

FOUNDATION SOFIA PLATFORM



2025 ANNUAL REPORT

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OUR MISSION

The Sofia Platform Foundation is a non-government organization registered in public interest.

Over the past 10 years, the foundation has worked with hundreds of experts, teachers, students, and citizens in more than 100 locations in Bulgaria, becoming one of the leading organizations supporting formal and informal history and civic education in Bulgaria.



CIVIC EDUCATION

We create opportunities for everyone to develop critical thinking and active citizenship through consistent, innovative, and widely accessible education - both at and outside of school.



HISTORY OF THE RECENT PAST

We strive to ensure that the reflection on the recent past has a permanent place in education and public debate, so that we can better understand the challenges facing democracy today.

OUR MISSION



In 2025, the Sofia Platform Foundation continued its focused efforts to strengthen democratic culture in Bulgaria and to preserve the memory of the country's recent past. Throughout the year, we expanded our work on developing digital educational resources, organized dozens of training events and other professional development formats for teachers, developed a new five-year strategic plan and established a new Board of the organization, while also building new strategic partnerships with the business sector.

2025 was also a successful year for the activities of THE CIVICS Innovation Hub, the pan-European civil society organization for citizenship education, of which the Sofia Platform Foundation is a co-founder. THE CIVICS continued to expand its work across its hubs in Bonn, Zagreb, and Sofia, with the Sofia hub remaining an integral part of the Foundation's activities.

Below is a brief overview of the projects implemented by the Sofia Platform Foundation in 2025 in support of its strategic objectives, as well as the initiatives carried out within the framework of THE CIVICS Innovation Hub.

Thank you for the support!

OUR PROJECTS

HISTORIES FROM BELENE

The Histories from Belene project is a comprehensive initiative aimed at deepening public understanding of Bulgaria's communist period and fostering reflection on its societal and civic consequences. At the heart of the project is the Belene labor camp, presented as an emblematic symbol of the repression and systematic violation of civil rights and freedoms during the totalitarian regime between 1944 and 1989.

The first phase of the project was successfully completed in 2024. Following its successful implementation, the initiative received renewed funding and continues under a new project for the 2025–2027 period.

Budget: 2 227 340 BGN (funding for the entire project period); of which **742 446 BGN** was received in 2025

Activities:

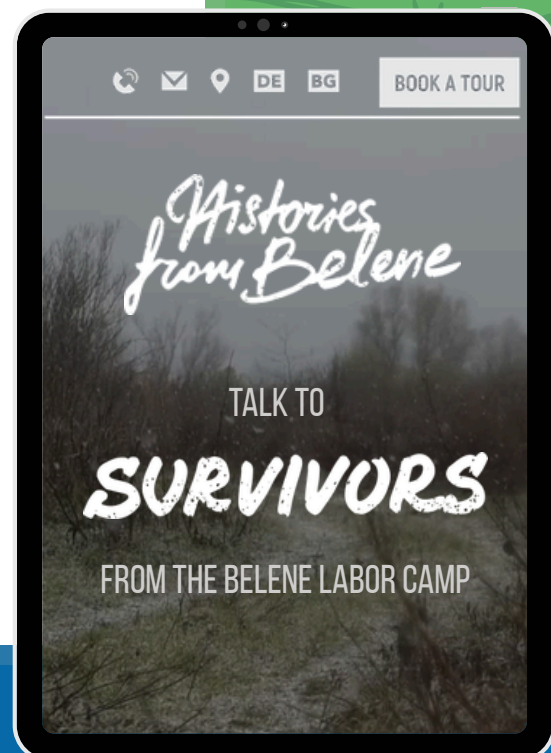
- interviews, post-production, and programming of **virtual conversations with survivors** of the forced labor camps in Belene, Lovech, and Bosnia, as well as with formal political prisoners from the prisons in Stara Zagora and Kyustendil;
- further developing the **online platform** for virtual conversations with survivors;
- creating a **virtual tour** of the Belene camp;
- developing a booking system for **guided tours of Belene** and the former camp led by local guides;
- preparing, obtaining certification from the Ministry of Education and Science, and delivering **professional development training for history and civic education teachers**, as well as **university students**;

