 1990s, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR) has spent two decades assembling visionaries committed to the values of democracy, peace, and regional cooperation. In commemoration of our 20th anniversary, we compiled stories and personal accounts from individuals across the region who have played pivotal roles in YIHR. This collection, titled 'Moja inicijativa/Nisma ime/My initiative' comprises narratives from those who have actively contributed to the advocacy for human rights and peace over the past twenty years, and who tried to provide answer to the question what YIHR means to them. These stories form a legacy that, while seldom knowns and even less frequently shared, are crucial for passing on to future generations to inspire and reassure them that they are not alone.



Conference 'What Is Peace for Us?'
YIHR#20, 2023 (photo by Dejan Radić)



Art

The year 2023 was also marked by the tenth edition of the 'Mirëdita, dobar dan!' festival. This year was notable both for the heightened tensions between Serbia and Kosovo, and the tragic event at Vladislav Ribnikar school. The festival commenced with a minute of silence, reflecting a solemn respect for the recent violence. The opening event featured the film 'How I Learned to Fly'. The festival included a study visit to Prishtina, during which eighteen young participants from Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo attended the 'Once Upon a Time, Never Again' exhibition, which honours children who perished in the Kosovo war. Following the film projection, citizens of Prishtina gathered in front of the Kosovo National Theatre to light candles in a gesture of solidarity with the victims of the Belgrade school tragedy. Despite these sombre circumstances, the festival successfully achieved its objective of fostering cooperation and exchange between Serbian and Kosovo societies.



The anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide was commemorated with a series of events in Belgrade, including a public candle-lighting ceremony, and an activist performance in front of the Presidential Palace, designed to convey messages of empathy, piety and solidarity with the victims. In collaboration with the Post-Conflict Research Centre, and with the consent of the mothers, a segment of the 'Mother's Scarf' artistic installation was displayed. These scarfs symbolize the women who survived the genocide, many of whom lost loved ones in this massacre. Around 80 citizens participated in the commemoration, each holding scarfs and connecting them to one another. The event reiterated the call for the official recognition of 11 July the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the Srebrenica Genocide, a gesture we believe is crucial for the ongoing peace-building effort.



'Mother's Scarf', commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide anniversary, 2023



Throughout 2023, YIHR steadfastly continued its campaign against the proliferation of nationalist graffiti and tributes to war criminals on the walls of public institutions. In a collaborative effort with the 'Krokodil' association, YIHR organised a street action to paint over such graffiti at the Institute of Chemistry, Technology and Metallurgy, located in the children's park near Mitićeva rupa, Belgrade. A testament to the positive impact of such efforts is the fact that in July, the walls of the Institute were adorned with a mural celebrating renowned Serbian scientists.

In March 2023, YIHR submitted 308 complaints to the communal services in ten towns in Serbia, demanding the removal of graffiti and murals dedicated to Ratko Mladić. These complaints were compiled based on information provided by citizens. We are still awaiting responses from the relevant authorities.

YIHR IN NUMBERS

We are particularly proud of our research activities in 2023. Of several impactful publications, we would like to highlight two reports: 'Passivisation of Addresses of Albanians in the Preševo Valley as Discriminatory Practice' and 'Attitudes of Young People in Serbia about the Wars of the 1990s'. The former report sheds light on violations of the Law on Permanent and Temporary Residence and other relevant legislation by police authorities in southern Serbia. The latter provides valuable insights into the current perceptions held by young people in Serbia regarding the conflicts of the 1990s. A significant breakthrough for this research was made when the report was presented to the audience of 70 students at the Faculty of Political Sciences in Belgrade.

In conclusion, we find it important to highlight our victories. One such victory in 2023 was won in the fight against hate speech. Through final and enforceable judgments by the Appellate Court in Belgrade in July and October 2023, YIHR successfully confirmed that the reporting by 'Inform-er' daily and its editor-in-chief Dragan Vučićević in January 2017 constituted hate speech.

32 programmes

1200 programme participants

8 street actions and gatherings

9 exhibitions

2500 Endžio HAB visitors

8 publications

37 TV appearances

944 media mentions

1,6K new followers on 

367 new followers on 

48 meetings with decision-makers

92 events we attended

308



complaints submitted,
demanding the removal of murals
dedicated to Ratko Mladić

0



murals removed
by communal services



RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

Throughout 2023, YIHR published six research studies, analytical reports, and policy papers. While the topic and findings of these research projects often attracted fresh attacks on YIHR's activities, they contributed to advancing our collaborations with educational institutions and certain public authorities (Commissioner for the Protection of Equality) in Serbia, which were willing to provide information or offer venues for the presentation of YIHR's work.

In May 2023, we released two publications addressing Srebrenica genocide denial through two distinct approaches. The first, ['Denying the Future – A Path to the Past: Proposal for a New Framework for the Fight against Genocide Denial'](#), provides an overview of the efforts to counter Srebrenica genocide denial in Serbia to date and proposes future actions. The second, ['Srebrenica Genocide Denial – Directions for Advocacy and Potential Initiatives'](#), outlines the legal framework of the Republic of Serbia regarding the Srebrenica genocide, and examines the perspectives of political actors. Using examples from EU countries, this publication offers guidelines for combating the denial of the Srebrenica genocide.

During the week of our 20th anniversary celebrations, YIHR organised a panel discussion titled 'Attitude towards the Srebrenica Genocide as an Ultimate Political Issue' at Endžio HAB on 14 November. This event also provided an opportunity to present the findings of these two policy papers. One of the speakers at the panel was Member of Parliament Jelena Jerinić of the Green-Left Front, who reminded the National Assembly of Serbia on 11 July of court-established facts about the genocide in Srebrenica.



In late October, YIHR presented the report '[Passivisation of Addresses of Albanians in the Preševo Valley as Discriminatory Practice](#)' to an audience of more than 30 diplomats, journalists, representatives of civil society organisations, and Belgrade citizens. The audience was addressed by the authors of the report: Marko Milosavljević, Head of Research and Advocacy at YIHR Serbia; Dr Miloš Rašić, an ethnologist – anthropologist, and research associate at the Ethnography Institute of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts; and Relja Pantić from the Department for Actions and Complaints of the Commissioner for Protection of Equality. Dr Miloš Rašić presented the research methodology, which was based on qualitative research methods, including in-depth interviews, discussions, focus groups, and road maps during four visits to the Preševo Valley from July to September 2023. The YIHR research team used a semi-structured questionnaire to interview 47 individuals from Bujanovac, Preševo, and Medveđa, including 23 passivised citizens of Albanian origin and 24 political actors, local activists and representatives of political parties.

