

# IAYSP Europe and Middle East: Inside the 2025 Democracy and Digital Advocacy

Michael Balcomb

April 8, 2025



Funded by  
the European Union



Erasmus+ Exchange in Vienna, Austria (23–31 March 2025)

## Youth Democracy & Digital Advocacy Program

| Erasmus+ Mobility | 2025 Edition

As civic landscapes across Europe grow more complex and digital spheres expand rapidly, youth engagement in democracy is not only needed—it is urgent. The YDDAP program, implemented in the heart of Austria, brought together 30 passionate young changemakers from five countries—Austria, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Moldova, and Romania—to build not only their knowledge but their influence.

This newsletter captures the energy, insights, and outcomes of our Erasmus+ exchange. We invite you to explore the highlights, reflections, and aspirations of a program designed to equip youth with tools for active citizenship in the digital era.



## What the Journey Looked Like

The program was more than a series of workshops; it was a story that unfolded day by day.

Each day carried a distinct theme, building toward a shared purpose. The second and third days dove deep into **democracy**—not as an abstract concept, but as a living, breathing process. Through **simulations and role plays**, participants stepped into the shoes of local leaders, activists, and citizens, navigating real-world dilemmas and discovering how their voices could truly shape society.

Midweek, the tone shifted with **Cultural Storytelling**, a deeply human day. Participants opened their hearts in storytelling circles, sharing personal experiences of exclusion and identity. What emerged was a celebration of **empathy, inclusion**, and the realization that every story matters in the democratic dialogue.

As the week progressed, the focus turned to **Digital Advocacy**. Participants were no longer just learners—they became campaigners. Together in teams, they developed digital campaigns around real issues, creating action plans that could be implemented beyond the program.

Take a look at YDDAP – [click here!](#)



## 📍 United Nations Vienna

Standing where multilateral diplomacy happens, youth explored the UN's role in global peacekeeping and SDG implementation. A special dialogue with the UN Information Service emphasized how youth can shape global narratives.

*"This visit made me realize that diplomacy isn't abstract—it starts with youth knowing their rights."*



### 📍 **Austrian Parliament**

A guided tour and exclusive Q&A with parliamentary staffers offered insight into how national legislation interacts with EU policy. Young participants gained firsthand understanding of how laws are made—and how they can be influenced.

[See more from our Austrian Parliament visit – click here!](#)



## 📍 Red Cross Austria

As part of the Youth Democracy and Digital Advocacy Program (YDDAP), participants and organizing staff were honored to be welcomed by distinguished representatives of the Austrian Red Cross: **Peter Kaiser**, Deputy Secretary General, **Sonja Kuba**, Head of the Austrian Youth Red Cross, and **Marlies (Haider) Ladstaetter**, Assistant to the Deputy Secretary General and Federal Commander in Charge.

During our visit, they offered valuable insights into the Red Cross's mission both globally and locally—from disaster relief and healthcare services to youth education and community support. Their inclusive approach reaches all age groups and integrates crucial services such as blood donation banks and second-hand shops into Austria's social safety net.

What stood out most was their deep commitment to **democracy, social inclusion, and active citizenship**.

Through partnerships with schools, public institutions, and local NGOs, the Austrian Red Cross fosters a culture of service, responsibility, and solidarity.

For the YDDAP youth participants, this experience was not only inspiring—it was a vivid demonstration of how structured civic engagement can drive real change. Seeing how values like compassion and public service are institutionalized gave them a clearer picture of how they, too, can contribute meaningfully to society.

See more from our Austrian Red Cross visit – [click here!](#)



### **Democracy Beyond Borders**

Flags were raised, dances shared, and stories told. Traditional foods, folk costumes, and national songs wove an evening of unity through difference. More than a social event, it was a living laboratory of intercultural dialogue and soft diplomacy.



### **Satisfaction & Value**

94% found the program *very relevant* to their goals.

89% reported improvement in digital advocacy skills.

100% would recommend the experience to peers.