Project duration:
2025-2027

Funding organization:



[TO THE PROJECT](#)



OUR PROJECTS

HISTORIES FROM BELENE

- organizing **school visits to the Belene camp** for classes of students accompanied by teachers who have successfully completed the training program;
- organizing a **summer school for students**;
- organizing a **study visit for diplomats**;
- securing **protected heritage status** for the remains of the Belene camp and developing an **on-site exhibition**.

In 2025, the Sofia Platform Foundation continued delivering its Ministry of Education and Science-certified professional development program, Methods for Teaching Polarizing Topics: The History of Bulgarian Communism, for history and civic education teachers. The program focuses on interactive teaching methods for addressing polarization in the classroom. During the year, five training sessions were delivered, bringing together 98 teachers from across Bulgaria. Offered free of charge to participants, the training course was held outside Belene for the first time: three sessions took place in the regional cities of Veliko Tarnovo, Pleven, and Ruse, while two were held in Belene. All participants visited the site of Bulgaria's largest communist-era labor camp as part of the training.

In 2025, we also developed and secured certification from the Ministry of Education and Science for a new professional development program for civic education teachers, Current Challenges in Civic Education: Depolarization and Dialogue. Following its approval, we successfully delivered three training sessions under the program in Belene in November and December, with a total of fifty-nine participants.

Project duration:
2025-2027

Funding organization:



[TO THE PROJECT](#)

[VISIT: BELENE.CAMP](#)

OUR PROJECTS

HISTORIES FROM BELENE

During the year, we continued our initiative enabling teachers who have successfully completed the training program to take their students to the Belene camp on educational visits. These educational visits include guided tours of the remaining camp buildings and a range of experiential learning activities designed to encourage critical engagement with the site's history. In 2025, nineteen such school visits were organized, involving approximately 500 participants.

Throughout 2025 we continued to expand the dedicated online platform, www.belene.camp. Three new virtual conversations with survivors of the communist regime's system of repression in Bulgaria were published. As a result, visitors to the platform can now engage in virtual conversations with 9 former camp inmates and political prisoners.

Following the premiere of the interactive Belene – A Bulgarian Resistance Story exhibition at the Victims of Communism Museum in Washington, D.C., in 2024, the exhibition continued its journey. In 2025 the exhibition's Bulgarian premiere took place at the New Bulgarian University during the 10.11 Festival.

In 2025, we worked on the [exhibition](#) installed in Site Two of the former Belene labor camp. Through personal stories and illustrative artefacts, the exhibition presents key aspects of the lives of former camp internees and political prisoners. During the year we updated and expanded the content of the exhibition's interactive display featuring the project's virtual conversations with survivors.

Testimonies from survivors featured on the digital platform www.belene.camp were also presented as part of the [Hunger 2.0](#) exhibition at the National Museum of Military History in Sofia, which opened on July 3, 2025, to mark the museum's 109th anniversary.

Project duration:
2025-2027

Funding organization:



[TO THE
PROJECT](#)



OUR PROJECTS

HISTORIES FROM BELENE

The exhibition explores the fundamental theme of hunger through five distinct dimensions: physical hunger, the instinct for survival, the need for security, the search for truth, and the longing for a future.

In 2025, we began work on the publication of two books related to the history of communism in Bulgaria. The first is Nedyalko Geshev's memoir, *Belene – The Island of the Forgotten*. This is a particularly important work because it offers a vivid account of the especially grim early years of the Belene labor camp and recounts the author's personal story of two escape attempts from the island, the second of which was successful. Although it was originally published outside Bulgaria, the memoir is among the earliest published testimonies about the camp. The second publication is Borislav Skochev's manuscript, a comprehensive study of the entire system of forced labor camps and political prisons during the communist period.