Presenting the main findings of the research, it was highlighted that the Ministry of the Interior's police departments violate the Law on Permanent and Temporary Residence. One of the key findings is that 72% of respondents did not receive a written decision on address passivisation, effectively stripping them of their broadest range of rights (including the right to personal identification documents, electoral rights, right to permanent residence, property rights). Milosavljević emphasised that there were two primary indicators of the Ministry of the Interior's violations of the Law on Permanent and Temporary Residence: inconsistent and non-transparent data on passivisation, and changes to the electoral roll in Medveđa between 2015 and 2022, where 4,309 citizens from predominantly Albanian settlements lost their voting rights. YIHR also presented this report in Bujanovac, at the cultural centre 'Vuk Karadžić' in November 2023, in collaboration with the Bujanovac Human Rights Committee. The Minister for Public Administration and Local Self-Government, [Aleksandar Martinović](#), soon accused YIHR of presenting false information, but did not provide data to convince citizens that the Ministry of the Interior or the Ministry for Public Administration and Local Self-Government do not act in a discriminatory manner.

PASIVIZACIJA ADRESA ALBANACA

u Preševskoj dolini
kao diskriminatorna
praksa



Research paper '[Attitudes of Young People in Serbia about the Wars of the 1990s](#)', 2023



Research paper 'Attitudes of Young People in Serbia about the Wars of the 1990s', 2023

During the celebration of our 20th anniversary, on 13 November, YIHR presented the report '[Attitudes of Young People in Serbia about the Wars of the 1990s](#)' to over 35 media representatives and citizens. The speakers at the presentation included Rodoljub Jovanović, psychologist and author of the research; Marija Vasić, sociology professor from Novi Sad; Milijana Pejić, General Secretary of the National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS); and Anja Zloporubović, then YIHR programme assistant. Marko Milosavljević of YIHR moderated the discussion.

YIHR conducted this research in August 2023, in cooperation with SmartPlus, a market research agency. The objective of the research was to examine the level of knowledge among young people on topics such as the wars in the former Yugoslavia, key actors in the conflict, attitudes towards war crimes and their perpetrators, as well as young people's views on the International Criminal Court for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). The research revealed that young people are insufficiently familiar with the events of the 1990s, primarily obtaining information from their parents, teachers, and the Internet, and that they are most knowledgeable about crimes where the victims were of Serbian origin.

Two events that young people identified as the most important in the 1990s wars are Operation Storm (18.68%) and the NATO bombing (13.74%), while all other significant events accounted for less than 5%. The strongest negative emotions young people expressed were towards the ICTY, with 62% of respondents viewing it negatively, and nearly 41% believing that the main purpose of trials before the ICTY was to place the blame for war crimes on Serbs. On 22 December, author Rodoljub Jovanović presented the paper to students of the Faculty of Political Sciences. The presentation was organised as part of the course 'Political Behaviour' and gathered over 70 students from the second year of journalism and fourth year of international relations.

Aware that crime denial practices, the glorification of war criminals, and warmongering are no longer exceptions, we decided to monitor and report annually on the denial of war crimes by state representatives of Serbia. In late December, we presented the report **'State of Denial – Serbia 2022: Time of Silent Pride'**. As these harmful practices have become normalised, this report will enable continuous monitoring of actions that directly invalidate, diminish, or endanger peace-building efforts in Serbia. Alongside the report on denial practices, YIHR presented the findings of the report 'Attitudes Towards War Crimes in the 2023 Election Campaign'. The main findings indicate that the lists of governing parties (Serbian Progressive Party-Socialist Party of Serbia) were supported by four convicted **war criminals** and one **individual indicted** for war crimes before a domestic court, who is being prosecuted for the murder of approximately 1,300 Bosniaks around Srebrenica.

In mid-December, YIHR published an **analysis** of the content of 16 school history textbooks, nine for primary schools and seven for secondary schools. These textbooks cover the period of the disintegration of Yugoslavia during the 1990s, including the armed conflicts in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo, as well as the period of NATO bombing.

The analysis 'Wars of the 1990s in History Textbooks in Serbia' reveals that an imbalance in the presentation of data on the suffering of the population based on nationality is still present, though to a lesser extent concerning Croats and/or Bosniaks as victims. In some instances, victims from these two nationalities are mentioned, usually in the context of the total number of casualties or in the context of atrocities so extensive that their inclusion was unavoidable, such as the Srebrenica genocide.

One of the findings of the analysis is that, compared to previous analyses of history textbooks, the attitude of historians in Serbia towards Kosovo Albanians has not changed. If their suffering is mentioned at all, it is only in the context of their deaths as terrorists or KLA members in battles with Serbian security forces (such as in the case of Adem Jashari) or if they were killed by NATO bombs. When mentioned, Albanian civilian casualties, mostly women, children and the elderly, are addressed only briefly. The findings of the history textbooks analysis and the data from the research on the attitudes of young people will help new YIHR generations develop and test new methods to combat denial and ensure the non-repetition of war crimes, considering not only the local context, but also the global context of conflicts such as those in Ukraine and the Middle East.

**Report 'State of Denial – Serbia 2022:
Time of Silent Pride', 2023.**



ADVOCACY

Through its advocacy work, YIHR successfully brought the issue of glorification of war criminals to the attention of the European Parliament, European Commission, and Council of Europe, with a particular emphasis on murals dedicated to war criminals. Thanks to our advocacy efforts directed at political parties, an inspection oversight was conducted in a primary school where war criminal Nebojša Pavković addressed the pupils. Following communication and meetings with YIHR, Dobrica Veselinović, representative of the Green-Left Front, visited the Srebrenica Memorial Centre in Potočari in July 2023 and paid respects to the victims of the Srebrenica genocide. Furthermore, YIHR successfully demanded the dismissal of Education Minister Ružić due to his unacceptable speech following the mass shooting at Vladislav Ribnikar primary school. Additionally, we lodged a constitutional complaint on behalf of Teuta Fazliu, a citizen of Albanian nationality, regarding the abuse of permanent residence passivisation. During the 2023 election year, alongside other civil society organisations, we called for the investigation of electoral irregularities and for the assurance of freedom of assembly and expression without excessive use of force by the police. In case of Srpski telegraf's reporting about Albanians 'poisoning our kids' in May, we proved before the Commissioner for Protection of Equality that this tabloid disseminated false information and engaged in discrimination. In July 2023, the Appellate Court in Belgrade confirmed in its final judgment that reporting by the Infomer tabloid about YIHR in January 2017 constituted hate speech. Regarding tensions in Kosovo, we have been calling for an efficient investigation into the paramilitary association and terrorist attack in Banjska that occurred in September 2023, as well as the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement.