### **Participant Reflections**

*“For the first time, I understood democracy not as a system, but as a personal responsibility.”*

*“This program gave me tools—and the courage—to raise my voice online and offline.”*



# Youth Democracy and Digital Advocacy Program

”

**Democracy thrives not in institutions alone—but in the voices of those who dare to shape them.**

## **Next Steps | Advocacy in Motion**

From **April to June 2025**, each country's delegation will lead localized digital advocacy campaigns mentored by experts. These campaigns will spotlight local democratic challenges and youth-driven solutions, culminating in an online regional showcase.

*“Democracy thrives not in institutions alone—but in the voices of those who dare to shape them.”*



### Appointment Announcement

We are pleased to announce that **PhD (C) Ejona Icka** has been appointed as the UN Coordinator for IAYSP Europe and the Middle East.

In this new role, Prof. Icka will work closely with the IAYSP EUME office team to strengthen strategic partnerships with UN entities and further advance our mission in peacebuilding and youth empowerment throughout the region. We warmly congratulate Prof. Icka on this important appointment and look forward to her continued leadership and impact.

For additional insights, check out our website - [Home](#) - [YSPeace](#)





yspbalkan and 4 others

Original audio



yspbalkan Edited • 2d

Last week in Austria, the YDDAP Erasmus+ program immersed participants in a vibrant blend of cultural exchange, fostering meaningful discussions on democratic values, youth empowerment, and digital advocacy, while exploring the rich history and innovative future of European youth engagement.

The YDDAP project, funded by the European Union through Erasmus+ (KA152), aims to promote youth participation and democratic learning. It is implemented by IAYSP EUME in partnership with CARP Romania, Family Federation Moldova, University of Tetovo, and UPF Kosovo.



46 likes

5 days ago



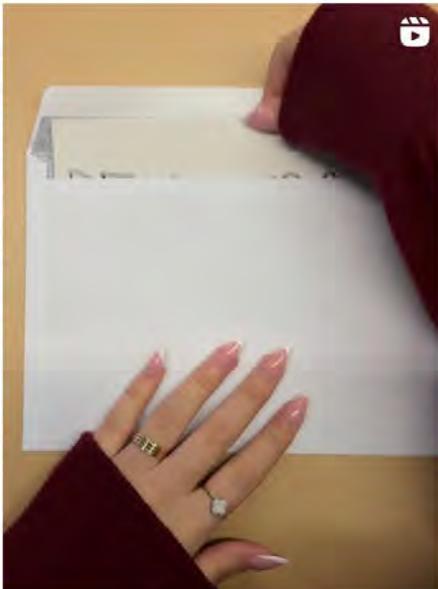
Add a comment...



More posts from yspbalkan



Learning from the Best  
Inspiring Visit to the Austrian Red Cross



gjetimi inspirues i studentes së Psikologjisë në UB  
ipe Shala – Fituese e një çmimi nga Federata e Pa  
aktiviste në mbështetje të nxënësve

ibt-uninet



SUCCESS STORY

Leading  
ajontheUK





yspbalkan and 4 others

Original audio



yspbalkan Edited • 2d

YDDAP Participants at the Austrian Parliament AT

As part of the Youth Democracy & Digital Advocacy Program (YDDAP), participants had the opportunity to visit the Austrian Parliament and gain firsthand insight into the country's governance and legislative process.

Through this visit, they explored democracy in action, learning how laws are made, the role of parliamentarians, and the importance of civic engagement and advocacy. This experience reinforced their commitment to being active citizens and driving positive change.