In 2025, we launched a major initiative to create a digital map of all labor camps that operated on the territory of Bulgaria, alongside the compilation of a list of all individuals who were interned in the Belene camp, on the basis of surviving archival records. During the year, we developed the project methodology and initiated the process of collecting data.

The now-traditional study visit to Belene for members of the diplomatic community took place on September 25-26. In 2025, the program welcomed thirty-two participants and, for the first time, also included representatives of the business sector. Among the guest speakers were Prof. Lilia Topouzova (University of Toronto) and Zheko Stoyanov, a former political prisoner whose testimony is available on the belene.camp platform.

During the year, the Foundation also participated in various public events and professional forums.

Project duration:
2025-2027

Funding organization:



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PROJECT](#)



OUR PROJECTS

HISTORIES FROM BELENE

On March 27, for example, the team took part in the Civic Education Forum organized by the Regional Department of Education in Stara Zagora, which brought together teachers of civic education, history, geography, and philosophy from across the region. The Foundation presented its projects, including grajdansko.bg, belene.camp, its training programs for teachers and university students, and a range of additional educational resources and materials.

The Foundation also participated in the annual ***Good Practices in Focus*** conference for teachers, held at Inter Expo Center on April 26. The event traditionally brings together around 500 school principals and teachers from across Bulgaria to exchange effective educational practices. The Sofia Platform Foundation presented its ongoing projects at an exhibition stand.

On September 26-27, 2025, the Sofia Platform Foundation participated for the first time in the annual ***Democratic Mosaic*** festival, which brings together more than seventy civil society organizations from across the country to share stories of social change and community-building.

Visitors to ***Persina Fest*** in Belene (September 5-8, 2025) had the opportunity to learn more about Bulgaria's largest communist labor camp, located on the islands near the Danube town. The Sofia Platform Foundation participated with an information stand presenting its [Grajdansko.bg](https://grajdansko.bg) and [Histories from Belene](https://belene.camp) projects to a wide audience. During the festival, we also organized guided group visits to the former camp.

2025 was a record year for the Sofia Platform Foundation's media presence. Throughout the year, the Foundation featured in more than sixty television and radio programs, newspaper articles, online news publications, and digital media platforms.

Project duration:
2025-2027

Funding organization:



[TO THE
PROJECT](#)



OUR PROJECTS

HISTORIES FROM BELENE

The Foundation continued its active efforts to secure recognition of the former Belene camp as a cultural heritage site. The administrative procedure continued to progress throughout 2025, bringing the site closer to official designation as a heritage site. We hope that this status, together with the necessary framework for its management, conservation, and maintenance, will be formally adopted in 2026.

In 2025, the Sofia Platform Foundation also began collaborating with the documentary podcast Urban Detective, producing a five-episode series dedicated to the Belene labor camp. The podcast is scheduled for release and distribution in 2026.

In 2025, Bulgaria's most popular YouTube creator, Slavi Panayotov - The Clashers, released an episode dedicated to the Belene labor camp. The episode was produced with the support of the Sofia Platform Foundation and was viewed more than 400,000 times during the year. In 2025, Belene was also featured in another of Slavi Panayotov's projects, the book 50 Forgotten Places in Bulgaria.

As a result of the communication and public awareness activities carried out by the Sofia Platform Foundation and its partners, visitor numbers to the Belene camp increased significantly in 2025. Through the Foundation's educational initiatives alone, more than 800 students and teachers visited the site during the year. In addition, hundreds of other visitors explored the camp through the [belene.camp](#) platform.

Project duration:
2025-2027

Funding organization:



[TO THE PROJECT](#)



OUR PROJECTS

SUMMER SCHOOL “WHY SHOULD WE REMEMBER?”