The year began with tensions between Serbia and Kosovo, which directly threatened to further aggravate the situation for the families of persons who disappeared during and after the Kosovo war. The right to truth has remained a central focus of YIHR's work. In January, in collaboration with the Working Group for Chapter 35 of the National Convention on the European Union, we organised a **public debate** on the search for missing persons to create a space for information that is free from political abuse, and to amplify the voices of the families of the disappeared. Despite the tensions, representatives of Serbia and Kosovo adopted a new declaration on 2 May, committing to allow access to documents in their possession, including classified ones, for the purpose of locating missing persons. Alongside 20 other organisations and renowned individuals, we **called on** Serbian authorities in February to support the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement.



Debate '(Missed) Opportunity for Agreement: The Search for Missing Persons from the Kosovo War', 2023

At the beginning of the year, we were concerned by the actions of Serbia's youth representative at the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO), which were directed against Kosovo, a founding country of this inter-state mechanism for youth mobility and reconciliation in the region. As a result, the Regional Network of Youth Initiatives for Human Rights sent an [open letter](#) to RYCO, prompting the RYCO Secretariat to demand that the Government of Serbia replace its youth delegate, which was done promptly. In the same month, we warned the Government of Serbia against remaining silent in response to the promotion of [fascism](#) with regard to a traditional gathering of neo-Nazi groups on 4 February, which celebrated the collaboratorist and war criminal Milan Nedić. We demanded that the Serbian Ministry of the Interior uphold the law, but [once again](#), the police allowed the display of neo-Nazi symbols and insignia in the streets of Belgrade.

Activism has remained one of the key tools YIHR uses. In February, together with the 'Krokodil' association, we organised a [citizens' action](#) to clean the children's park 'Mitićeva rupa' in Belgrade. The goal was to remove the illegal graffiti 'When the army returns to Kosovo' from the wall of the Institute of Chemistry, Technology and Metallurgy, a public building, which had appeared on its freshly renovated façade. Our idea was to replace such graffiti with gentle, child-friendly content that promotes values bringing joy to both children and their parents. [We succeeded](#): today, the wall of the Institute features portraits of scientists whose work is relevant to the Institute's field of expertise.



Action of mural removal, 2023

After this action, the offices of YIHR and the Krokodil association were vandalised on several occasions. Additionally, different parts of the city were defaced with large graffiti reading 'When the army returns to Kosovo'. Photos of these large graffiti were circulated on the networks and right-wing Telegram groups, with hundreds of unidentified individuals participating in their creation. Government officials publicly expressed support for these actions, stating several times that there was nothing objectionable about these inscriptions, and avoided condemning the mass and organised display of violent symbols in towns across Serbia.

Through press releases, visits to sites of suffering, and street actions, both independently and in collaboration with YIHR offices in the region, we highlighted the importance of court-established facts, the promotion of an inclusive remembrance culture of the wars, and the strengthening of reconciliation.

In February, on the 30th anniversary of the abduction in Štrpci, together with colleagues from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, we handed a package of responsibility to the governments of Serbia, Montenegro, and Republika Srpska. This package contained five recommendations, including a request for the establishment of an inter-governmental commission to determine the truth and hold all responsible parties accountable for this crime. On the occasion of the Štrpci abduction anniversary, we also submitted a request to the municipality of Novi Beograd to restore the plaque commemorating one of the abducted citizens, Toma Buzurov, which had been altered to change the context of his murder. The memorial plaque was stolen in late 2022 and returned in April 2023, thanks to the efforts of the [neighbours](#) from Block 23, supported by YIHR.

In May, together with YIHR Croatia, we [commemorated](#) the suffering of civilians during Operation Flash and the rocket attacks on Zagreb. On this occasion, we again demanded that the governments of Serbia and Croatia expedite the search for missing persons and enhance cooperation between the two states in prosecuting war criminals. In the same month, we called for the [responsibility](#) of Verica Letić, principal of Djura Jakišić school in Kać, and Novi Sad Mayor Milan Djurić, for organising a class in which primary school pupils were addressed via Skype by war criminal Nebojša Pavković from prison in Finland. In June 2023, based on YIHR's request, Member of Parliament Nebojša Novaković raised a [parliamentary question](#) to the acting Education Minister Djordje Milićević, which led to an inspection oversight of the school in Kać.

The mass murder committed by a juvenile school pupil on 3 May at Vladislav Ribnikar primary school in Belgrade shocked Serbia and led to massive protests under the banner 'Serbia against Violence'. The juvenile shot and killed nine people and wounded six others, mainly his peers. Due to the unacceptable and unlawful actions of government officials at the subsequent press conference, YIHR called for the urgent dismissal of Education Minister Branko Ružić for politically instrumentalising the tragedy, and for the accountability of Veselin Milić, Head of the Belgrade Police, for publicly showing a list of underage victims and revealing the name of the underage perpetrator. Shortly after the school shooting, Minister Ružić resigned. Regarding Veselin Milić, the Commissioner for the Information of Public Importance and Protection of Personal Data found no violation of the Constitution and law, stating that Mr Milić did not reveal the identity of the children; rather, it was the media that made the list available to the public, thereby violating the Law on Information.

In response to unethical media reporting by *Srpski telegraf* in May, which claimed that Albanians were ‘poisoning our kids with juice imported from Kosovo which causes cancer’, we lodged a complaint with the Commissioner for Protection of Equality for discrimination and incitement of prejudice towards Albanians. The Commissioner responded by issuing an opinion confirming that the article in question was discriminatory, and recommended that *Srpski telegraf* refrain from publishing discriminatory content that violates the dignity of individuals or groups based on their national identity.

In June, YIHR condemned the decision of the Toplički Administrative Region to honour war criminal Vladimir Lazarević with the ‘Tzar Lazar’ charter, as well as the lecture Lazarević delivered to youth in November 2023, organised by the Serbian Progressive Party in the Pantelejev municipality in Niš. Following YIHR’s reaction to the Serbian Progressive Party’s continued glorification of war criminals as heroes during the election campaign, the Serbian Progressive Party’s municipal board responded with a series of lies, falsely portraying YIHR as a partner organisation to the coalition ‘Serbia against Violence’.