85 likes

March 26



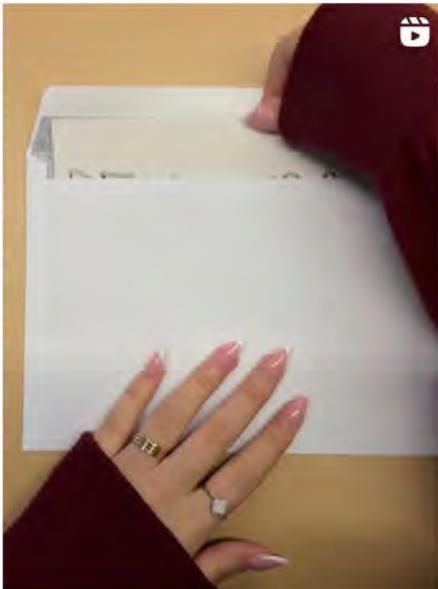
Add a comment...



More posts from yspbalkan



Learning from the Best  
Inspiring Visit to the Austrian Red Cross



gëtimi inspirues i studentes së Psikologjisë në UB  
ipe Shala – Fituese e një çmimi nga Federata e Pa  
aktiviste në mbështetje të nxënësve

ibt-uninet



SUCCESS STORY

Leading  
ajontheUK





yspbalkan and mikaela.llalla  
OctaSounds • Young, Happy, and Free

\_labinotcocaj\_ 1w  
5 stars

Reply

\_labinotcocaj\_ 1w  
3 stars

Reply

yspbalkan 1w  
5 stars

Reply



32 likes

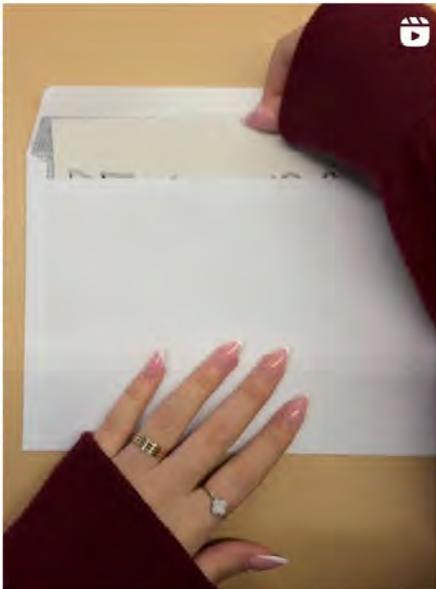
March 29

Add a comment...

More posts from yspbalkan



Learning from the Best  
Inspiring Visit to the Austrian Red Cross



gëtimi inspirues i studentes së Psikologjisë në UB  
ipe Shala – Fituese e një çmimi nga Federata e Pa  
aktiviste në mbështetje të nxënësve