In 2025, the eighth edition of the Why Should We Remember? Summer School was held in Belene, bringing together twenty-three secondary school and university students. Established in 2018, the program offers an intensive week-long educational experience designed to deepen young people's understanding of the differences between democracy and totalitarianism and the importance of remembering Bulgaria's recent past.

The program includes educational sessions on the history of the communist period and the Belene labor camp, meetings with survivors and leading experts, visits to historical sites in the region, and work with archival documents. Since 2024, it has also incorporated dedicated modules on media literacy and countering propaganda.

Budget: part of the abovementioned project

Activities:

A five-day summer school for secondary school and university students held in Belene. The program includes work with archival materials, visits to significant historical sites in the Belene area, discussions with survivors of the labor camps, and lectures by experts.

Project duration:
2018 - annually

Funding organization:



[TO THE PROJECT](#)



summer
school



OUR PROJECTS

PROTEUS - PROTECTING EU VALUES AND FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS THROUGH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Budget: EUR 220,420 (total funding for the entire project period), of which **EUR 51,197.62** was received in 2025

Activities:

Capacity-building training for civil society organizations; **grant funding** for civil society projects

The project supports civil society organizations (CSOs) in their efforts to protect the European Union's fundamental rights and values in the context of increasing pressure on civil society and the shrinking of democratic space. Through capacity-building training, small grants, and mentoring, PROTEUS provides targeted support to selected organizations, with priority given to those based in peripheral regions and smaller towns and communities.

In 2025, a total of twenty-seven participants took part in the project's capacity-building training program for CSOs. Through PROTEUS, projects implemented by five organizations from across Bulgaria received financial support, enabling them to carry out initiatives promoting EU rights and values and strengthening civic participation in underserved and peripheral communities.

Project duration:
2023 - 2026

Funding organization:

Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) Programme of the European Union



Co-funded by
the European Union

[TO THE PROJECT](#)



OUR PROJECTS

GRAJDANSKO.BG

Budget: During 2025 - part of the *Histories from Belene* project

Activities:

Development of an online platform providing resources for civic education teachers, including **lesson plans aligned with the Ministry of Education and Science curriculum for Grades 11 and 12**, as well as **lessons on current civic issues**

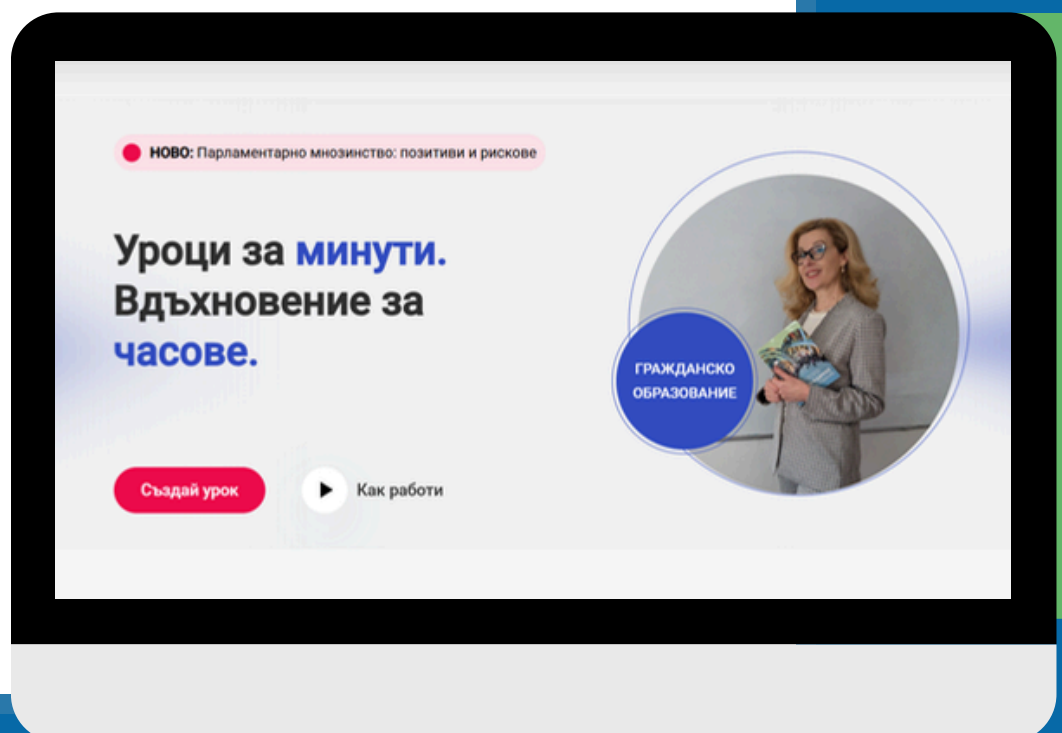
In 2025, we continued to improve and expand www.grajdansko.bg, an online educational platform designed to support civic education teachers in Grades 11 and 12. During the year, we undertook a comprehensive redesign of the website and upgraded its functionality. The improvements were guided by recommendations from curriculum specialists to maximize the platform's usefulness for teachers. In addition to serving as a valuable resource for creating lesson plans aligned with the national curriculum, the platform was expanded in 2025 with new teaching materials addressing current social issues and contemporary civic challenges.

