BALKAN INTERNATIONAL YOUTH SUMMIT FOR PEACE 2026

What We Carried Across the Bridge

Youth as Peace Practitioners, From Dialogue to Action

151
young people



4
days



120
people on the Peace Road

Organized by

YSP Balkan, IAYSP, Ministry of Sport and Youth of Kosova, Municipality of South Mitrovica, Universal Peace Federation, Major Group for Children and Youth SDG16 Global Youth Caucus



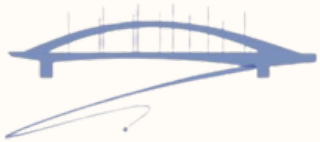
54
NGOs and institutions

51
nationalities



OUTCOME REPORT
MITROVICA, KOSOVA 1–4 OCTOBER 2026

Four days. One bridge. A shared purpose.



Young people from five continents spent four days in Mitrovica. They met a prime minister, UN officials and, above all, each other. They trained in three levels of peace and, on the last day, walked together across the bridge that for years divided the city.

In brief: Three Points to Take Away

1. **Peace is a skill, and it can be taught.** Participants practiced staying calm under pressure, listening to understand and negotiating from interests, not positions.
2. **Young people want influence, not just a seat.** "Participation is a right. It's not a favour," the UN human rights office told the room.
3. **Trust is the missing piece,** between communities and between young people and their institutions.

One City, Three Circles of Encounter

Local

Young people from Mitrovica's communities create encounters where relationships matter most

Regional

Peers from across the Western Balkans compare lived problems and imagine solutions together.

Global

Young leaders connect local questions to international experience and the YPS agenda.

The Policy Thread, Carried into Practice

In 2015, UN Security Council Resolution 2250 recognized young people as partners in peace. More than ten years on, the UN is reviewing how far that promise has come.

New York | April

Youth set the priorities
Global consultation for the UN study on youth and peace

Mitrovica | October

IAYSP put them into practice
Four days of training in three levels of peace, ending on the Peace Road

After the Summit

Back to the UN
Bringing their voices to the UN as the study continues, ahead of the 3rd summit in 2027.

Scan to read the Global Youth Position Paper

A bridge that worked like a wall



Mitrovica sits on the Ibër river in northern Kosova. The south is mostly Albanian and the north mostly Serb. For years, the main bridge between them was more than just a crossing, but a symbol of division. Opening the summit this year, Prime Minister Albin Kurti said the city's bridges long had "the form of bridges but the functionality of walls".

The divide runs deeper than the river: two languages, two school systems and stories in which "the heroes of one part of the population are the enemies of the other," as Iana Minochkina of the UN Mission in Kosovo put it. "This bridge is open now," said Hon. Jovan Jovanović, former Member of Parliament of Serbia, "but these divisions are... still palpable."

7 in 10

young Kosova Albanians had never spoken with a Kosovo Serb (and 4 in 10 young Kosovo Serbs with a Kosovo Albanian).

IOM survey, 2019

1 in 4

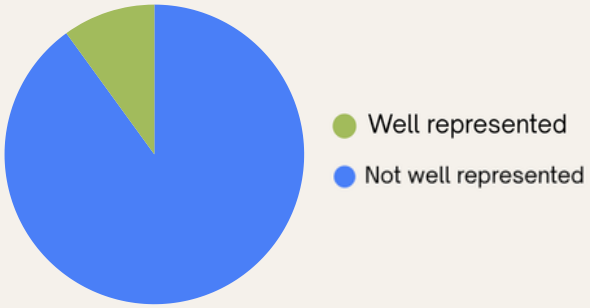
1 in 4 young adults born in the 1990s do not trust their government at all

World Values Survey data, UN DESA, 2025

Few feel heard

10 % of young people in Kosovo feel their interests are well represented in national politics

FES Youth Study Kosovo, 2018



Our Takeaway

The divide is local, the frustration is global, from Gen Z protests in Nepal to Serbia. Mitrovica's bridge is open but trust lags behind, a gap young people can help close, with everyone playing their part.

Not another conference

Most youth events teach young people how institutions work. But building peace requires more than understanding systems. It also means learning how to manage frustration, navigate disagreements, and genuinely listen to people whose experiences, beliefs, and perspectives may be very different from your own. At this summit, young people practiced these skills and then took what they learned beyond the conference room and into the streets of Mitrovica.