In early July, the Appellate Court in Belgrade upheld the first instance judgment of the Higher Court in Belgrade in the case against the publisher of the Informer tabloid, ‘Insajder tim’, and its editor-in-chief Dragan J. Vučićević, ruling that the information published in this daily constituted hate speech. The final judgment stated that describing YIHR as a ‘Soros-Shqiptar-Fascist organisation’ that creates ‘chaos all around Serbia’ and conducts ‘fascist terror in our country’ constitute hate speech because it incites violence, hatred, and discrimination against the association and its members based on their affiliation.



‘Mother’s Scarf’, commemoration of the anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide, 2023

We commemorated the twenty-eighth anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide alongside forumZFD Serbia and local citizens with the art installation ‘Mother’s Scarf’ and by lighting candles in front of the Presidential Palace in Belgrade. As in previous years, we once again called for 11 July to be declared the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the Srebrenica Genocide, as a lasting commitment to peace and relationships built on trust and solidarity. By symbolically tying one scarf to another, we demonstrated our solidarity with the women and mothers of Srebrenica. The installation ‘Mother’s Scarf’ was created by the Movement of Mothers of Srebrenica and Žepa Enclaves in collaboration with the Post Conflict Research Centre, and Srebrenica Memorial Centre. The commemoration was attended by representatives of the EU Delegation, the Council of Europe and several embassies, as well as by political party representatives, including ten Members of Parliament. Once again, government officials failed to attend this event.

In August, we opposed the misuse of victims’ identity, the selection of the location, and the officials’ narrative during the commemoration of victims of war crimes committed during Operation Storm, organised by the authorities of Serbia and Republika Srpska in Prijedor. In October, together with the Humanitarian Law Centre, Women in Black, and the Sandžak Committee for Human Rights, we highlighted the responsibility of the Commission for Missing Persons regarding the crimes against abducted citizens in Sjeverin. In late November, in response to new indictments for contempt against Vojislav Šešelj and four other members of the Serbian Radical Party, YIHR activists posted boards in Hrtkovci to remind the public of crimes against humanity for which the leader of the Radicals was convicted. This action also served as a protest against the union in local elections between the governing Serbian Progressive Party and the party of war criminal Šešelj, who was a parliamentary candidate during the election campaign.

Continuing our battle for walls and public spaces that should not be arenas for promoting violence, hatred, and warmongering propaganda, YIHR submitted [308 requests to the communal services](#) in ten towns and municipalities across Serbia, demanding the removal of murals and graffiti celebrating war criminal Ratko Mladić. With the help of 120 citizens, who sent photos and locations, we mapped murals, graffiti, writings, and stencils. Local communal services are legally obliged to clean the façades, not only of images of Ratko Mladić and other war criminals, but also of all other graffiti that incite hatred, such as the letter 'Z'. By the end of 2023, none of the graffiti and murals had been removed by official decision, although YIHR's request was included in the recommendations by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović, in her [report](#) on dealing with the past in the countries of the former Yugoslavia.

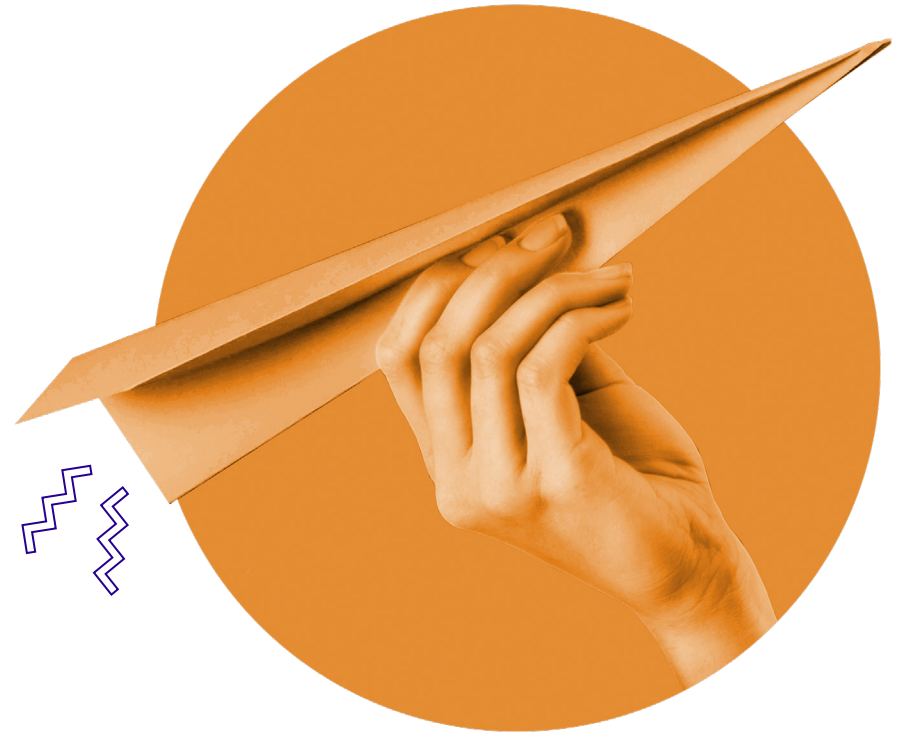
During 2023, YIHR, in collaboration with other civil society organisations, issued several [communications](#) condemning the messages of hatred on walls and public campaigns inciting violence against critics, academics, and political actors. Impunity and the lack of public condemnation by the authorities contributed to the exploitation of hatred and intolerance towards critical members of the academic community, minorities, women, and neighbouring countries, thereby normalising these harmful ways of communication in the public sphere.

We supported young people by joining the 'Serbia against Violence' protests, sparked by the mass shooting at Vladislav Ribnikar primary school. As signatories of an open letter to the relevant authorities, alongside various citizen associations, journalists, and media groups, we actively participated in a series of protests in Belgrade with our activists. This wave of anti-violence activism was very important for us, as it encouraged young people across Serbia to engage in protests and publicly advocate for their beliefs, perhaps for the first time.

Following the mass shootings in Belgrade and Mladenovac, we, along with other civil society organisations, demanded [reforms](#) in the security sector and media sphere. We also called for the appointment of new [ministers](#) responsible for these areas and new members of the Regulatory Body for Digital Media (REM) Council. Additionally, we supported and advocated for the formation of a committee of inquiry at the National Assembly to investigate the responsibility of government institutions in both cases of mass shooting.