ibf-uninet

SUCCESS STORY

Leading  
ajointheUK



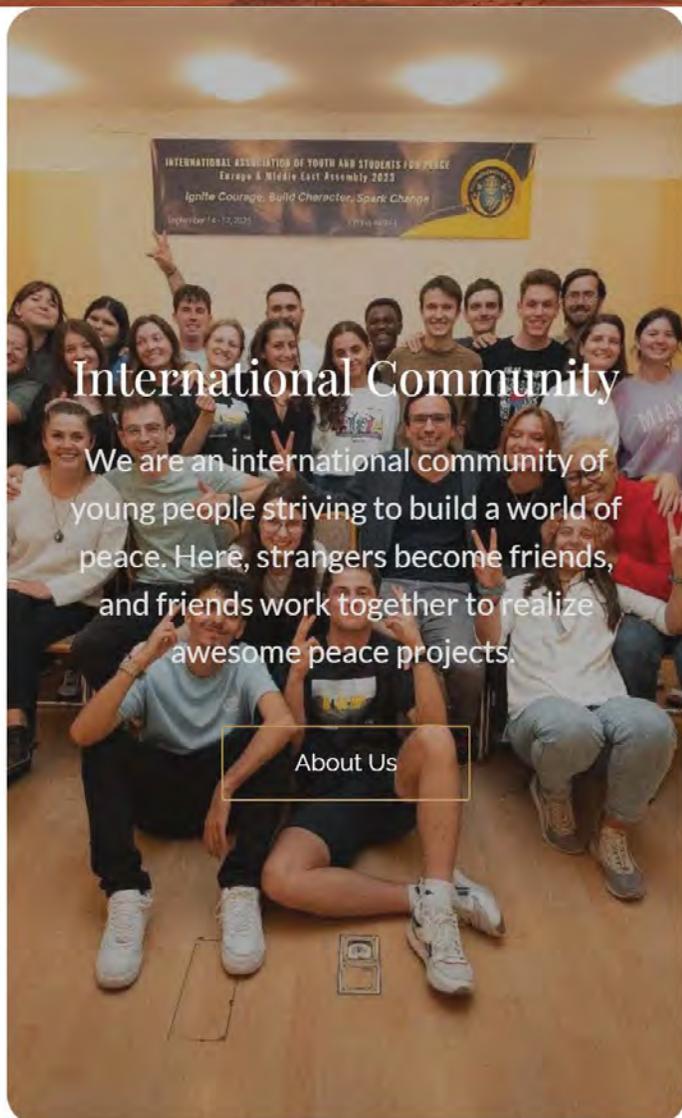


# What will you do for the planet?

AND EVERYONE ON IT?



^ | v CONTACT



## International Community

We are an international community of young people striving to build a world of peace. Here, strangers become friends, and friends work together to realize awesome peace projects.

About Us



## Empowering Youth and Students

YSP is a youth NGO with special consultative status with UN ECOSOC. We provide opportunities and education for young people to engage with policy-making bodies about issues that matter and make a difference in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

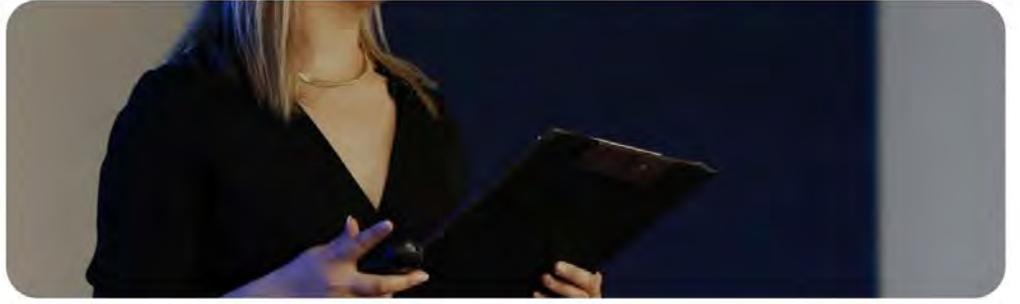
Youth Forums & Conferences





## What Can I Do?

Discover how you can immerse yourself in transformative activities, train to become an effective peacemaker, and stand out in a variety of projects.



## RISE: Our Stories and Voices Matter

We invite you to be part of a community where every voice matters. Create your story with us!



## What Participants' Say And Think

Step into the inspiring world of Youth and Students for Peace through the voices of our community. Dive into testimonials that reflect our commitment to nurturing young leaders and fostering a culture of peace and unity. Explore a few participants' stories and see how YSP is shaping a brighter future for generations to come.

I attended the IAYSP event "the Role of Youth in Achieving the SDGs" that took place at UN Vienna and it had a great impact on me. It was the first time I was in the UN building. It was really touching to hear a student's presentation about climate change and war. I was amazed by the story of a young girl from Syria and a 17 year old lady from Korea who is concerned about global warming. Since these topic concerns me I find it really important to communicate with like minded individuals, I feel that it is important for young generation to speak up about global crisis and peace topics

Irene

From Ukraine

Participated at the UN Conference in Vienna, 2024



Seidengasse 28,  
1070 Wien, Austria

Email: [office@yspeace.eu](mailto:office@yspeace.eu)

Contact us

#### LEARN MORE

About ▾

Activities ▾

Peace Designer Training

Locations

Privacy Policy

#### STAY CONNECTED

We'd love to stay in touch! Sign up below to receive updates on YSP's work.

First Name 

Last Name

Your Email Address



I agree to receive updates from YSP and to have my personal data processed for this purpose.

SIGN UP