Most Youth Events	This Summit
Young people listen to experts →	**They practiced** listening drills, negotiation game, and a peace conference simulation
Problems get named →	**Every table names who must act** and what young people decide they will do themselves
It ends when the event ends →	**One step on a pathway** from local training and youth projects to summits and UN forums.
It stays in the conference room →	**It ended in public,** on the Peace Road through Mitrovica

Day 1
Encounter

Culture, connection and young people's own projects

Day 2
Outside - In

How the system works, from those inside it

Day 3
Inside - Out

The three levels of peace, one at a time

Day 4
On the Bridge

The work made public on the Peace Road

From a first meeting to a method

2025 - A FIRST MEETING

Aim: bring North and South Mitrovica together

Young people: met across the divide and and friends

Policy: learned the regional context

Bridge: about 60 crossed together

2026 - A METHOD

Aim: turn that encounter into a method others can repeat

Young people: practiced listening, negotiating and handling crises

Policy: Built on the UN global youth consultation

The bridge: more than 120 walked the Peace Road through North and South

> We can start the peace. No need to wait for the bigger people to do so.
>
> A participant, 2026

The first bridge we cross is inside us

Each layer rests on the one before. Skills without inner grounding give way under pressure. Agreements without trust do not last. So the training starts inside and works outwards.

Level 1 : Peace within

The idea. Stay steady under pressure. Notice what you feel before you act on it.

We practiced. Noticing anger and fear as they rise, and pausing before we react to them.

"I can feel offended but still respond with a calm mindset. Being calm doesn't mean accepting disrespect." Participant, Inner Transformation Lab

Level 2 : Peace with others

The idea. Listen for what the other person needs, not just what they demand.

We practiced. Listening to understand, not to win, and finding what each side really needs.

"When I'm fully listened to, I find things inside me I'm not even aware of."

Participant, Peacebuilding Skills Workshop

Level 3 : Peace with the world

The idea. Lasting peace needs young people, older generations, and institutions working together.

We practiced. Turning problems into proposals for decision-makers, and negotiating a peace deal every side can live with.

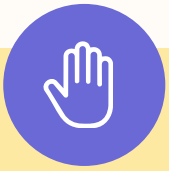
"No process related to youth peacebuilding should happen without giving the ownership to young people." Speaker from Youth-led Peacebuilding Panel

Why it matters for policy

Youth, peace, and security plans ask young people to take part in decisions. They rarely prepare them for the pressure that comes with it. "Power without formation repeats old patterns, and formation without power just stays as a workshop," IAYSP's Director of UN Relations told the Day 2 panel. Plans should invest in both: training young people inside and out, and giving them real access to the people who decide.

Three tools you can use from tomorrow

Day 3 moved from listening to doing, in an Inner Transformation Lab led by Dr. Andrei Eșanu, a psychiatrist from Moldova, and a Peacebuilding Skills Workshop led by Marlise Ladstaetter and Olga Majtova of IAYSP.



Tool 1

PAUSE before you react

Pause. Take a breath. Observe what you feel. Proceed more consciously.

Why it works: Frustration pushes us to react in seconds. A short pause gives you time to choose a response instead.



Tool 2

Listen to understand

Before you reply, tell the other person what you heard, and why you think it matters to them. Then ask: "Did I get that right?"

Why it works: People soften once they feel understood, and you find out what they actually meant.



Tool 3

Ask "why?"

When two sides want opposite things, ask each one why. Then look for a solution that meets both needs.

Why it works: Demands clash, but the needs behind them can open the door to creative solutions that satisfy both sides

Peace within is not always calm

Every conflict needs someone who keeps their head while others lose theirs: someone who listens, steps back, and helps both sides hear each other.

Peace within is not....	Peace within is...
Always being calm and smiling	Feeling everything without being ruled by it
Never feeling angry	Turning anger into action, not violence
A constant meditative state	Returning to balance, again and again

FROM THE INNER TRANSFORMATION LAB



What steals my inner peace? What restores it?
What is one thing I will do to build peace within when I go home?

Five messages from four days

A prime minister, UN officials, former politicians, activists and young people all had their say. Our reading of the five messages that ran through the four days:

1 From a seat to real influence

Young people have more seats and consultations than ever, but little say over what happens next.

"From consultation to influence, from participation in events to participation in decisions, and from commitments to measurable change." Sudha Balakrishnan, UN Youth Office, Day 2

2 Trust takes years, not one-off projects

Every panel named low trust as a reason young people switch off or leave. Short projects raise their hopes, then drop them when the money stops.

"What is missing usually is the continuity of efforts." Iana Minochkina, UNMIK Youth Peacebuilding and YPS panel

3 Integrity is taught, then shown

Participants want integrity taught from childhood and practiced by institutions. When jobs depend on who you know rather than what you can do, young people lose hope and leave.

"What we are missing today... is a culture of hope. And your job and our job is to relaunch this." Enver Hoxhaj, former Foreign Minister of Kosova, Intergenerational Dialogue

4 Protect the human in a digital age

The Prime Minister warned that a machine never has to apologize, yet apologies teach us to trust. Participants asked for human-made work to be celebrated, not only AI labelled.

"Maybe it's not about trusting AI more but learning to trust people more again." World Café, digital table

5 Healing and safety are part of peace

Participants asked for free mental health support, and for public spaces where survivors are believed instead of carrying the burden of proof.