During the election campaign, which effectively began after the terrorist attack in Banjska, we advocated for fair elections free from the influence of war criminals in the public sphere. The start of the election campaign was marred by the misuse of citizens' personal data, including the falsification of signatures for election lists in local and parliamentary elections. YIHR Programme Director, Sofija Todorović, was also a target of [personal data misuse](#), along with several public figures who quickly raised public awareness about this issue.

Throughout the election campaign, YIHR informed citizens, especially young people, about their rights through [guidelines](#) and [instructions](#).



During election silence, on 14 December 2023, we [presented](#) the findings of our monitoring of war criminals' participation in the election campaign for local, provincial and parliamentary elections, as well as the report '[State of Denial – Serbia 2022: Time of Silent Pride](#)'. Throughout the campaign, we emphasised that, despite the illegal museum and monument dedicated to [Dragoljub Mihajlović](#) in Belgrade, citizens will not forget the anti-fascist struggle, regardless of the revisionist practices promoted by the authorities. We recorded 12 instances of war criminals being glorified during the governing coalition's election campaign. In response, we requested that the new government representatives in the City of Belgrade initiate the erection of a monument in Batajnica dedicated to Albanian civilians from the war in Kosovo.

After election irregularities were discovered, we joined citizens in standing up against electoral fraud, and [police brutality](#) against protesters, which occurred on 24 December in front of the Assembly of the City of Belgrade. Along with other civil society organisations, we supported large citizens' protest against electoral irregularities organised by the 'ProGlas' platform in Belgrade on 30 December 2023. According to the [Archive of Public Gatherings](#), this protest was attended by 17,000 citizens, making it one of the largest political protests of the past year.

IMPACT THROUGH PROGRAMMES

TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE PROGRAMME

Open Class 'New Practices of Remembrance of the Srebrenica Genocide'

An open class '[New Practices of Remembrance of the Srebrenica Genocide](#)' was held in January, in collaboration with forumZFD Serbia and the Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina (NDNV), with the participation of more than twenty young people. During the open class, the participants had the opportunity to talk with historian Olga Manojlović Pintar about remembrance practices that contribute to the process of reconciliation, and the significance of art for peace activism in the socio-political context of the 1990s wars, with special emphasis on the Srebrenica genocide. Another topic discussed was the significance of artistic and debate groups in constructing anti-war discourses within the artistic space of 1990s Serbia.

Debate '(Missed) Opportunity for Agreement: The Search for Missing Persons in the Kosovo War'

The debate '[\(Missed\) Opportunity for Agreement: The Search for Missing Persons in the Kosovo War](#)' was held in January in the context of the European plan for a new Serbia-Kosovo agreement. The debate featured Jelena Krstić of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Bekim Blakaj, director of the Humanitarian Law Centre Kosovo, and Nataša Božović from the Missing Persons Resource Centre.

In light of the announcements from officials in Belgrade and Prishtina regarding the possibility of reaching an agreement, though with contentious issues about missing persons, the debate primarily focused on the disputes and causes of disagreement between the two negotiating parties, as well as the political exploitation of the search for missing persons. Participants also discussed the law on missing persons in Kosovo, which addresses the needs of the families of the disappeared. However, it was noted that despite families of missing persons in Serbia having prepared a proposal for a similar law, there has been no response from the authorities. The participants agreed that the new European plan for a general agreement could help in resolving the issue of missing persons.

Programme 'A Step Closer to Peace'

A four-day educational programme titled '[A Step Closer to Peace](#)' was organised in May in cooperation with YIHR BiH. Participants had the opportunity to engage with peers from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, meet and converse with peace and LGBTIQ+ activists from Tuzla, and learn about their efforts for build a better society. The programme also provided insights into the wartime events in Tuzla from 1992 to 1995, with a particular focus on the massacre at the Tuzla Gate. The participants paid their respects to the victims of the Tuzla Gate massacre and conveyed a message of peace, emphasising their responsibility to educate other young people about this crime to prevent its recurrence.



Drina Summer School

YIHR gathered twenty-five young people from Serbia at the [Drina Summer School](#), where participants had the opportunity to learn about the mass human rights violations that occurred in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1991 and 1995.

The Drina Summer School commenced with an open class 'Autostereotypes and Heterostereotypes: Normalisation of Discrimination and Violence'. In this session, participants engaged with psychologist Tamara Tomašević to explore how stereotypes and prejudices are formed and perpetuated in everyday life. They also discussed the underlying feelings and needs that contribute to the creation of autostereotypes and heterostereotypes.

During the rest of the programme, participants delved into various topics related to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They examined the political context before the war and during the disintegration of Yugoslavia; the Srebrenica genocide; the deportations and camps for Bosniaks in Serbia; the forced mobilisation of refugees, and wartime sexual violence in eastern BiH. The participants also visited the Srebrenica Memorial Centre, where they learned about the events leading up to the genocide, and the execution of the mass killings.



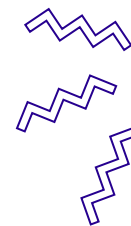
Drina Summer School, 2023

YIHR Activist Network – young people from Serbia and Kosovo

A call for young activists from Serbia and Kosovo was launched in June. The [Activist Network](#), aimed at reconciliation and peacebuilding, seeks to gather 100 activists, offering them the opportunity to enhance their skills, connect with other like-minded young people, and collectively work towards peacebuilding in the region through exchanges, internships and workshops. The initiatives and achievements of Network members are promoted through traditional media and social networks to inspire others to take action. This initiative represents an important step forward in overcoming divisions, promoting understanding, and building a more peaceful and prosperous future for all.

„I ŠČa ćemo sad?“ [And Now What?] Regional Summer Activist School for youth from Croatia and Serbia

YIHR Croatia and YIHR Serbia organised a [Regional Summer School](#) for 30 activists from Croatia and Serbia in Daruvar in early July. The Summer School programme featured numerous interactive workshops and group sessions, focusing on topics such as human rights, the rights of ethnic and national minorities, prejudices and stereotypes, the fight against discrimination, etc.



Kaleidoscope Festival

Together with its activists, YIHR participated in the [Kaleidoscope Festival](#) in Tuzla. The festival programme included a variety of activities such as lectures on dealing with the past, peer violence, and activism, as well as exhibitions, music concerts, and dance workshops. One of the central events at the festival was the creation of a mural in the city park in Tuzla. The mural aimed to convey a message of peace between young people from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. Additionally, a workshop 'Dealing with the Past from Youth Perspective: Remembrance Culture for the Purpose of Peace Culture' was held. During this workshop, the Tuzla Gate massacre and the Djukić case were discussed, and the participants had the opportunity to speak with parents of the children murdered at the Gate.