Project duration:
2022 – 2027

Funding organization:



[TO THE PROJECT](#)



OUR PROJECTS

FESTIVAL 10.11

Budget: BGN 30,000 from Sofia Municipality (total funding for the project), all of which was received in 2025; **EUR 12,000** from the Federal Foundation for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in East Germany (total funding for the project), all of which was received in 2025

Activities:

Walking tours, tram tours, exhibitions, workshops, and public discussions

The festival is dedicated to promoting a deeper understanding of Bulgaria's communist past and encouraging public reflection on its legacy. Its title refers to the symbolic date of the fall of the communist regime – November 10, 1989.

The inaugural Festival 10.11 took place over November 2-14, 2025. The program featured several walking and tram tours, exhibitions, workshops, and public discussions.

Two exhibitions were presented as part of the festival. Belene – A Bulgarian Resistance Story was displayed in the foyer of Building Two of the New Bulgarian University, while the Assimilation and Resistance of Muslim Women exhibition was presented at the Sofia City Library. The program also included five themed tours along five historical routes in Sofia.

Public discussions brought together Bulgarian and international speakers, including Daniela Koleva, Ulrich Mähler, Emine Sadkı, Zekiye Emin, Stefan Wolle, Zachary Karabashliev, Matthias Irlinger, Derviş Hızarcı, and others.

Project duration:
2025

Funding organizations:



Calendar of cultural events
of Sofia Municipality

BUNDESSTIFTUNG
AUFARBEITUNG



[TO THE
PROJECT](#)



OUR PROJECTS

STUDY VISIT TO GERMANY

Budget: BGN 20,520.57 (total funding for the project), all of which was received in 2025

Activities:

Study visits to memorial sites and former concentration camps in Germany for a multidisciplinary team to inform the conceptual development of a Museum of Communist Bulgaria

Over June 1-8, 2025, the Sofia Platform Foundation organized a study visit to Germany for a multidisciplinary group of historians, political scientists, journalists, and digital content creators, with a total of eleven participants. The visit provided valuable insights into how Germany has transformed difficult chapters of its history into places of remembrance and public education.

The study trip included visits to leading museums, memorials, and sites of memory related both to National Socialism and to communism, including the Hohenschönhausen Memorial, Ravensbrück Memorial, Buchenwald Memorial, the Bautzen Memorial in Dresden, and other significant sites.