"Asking for help is not giving up. It's actually refusing to give up." Author Charlie Mackesy as quoted by The Mind We Don't Talk About team, S!NERGY first prize

Nine youth-led projects

S!NERGY is IAYSP's youth project competition. Young people turn local problems into projects, and the best are supported through to delivery. All nine projects at the international round in Mitrovica had already won national or regional rounds.

Winners	Learning for Everyone	Character, Peace, and Wellbeing
1st **The Mind We Don't Talk About** — Albania — Parent-child psychology sessions to tackle mental health stigma, on €800	**Mother Tongue** — North Macedonia — Albanian-language toolkits and Braille for children with disabilities	**Youth with Vision** — Brazil — Character education in schools, with a game-based platform and teacher training
2nd **Disconnect to Reconnect** — UBT International Smart Schools, Kosova — A seven-day phone-free challenge for 50 students aged 12 to 15	**ChemAccess** — Phillippines, by video — Braille chemistry tiles with audio QR codes for visually impaired learners	**PeaceMaker** — Romania — Peace workshops for over 200 children and teachers in rural schools
3rd **ECAS** — Azerbaijan and USA — Art and storytelling to help child abuse survivors in Baku move "from survivor to youth leader".	**KELASI** — DR Congo, by video — Software that frees teachers from paperwork, plus robotics and AI workshops	**Consumed by Stress** — Student-led — A free community run for over 150 students as a better answer to stress shopping

World Cafe: eight tables, eight proposals

Participation	**Education and work**	**Migration**	**Digital life**
Influence, not turnout	Hire on ability, not connections	Teach a culture of hope at home	Value human-made work; keep AI a tool
Faith and culture	**Mental health**	**Gender and safety**	**Open table**
Religion as a means for peace	Free support and emotional skills	No burden of proof on survivors	Money skills and open accounts



On the last day, we crossed

Participants, guests, the Mayor of South Mitrovica and local cyclists walked the Peace Road across the Ibër bridge. Then, by the river, the walk turned into basketball and football.

Peace Road is a yearly relay of walks and bike rides for peace, held by the Universal Peace Federation in more than 120 countries.







What happens after the bridge

Everyone has a role. Here is what speakers and participants asked of each group.

Governments

- Make youth councils work
- Hire on merit, in the open
- Report back on youth ideas

The UN & partners

- Fund youth-led work long-term
- Expand youth advisory boards
- Protect young activists

Schools & universities

- Teach integrity, and model it
- Link learning to jobs
- AI and media literacy for all

Young people

- Make every seat count
- Follow one local issue through
- Look after each other

Private sector and media

- Hire on ability, not connections
- Offer internships and flexible work
- Tell hopeful stories; label AI

Civil society

- Choose people openly
- Follow up on action plans
- Defend civic space

Who is behind it

YSP Balkan

Regional Chapter of the International Association of Youth and Students for Peace (IAYSP)

YSP Balkan is a youth-led NGO Kosovo-based chapter of IAYSP Europe and the Middle East, the network's regional office in Vienna. For over four years, its Peace Designer Training has brought together young people aged 16 to 35 from Kosova, North Macedonia, Albania and Serbia. Working in mixed teams, they turn real community problems into project proposals. The strongest are judged at the S!NERGY Assembly and supported through to implementation, with twelve community peace projects delivered so far. The Balkan International Youth Summit for Peace, first held in Mitrovica in 2025, is its flagship event.

IAYSP is the international youth-led network with chapters in over 40 countries and the main office in New York, USA. Since 2022, it has held Special Consultative Status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), giving members a path from local projects to the UN, for example through events it hosts at UN forums. IAYSP was founded in 2017 by Dr. Hak Ja Han. The Peace Designer and S!NERGY model runs across the network, with winners moving to international competitions. What sets IAYSP apart is its values-first inclusive interfaith approach, built on three levels of peace: within oneself, with others and with the world.

YSP Balkan Achievements during the past two years

567	Students have completed the Peace Designer Training in Kosova, North Macedonia, Albania, and Serbia
15	Partners and institutions collaborated in these initiatives
12	Local peace projects successfully implemented
58	Peace Designer Training sessions
28	Consulting sessions provided, with ongoing mentoring throughout the training period
23	Young leaders participated in the annual S!NERGY, hosted at a UN Vienna Office

What participants took home

In their own words, from the feedback forms.

"...the importance of really listening to the other person, especially when trying to understand a conflict."

"...it starts with how we listen, communicate, and act in our own communities."

"...this helped me understand peace as a process that starts within ourselves, continues through the way we communicate and build relationships with others, and finally extends to our communities and the wider world."

See you on the bridge in 2027

A third summit in Mitrovica in 2027, more Peace Designer training sessions and the findings taken to the UN.

Join us: Scan the code or visit www.ysp-balkan.org

YSP Balkan · office@ysp-balkan.org · Sources: session recordings and notes, feedback forms, the program and registration data. Photos: BIYSP 2026.

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Peace Starts Within