Kaleidoscope Festival, 2023

Storytelling Workshops 'Share Your Story' 23/32

In August, ten young people from Serbia had the opportunity to participate in the storytelling workshops '[Share Your Story](#)' in Prizren, alongside their peers from Kosovo. During the workshop, participants learned about processes conducive to peace, the development of intercultural dialogue, and how to listen to the other side to overcome differences and normalise relations. On the final days of the workshop, participants wrote and shared their stories with each other. Additionally, they visited the International Documentary and Short Film Festival – Dokufest, and took a guided tour through Prizren, where they explored the city's religious and historical monuments.

Workshop 'Nationalistic Narratives and Buried History'

In late August, young people from Serbia participated in the workshop '[Nationalist Narratives and Buried History](#)', where they had the opportunity to learn more about the relations between Serbia and Kosovo before, during and after the war. The topics addressed at the workshop included everyday challenges and discrimination faced by Albanians born in Serbia, myths about Kosovo deeply rooted in society, and the contemporary picture of Serbia-Kosovo relations in the 21st century.

The participants visited the 13th May settlement in Batajnica, near the site in which the remains of 744 Kosovo Albanians were discovered in 2001. During the visit, they discussed the operation 'Depth 2', which aimed to conceal the bodies, and how government structures attempted to hide the atrocities committed by Serbian forces in Kosovo. They emphasised the lack of court proceedings in domestic courts against those responsible for these crimes. The activists highlighted the importance of memorialising places of suffering and promoting an inclusive remembrance culture.

At the workshop, participants also discussed what a final agreement between Kosovo and Serbia might look like, the steps needed to achieve it, and how young activists attending the workshop could contribute to this process.



Activists visited unmarked sites of human rights violations in Serbia

In addition to the mass grave in Batajnica, young activists visited [nine other locations of human rights violations](#) against non-Serb individuals in Serbia in 2023. They visited sites where mass graves were discovered, such as Perućac Lake, Petrovo Selo, Kiževak, and Rudnica, as well as camps for Croats in Begejci and Stajićevo, and camps for Bosniaks in Šljivovica and Mitrovo Polje. These visits left a profound impression on the activists. During these visits, they discussed atrocities committed during the wars in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo, highlighting the lack of memorialisation and the absence of memorials or plaques dedicated to the victims. The young participants also learned about the official remembrance policies, or rather the politics of oblivion, aimed at erasing these events and places and crimes from public memory over time.



Visit to unmarked sites of suffering, 2023

Programme of commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the crime in Kazani

On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the crime in Kazani, young activists from Serbia participated in a two-day educational programme titled [‘Kazani: From Public Secret to Memorialisation’](#), organised in Sarajevo by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and YIHR Serbia.

During the programme, participants visited the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where they explored the permanent exhibition on the Sarajevo siege, and the everyday life of its citizens during this period. They also attended the conference ‘Kazani: 30 Years Later’, organised by the Association for Social Research and Communication (UDIK), Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, and forumZFD. The conference examined the role of media, art, and local authorities in critically addressing the events in Sarajevo’s Kazani by BiH society. Additionally, participants visited Kazani with UDIK coordinator Edvin Ćudić to discuss the wartime events associated with this site, including crimes, trials, and the process of erecting the monument. They also visited other significant locations in Sarajevo related to remembrance culture and memorialisation, such as the War Childhood Museum and Sarajevo City Hall.

Exchange programme ‘From Conflict to Reconciliation – Stories of Young People from Serbia and Kosovo’

Twenty young people from Kosovo and Serbia participated in the exchange programme titled [‘From Conflict to Reconciliation – Stories of Young People from Serbia and Kosovo’](#). During the programme, participants explored the basic concepts of intercultural dialogue, the differences between freedom of speech and hate speech, and methods to combat hate speech. They also discussed prevailing narratives in Serbian and Kosovo media and the importance of media literacy. Conversations included topics on anti-war activism in Serbia, peacebuilding processes, and the distinctions between positive and negative peace. Participants learned about wartime sexual violence and visited monuments dedicated to the 1990s wars, discussing Serbia’s official policies on memorisation of victims and legislative recommendations for marking sites of atrocities in Serbia. The programme concluded with a workshop on storytelling techniques.

Documentary 'They Are Coming'

'[They Are Coming](#)' is a documentary about the new generation of human rights and transitional justice activists within the Youth Initiative for Human Rights in Serbia, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Croatia. These activists come from societies impacted by wars that everyone wants to leave in the past, yet the consequences persistently resurface. The documentary premiered during the birthday week at the Cultural Centre Belgrade.

The young people featured in the documentary wage a fight that nobody else wants to undertake, a fight that requires dedication, commitment, bravery, empathy, and solidarity. Most of the time, the only support they have is each other. In their 20s, they face opposition from entire societies, institutions, and often even war criminals. They have chosen this battle and refused to heed those who tell them they are too young or that they should focus on their futures.

They see a connection between democratic progress and the need to address the past. Their desire to discuss the past stems from their fight for a peaceful future. They understand their responsibility and are committed to activism. When you look at them, you see hope.

The majority of these activists were born after the war and have many questions. Their families, the educational system, and society have given them simple, monoethnic narratives, but they were determined to seek more. They began asking questions to understand their own society and the political climate they experience daily. Their stories are untold stories of the new generation and stories about the future.

This documentary is not only about these individuals, but also about the Youth Initiative for Human Rights and its role in the region. It reflects on the long journey over the past twenty years and the path that still lies ahead. This path is fraught with obstacles and resistance because of our insistence on discussing the past, which is essential for leading the societies in which YIHR operates towards lasting peace and a future far better than the present we live in now. As former YIHR Programme Coordinator Ivana Jovanović put it: 'By the very act of addressing what happened in the past, YIHR builds a peaceful future'.

Peace Education for Teachers and Students

As part of the project 'A Peace Education Package for Teachers and Students', in which YIHR participates as a partner organisation, alongside the Croatian Education and Development Network for the Evolution of Communication (HERMES) and the 'War Childhood Museum' Foundation from the Netherlands, two workshops were organised for the pupils of [Dragiša Luković Španac](#) Primary School in Kragujevac and [Dušan Vuković](#) Diogen Primary School in Bečmen. The first workshop focused on the role of toys in the context of growing up during the 1990s wars, while the second was dedicated to keeping diaries during childhood in wartime. The participants had the opportunity to discuss the importance of toys or to analyse diary excerpts. These workshops aimed to help pupils understand the living conditions of children during the war, develop empathy, connect more deeply with children who had to grow up in significantly different circumstances, and develop critical thinking skills.