Project duration:
2025

Funding organization:

BUNDESSTIFTUNG
AUFARBEITUNG



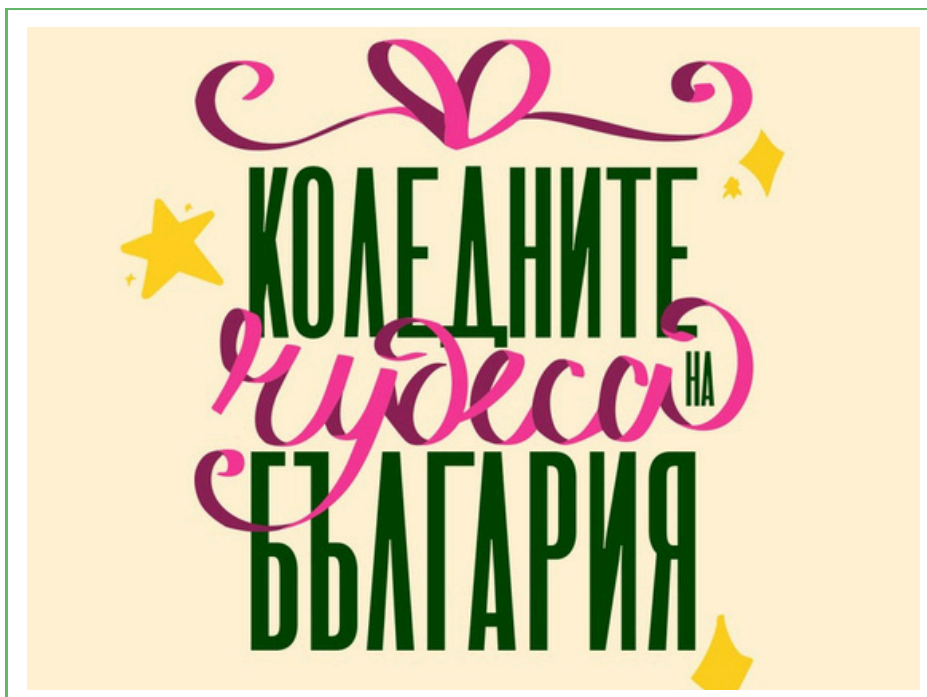
OUR PROJECTS

BULGARIA'S CHRISTMAS MIRACLES

Activities:

Bulgaria's first Christmas calendar of kindness, bringing together more than ninety initiatives, events, and stories of positive change from across the country, implemented by non-governmental organizations. Throughout the month, the website www.chudesata.bg featured a different civic cause, volunteer initiative, charity bazaar, educational event, environmental campaign, or inspiring personal story each day.

In 2025, the Sofia Platform Foundation was among the organizers of the Bulgaria's Christmas Miracles campaign. More than twenty social media influencers and public figures volunteered their support for the initiative, helping it generate over one million YouTube views, along with more than twenty-five media appearances with hundreds of thousands of additional views.



Project duration:
2025

Funding
organizations:

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



BSPB



BULGARIAN
CENTER
FOR NOT-FOR-PROFIT
LAW



BULGARIAN
DONORS'
FORUM



PLATFORM
AGORA



Sofia
Platform



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PROJECT](#)



OUR PROJECTS

CIVIC LEADERSHIP AND ACTIVE COOPERATION

Budget: CHF 213,979.95 (total funding for the entire project period), of which **BGN 178,887** was received in 2025

Activities:

Development of informational materials for the **National Civic Education Olympiad**; promotion of the Olympiad; **training programs for teaching civic topics in the history curriculum** and in the all-day school programs; cooperation with a range of **educational organizations**

The Sofia Platform Foundation is a member of the consortium implementing the Civic Leadership and Active Cooperation project, one of the three strategic projects supported under the Swiss - Bulgarian Cooperation Program.

During the final months of 2025, preparatory work began on the Foundation's project activities, including the development of educational materials for participants in the National Civic Education Olympiad, two new teacher training programs, research on attitudes towards civic education and civic participation at the local level, and other related activities.

Project duration:
2025–2028

Funding organization:

SWISS – BULGARIAN
Cooperation Programme 

[TO THE PROJECT](#)



OUR PROJECTS

ABSENT TRACES, ACTIVE MEMORY: RETHINKING REMEMBRANCE AT BELENE AND BEYOND

Budget: EUR 23,480 (total funding for the project), of which **EUR 18,297.24** was received in 2025

Activities:

An international exchange lab on memory culture, the future of the former Belene labor camp, and European approaches to preserving difficult historical heritage.

The international exchange lab brought together historians, educators, civil society representatives, and public institutions to discuss contemporary challenges related to memory culture in Europe. A central focus was the former Belene labor camp, one of Bulgaria's most significant yet insufficiently preserved sites of memory.

Through lectures, discussions, site visits, and exchanges of good practice, participants explored sustainable and inclusive approaches to heritage preservation, education, and remembrance.

The initiative aimed to develop practical ideas for transforming Belene into a vibrant site of memory, learning, and responsible cultural tourism within the broader framework of European cooperation.

Project duration:
2025

Project of:
THE **civics** INNOVATION HUB

Funding organizations:



BUNDESSTIFTUNG AUFARBEITUNG 

**LEARN
MORE** 

OUR PROJECTS

EUROPEAN RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP NETWORK - RELEAD

Budget: EUR 71,344 (total funding for the project), of which **EUR 30,531.64** was received in 2025

Activities:

In 2025, the **European Responsible Leadership Network (ReLEAD)** program was launched, and key organizational and content-development activities were carried out to establish and expand the initiative.

The ReLEAD online learning program aims to strengthen civic education in the workplace by supporting businesses in fostering responsible leadership and a stronger culture of civic awareness.

During 2025, four training modules and a complementary practical toolkit were developed, providing a structured and practice-oriented learning program. Subject-matter experts and local partner organizations were also selected in seven European countries.

In parallel, all core written content and communication materials, including website copy, promotional videos, and brochures were prepared.

Project duration:
2025–2026

Project of:
THE **civics** INNOVATION HUB

Funding organizations:



TO THE PROJECT



PROGRAMME DETAILS

- Location**
Online via relead.org
- Duration**
Up to 15 hours over 10 weeks
- Language**
English
- Cost**
Free (participation during working hours recommended, mandatory attendance for group workshops)
- Certification**
Open Badge + Company & Participant Certification

INTERESTED? GET IN TOUCH!

<https://thecivics.eu/projects/relead/>
Email us at relead@thecivics.eu

ReLEAD is developed and implemented by THE CIVICS Innovation Hub, a pan-European non-governmental organisation with hubs in Bonn, Sofia, and Zagreb. Our goal is to empower citizens across Europe with democratic skills, self-efficacy, and resilience. After the successful implementation of the programme CIVIC SCOUTS AT WORK (2021-2024), ReLEAD expands efforts to create a space for civic learning within the workplace through our network.

Join us in building a future where business success and social responsibility go hand in hand.

ReLEAD
European Responsible Leadership Network

COURTESY OF THE CIVICS INNOVATION HUB

AS A CONTINUATION OF CIVIC SCOUTS AT WORK

FUNDED BY bpb Robert Bosch Stiftung

WHERE WORK MEETS CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

OUR PROJECTS

MAPPING CIVIC EDUCATION IN EUROPE

Budget: EUR 58,809.34 (total funding for the project period), of which **EUR 6,570.00** was received in 2025

Activities:

During 2025, key activities focused on consolidating and disseminating the findings of the European civic education mapping process were carried out.

The initiative's second report, **Between Disruption and Resilience: A 35-Country Overview of Civic Education in Europe**, was finalized and published in 2025.