Conference 'What Is Peace for Us'

The [conference 'What Is Peace for Us?'](#) was held as part of YIHR's 20th anniversary celebration. The conference featured three panels addressing democracy, the European perspective, and peacebuilding in the region. Over 60 activists, human rights defenders, journalists, and young professionals from the region gathered to discuss new peacebuilding perspectives, the challenges in peace activism, and dealing with the past. In addition to the conference, we marked twenty years of work with an exhibition titled '[Imagine the Change](#)' at Endžio HAB. This exhibition paid homage to all those who dared to imagine and tirelessly fight for change, in an often hostile environment.



Conference 'What Is Peace for Us', 2023
(photo by Dejan Radić)



Workshop in the primary school
in Kragujevac, 2023

DEMOCRATISATION PROGRAMME

Monograph 'Moja inicijativa / Nisma ime / My Initiative'

The Youth Initiative for Human Rights emerged when the wars in our region had ended, but the wounds remained fresh. It was a time when new hope was emerging, alongside the awareness that changes must occur. From the very beginning, people who refused to let others speak for them instead spoke on behalf of those who were silent and unable to express their thoughts. These individuals shared their experiences and memories of their initial efforts in human rights activism, their establishment of or cooperation with our organisation, for our monograph **'Moja inicijativa / Nisma ime / My Initiative'**. This monograph contains over 65 stories that attempt to answer the question of what YIHR is – whether it is a small group of good people, a necessary school, an organisation taking unthinkable steps, a light in the darkness of communication in the region, or the heart of Serbia. All these stories are gathered in our monograph, which we dedicate to young activists, those who are yet to come, as well as those who left an indelible mark on YIHR. Ultimately, this is the answer to the question: YIHR is represented by its people.

With the **monograph**, we have demonstrated that over the past 20 years, there have always been young people who imagined a future different from the reality they currently live, and who were willing to build connections where none existed and start conversations where there was only silence.

BOLD Programme – Be Bold, It's Up To You!

In February and March, YIHR conducted workshops for 40 young leaders from Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro. The BOLD Programme **'Dare, It Concerns You'** trained young people in the skills necessary to turn their ideas into reality. During the workshop, they covered important topics such as understanding project language and project management, developing communication skills, and analysing media content, all aimed at empowering young people to actively participate in social action. Additionally, participants had the opportunity to learn about dealing with the past, specifically, the issue of collective guilt and responsibility in the context of mass human rights violations. Notably, one participant applied for and was admitted into the BOLD Civic Society Engagement Fellowship with an idea developed during the programme.

YIHR at protests

The fight for democracy and freedom held a special place in our work in 2023. In May, together with our activists, we joined the protests titled **'Serbia against Violence'**. Additionally, we were signatories of the open letter sent to competent authorities by associations of citizens, journalists, and media. This initiative was significant for us as it encouraged young people across Serbia to participate in protests, some for the first time, and publicly advocate for their beliefs. Towards the end of the year, we witnessed unprecedented electoral theft and irregularities, which sparked widespread outrage and a strong desire for justice. Amidst these events, we chose to continue our fight for a democratic society and support our courageous fellow citizens and activists. YIHR activists participated in these protests and blockades, where we also supported young people from the informal group 'Borba' and the citizens' group 'ProGlas'.



Protest 'Serbia against Violence', 2023

Programme 'Between Us'

The programme '[Between Us](#)' gathered 15 young people from in and around Novi Pazar for a joint journey to uncover the deep, socially rooted structures that uphold and maintain stereotypes and prejudices in society. These phenomena often contribute to the surge of violence and limit the human rights of minority and marginalised groups. The participants learned about the concepts of interculturality and inclusion, exploring topics such as the identity roles of individuals in society and the cultural patterns that perpetuate these roles. The programme also encouraged young people to develop initiatives that promote intercultural dialogue and work to reduce violent tendencies among uninformed community members. One of the ideas developed by the participants was a street action for World Mental Health Day, which was carried out with YIHR's mentor support. This action involved polling young people about their awareness of mental health and installing a 'box of wrong addresses', where passers-by could leave all the wrong addresses they had encountered in their search for help.

'Hack the Hate' Campaign

In October, YIHR organised a meeting for nine young individuals from Serbia and Kosovo, who, with mentor support, collaboratively created a [campaign](#) against insulting and discriminatory speech in public sphere. During the meeting, they mapped narratives on social networks and traditional media, and discussed ways to address these narratives through the campaign. Additionally, during the two-day gathering, they began producing video content for social networks.

Youth and Perspectives on the Past: Conversation with Marcello

This event brought together young people to [discuss](#) their interest in the 1990s wars and the likely causes that motivate youth to start exploring past events. From that perspective, the conversation also addressed the impact of the trend of young people being disinterested in efforts to establish peace and lasting reconciliation among formerly conflicting parties. The event provided an opportunity to promote the latest issue of the magazine 'Perspectives Southeast Europe', which features authors discussing the process of dealing with the past in the region. The magazine explores how this process can contribute to strengthening relations among the states that emerged following the disintegration of Yugoslavia and support their accession to the European Union.

'Kosovo Knot' Academy

27/32

The '[Kosovo Knot](#)' Academy gathered 26 young people from across Serbia for a five-day intensive course on the history of the Kosovo conflict, the political circumstances shaping narratives about Kosovo, and the legal aspects of the Kosovo issue. Through five comprehensive modules, the Academy provided participants with a broader understanding of the Kosovo issue, its history, and Serbian society's attitudes towards Kosovo. Topics covered at the Academy included the historical context, Serbia's views of Kosovo from 1989 to 1999, myths, current developments in Kosovo, as well as legal aspects and the role of art in dealing with the past. This Academy was significant not only for offering young people insights into key historical facts about Kosovo in the 1990s, but also because five participants were selected to work on Kosovo Chronology 2.0, a sequel to the first volume under the same title.

Action in Hrtkovci: 'Danger! War Criminal's House'

We continued our fight against the glorification of war criminals through field actions. In November, YIHR activists placed signs with inscriptions such as '[Danger! War Criminal's House](#)' in Hrtkovci, near the house of Vojislav Šešelj. This action aimed to remind the public of the crimes against humanity for which the leader of the Serbian Radical Party and parliamentary candidate was convicted.