The publication provides a comparative overview of the state of **civic education** across the **thirty-one countries** included in the core mapping exercise and is complemented by expert analyses covering Belarus, Moldova, Türkiye, and Ukraine. The report was publicly launched during the **NECE Preparatory Lab in Oslo** on April 3, 2025.

At the same time, the interactive **CIVICS Network Map**, which showcases organizations working in the field of civic education, was redesigned and functionally upgraded to improve usability and to facilitate access to national profiles.

Project duration:
2023–2025

Project of:

THE **civics** INNOVATION HUB

Funding organization:



[TO THE PROJECT](#)



OUR PROJECTS

NECE (NETWORK FOR EUROPEAN CIVIC EDUCATION)

Budget: EUR 229,652.00 (total funding for the project period), of which **EUR 59,761.87** was received in 2025

Activities:

Organization of **NECE Festival 2025**; delivery of **NECE Labs** on civic education across Europe; organization and facilitation of presentations, workshops, and capacity-building activities as part of **NECE Campus**

Network Development

In 2025, NECE continued to grow and expand as a European network for civic education. Partnerships established in previous years were further consolidated and strengthened, enhancing the network's sustainability, visibility, and impact within the field of civic education.

NECE Festival 2025: HOPE

The NECE Festival 2025: HOPE took place in Oslo over September 2-4, 2025 in cooperation with the European Wergeland Centre (EWC).

The festival brought together civic educators, activists, and changemakers from across Europe to reflect collectively on the role of hope in civic education and democratic participation. The program featured panel discussions, practice-oriented masterclasses, and artistic interventions that encouraged knowledge exchange and interdisciplinary dialogue.



Project duration:
2023–2025

Project of:

THE **civics** INNOVATION HUB

Funding organization:



[TO THE PROJECT](#)

OUR PROJECTS

NECE (NETWORK FOR EUROPEAN CIVIC EDUCATION)

NECE Campus

In 2025, NECE Campus expanded its portfolio with a total of eleven interactive webinars, providing in-depth analysis of a wide range of issues and challenges in civic education.

Recordings and supporting materials were published on the NECE website, creating a lasting collection of educational resources.

NECE Labs

During 2025, nine NECE Labs were organized across different European countries. Each lab event focused on a key challenge in civic and political education.

The principal thematic areas included:

- developing hope as a civic competency
- promoting youth participation in democratic processes
- strengthening financial and economic literacy

Additional attention was devoted to working with polarized groups, building trust within diverse communities, and addressing social division. Civic integration of migrants was also a key focus.

NECE Magazine

In 2025, the third issue of NECE Magazine, *HOPE*, was published. Distributed to participants at the NECE Festival, the publication features interviews and analytical articles developed in collaboration with fifteen leading civic educators and experts. The magazine also showcases innovative organizations and examples of good practice from across Europe.

Project duration:
2023–2025

Project of:



Funding organization:



[TO THE PROJECT](#)



OUR PROJECTS

YOUNG CLIMATE PROFESSIONALS 2.0

Budget: 3,300 EUR (funding for the entire project period); fully received in 2024

Activities:

Training sessions, expert lectures, group discussions, aimed at strengthening **environmental literacy** while promoting **active citizenship** and **social entrepreneurship**

Building on the activities implemented in 2024 and further strengthening the capacities of young climate activists through the #OurFutureEurope program, the first online session of the Youth Climate Program (YCP) in 2025 focused on the theme of Biodiversity - Protecting and Restoring Ecosystems.

The program culminated in the YCP Campus, held in Zagreb, where young participants from across Europe met in person to build professional networks, exchange experiences, and further develop practical ideas for a more sustainable future.

Following these intensive activities, the project concluded with the ideation of a total of 23 youth-led, environmentally focused, and innovative projects covering a broad range of topics and formats.

Of the projects developed, 4 received implementation funding. All funded initiatives were successfully carried out.

Project duration:
2024–2025

Project of:



Funding organization:



[TO THE PROJECT](#)