Memory: Street action in seven towns

In April, through an action [marking](#) the distance between seven towns in Serbia and Batajnica, YIHR activists reminded the public of the crimes against civilians committed during Operation 'River' on 27 and 28 April 1999. The action took place in Niš, Vranje, Čačak, Kragujevac, Novi Pazar, Novi Sad and Belgrade. Following the action, YIHR, along with Civil Action from Pančevo and the Human Rights Committee from Niš, issued a joint statement, highlighting the responsibility of Momir Stojanović for the war crimes committed during Operation 'River'.



'Kosovo Knot' Academy, 2023



Hrtkovci, 2023

HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRAMME

A complaint on the reporting of *Srpski telegraf* for discrimination and incitement of prejudices towards Albanian population

In response to unethical media reporting by *Srpski telegraf* in May, which claimed that Albanians were 'poisoning our kids with juice imported from Kosovo which causes cancer', we lodged a complaint with the Commissioner for Protection of Equality for discrimination and incitement of prejudice towards Albanians. The Commissioner responded by issuing an [opinion](#) confirming that the article in question was discriminatory, and recommended that *Srpski telegraf* refrain from publishing discriminatory content that violates the dignity of individuals or groups based on their national identity.

Belgrade Pride

For the tenth consecutive year, YIHR was part of the organisational team for [Belgrade Pride Week](#), the largest event advocating for the rights of LGBTQI+ persons in Serbia.

YIHR proudly and courageously fights for the rights of the LGBTQI+ community by participating in the organisation of the walk and other activities within Pride Week. Its most important role involves training volunteers. Every year, YIHR organises [Pride Academy](#), a two-day course for Pride volunteers. This course aims to teach volunteers all the necessary skills for participating in different Pride week activities, as well as to provide them with basic information and concepts from the history of LGBTQI+ community and challenges that many community members face on a daily basis.

The struggle for a fair and just society is ongoing, and in the context of the LGBTQI+ community, it has persisted for over 30 years despite numerous obstacles and opposing media and political campaigns. Combating discrimination towards LGBTQI+ individuals is a cornerstone of social progress and cannot be left to chance or neglected. This is why YIHR remains committed to this cause year after year.



Belgrade Pride, 2023

ENDŽIO HAB – A PLACE OF COLLABORATION AND CREATION

29/32

Throughout 2023, Endžio HAB continued to be a vibrant space of freedom where important, but often marginalised issues are brought to the forefront. It is a place where art is celebrated, and transformative ideas are born. This space nurtures narratives that contribute to the growth of both the community and individuals, with the indispensable support of YIHR.

In addition to events organised by YIHR, the doors of Endžio HAB are open to all organisations, informal groups, and individuals who share YIHR's values.

Located in the heart of the city, [Endžio HAB](#) benefits from high visibility and strong turnout at its events. With over 70 different events and more than 2,500 visitors in 2023, Endžio HAB is, above all, a safe space for those who think differently and seek to bring attention to neglected stories and truths.

Through the realisation of programmes, exhibitions, conferences, debates, and workshops, Endžio HAB was a starting point throughout the year for raising issues and addressing topics that struggle to find space in public discourse and are preferably shrouded in silence.

Our activist Bojana Radojević often nurtures her passion for activism and art through events held at Endžio HAB. She has been involved in organising and realising several exhibitions and workshops in Endžio HAB and she shared her experience and impressions:

For me, Endžio HAB is not just a space; it is one of the rare, if not the only, places open to cultural dialogue and reconciliation. The space bridges gaps and diminishes hatred through its exhibitions and other events, especially among the peoples of the former Yugoslavia.

I believe such space is crucial, not only because of its contribution to reconciliation, but also because it offers safety and comfort to those deprived of these due to various forms of oppression in our society and system. Endžio HAB embodies peace, love, solidarity, understanding, and belonging.

Regarding the exhibition 'Imagine the Change', my impressions were excellent. HAB is an ideal space for exhibitions, and the content was displayed in the best possible way. It was undoubtedly challenging to encompass 20 years of YIHR's work and actions, but the final result exceeded all expectations.

Bojana Radojević, YIHR activist



The exhibition 'Imagine the Change' opened on 15 November 2023. Guiding visitors through YIHR's work from its inception to the present, it tells the story of young people who, for 20 years, have persevered in discussing essential topics for the development of democracy and peacebuilding. Presented in an engaging and emotional way, the exhibition features photos, objects, and messages that have marked YIHR's two-decade journey. Visitors had the opportunity to witness the struggle of different generations of young people who remained steadfast in upholding the values we still proudly stand behind.

On 13 March, an anti-war exhibition was opened in Endžio HAB, organised by Women in Black along with activists from Russia. The exhibition, titled '**Repressions, Tortures, War, Russia 2022**', displays the works by anti-war resistance activists and those who were mobilised but refused to take part in Russia's war against Ukraine. These works, which cannot be displayed in Russia due to strict censorship, new laws, and repression, were showcased here. During the eight-day exhibition, various events were organised, including a discussion on repression in Russia, the history of the Yugoslav wars, the consequences of Slobodan Milošević's regime, resistance, and the Women's Court. The exhibition concluded with a screening of a documentary produced by OVD-info.



Exhibition 'Imagine the Change', YIHR#20, 2023
(photo by Dejan Radić)

Endžio HAB also hosted a photo exhibition by Imre Szabo, a renowned photographer and author of one of the most significant photo archives of Kosovo from the last two decades of the 20th century. The exhibition, titled **'A House for Sale'**, displayed photos that offer direct testimony of some of the most important events in Kosovo during the 1980s and 1990s.

The documentary **'20 Days in Mariupol'**, which won the Oscar for Best Documentary Feature Film, was screened at the end of the year. Directed by Ukrainian director, journalist, and Pulitzer winner Mstyslav Chernov, this film had its first screening in Belgrade after premiering at the Beldocs festival.

The exhibition titled **'Shine the Life'**, organised by Talas, was displayed at Endžio HAB and attracted many visitors. The exhibition depicted the LGBTQ+ community ready for a life without fear, where every space is safe. Through five thematic motifs, united by love, friendship, mutual support, and community care, the exhibition addressed some of the questions surrounding the surge of violence in our society.

Two panels of the Public History Festival took place at Endžio HAB: the promotion of the magazine from the perspective of Southeast Europe 'Past is Now. The Policy of Denial and Dealing with the Past in the Western Balkans', and the 'Public Conversation: History and Lessons (Un)learned'.



**Exhibition 'A House for Sale',
YIHR#20, 2023**





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

Belgrade, June 2024