

2026  
FINAL  
REPORT

# MOTHERS FOR PEACE & ECOLOGY



Mother Centers  
International  
Network for  
Empowerment

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# Our Processes

The Mother Center International Network for Empowerment (MINE) believes that *how* we reach our goals is just as important as whether or not we achieve them. Mothers for Peace & Ecology (MfP&E) has been a unique opportunity to refine our processes for better inclusivity and efficiency. These are five of the defining characteristics of our coordination that reflect the continuous growth and broadening capacity of our network.

## We are VALUE-DRIVEN

MINE has striven to have every action we take as a network reflect our values. Every choice we make, from how much we pay in honorar to how we structure meetings to reducing waste at our conferences, is rooted in participatory practice and our network's shared vision of a community where everyone has a voice as well as the infrastructure and resources to use their voice. The foundation provided by our core values was essential to the development of the additional process characteristics below. We don't just talk about what matters to us--we embody it.

## We are LEARNING-DRIVEN

Throughout our time working on MfP&E, we have dedicated ourselves to creating an organizational culture that 1) transforms missteps into opportunities for growth, 2) encourages all members to view themselves as both experts and novices, 3) sees acknowledgment of the distortions in perspective caused by traumatic experience as the first step to productive communication, and 4) holds space for a diverse array of voices to create solutions to complex problems.

## We are TRANSPARENT

It has become clear through the MfP&E project that transparency is an essential part of our work. While we once maintained transparency, especially in our financial tasks, as a way to demonstrate our integrity and competency in distribution of funds, it has now become clear that transparency is also an essential building block to inclusive participation and to creating a sustainable work culture that does not burn out our most valuable resource--our people. Clarity in the communication of requirements, especially across language barriers, and encouraging members to be honest about the boundaries they need to set with their work in order to thrive have greatly increased our efficiency and quality of our output.

# Our Processes

## We are REFLECTIVE

While we have used reflective practices regularly in the past, with this project it became clear that reflection is a critical step in the virtuous cycle of transformative change we are trying to enact in the Danube region. Organizational reflection, not just personal reflection, gives us insight into the internal systems that hinder growth and result in unexpected behaviors. That internal knowledge deepens our capacity to work skillfully in complex environments impacted by generational and collective trauma and helps us maintain the cultural humility and intellectual curiosity essential to building rapport across national, ethnic, and class boundaries.

## We are OPEN TO OPPORTUNITY

The obstacles we faced at the beginning of this project forced us to examine our community's beliefs about risk, trust, delegation, stewardship, generosity, and seizing opportunity. The MfP&E project would have been cut short in its nascency if we had not decided as an organization to shoulder the burden of risk necessary to trust in the diverse components of our network. Doing this allowed us to not only delegate the many complex tasks we had ahead of us, but also allowed us to take advantage of unforeseen opportunities for collaboration and growth. We want to continue to identify ethical and transparent ways of taking and managing risk so we can envision our future not as a series of one crisis after another, but rather as a field of transformation and possibility

# Our Processes

## APPLICATION and EVALUATION

After our opening meeting, MINE set out to create a way to help our participants make their parts of the project a concrete reality. This led to the creation of the Grant Application and the Milestone Form. The applicants fill out a Milestone Form for every objective they state in their initial proposal.

Applicants also generally include a longer proposal in their own words and formatting. We also ask for a spreadsheet delineating how they plan to spread the amount received across their budget.

For our Midterm Report, we asked all of our network partners to submit progress reports based on the milestones they had delineated in the original application. Many milestones were reached, others were changed after collaboration with the MINE coordination team, and some had to be dismissed, but the process was joint and transparent throughout.

**Mothers for Peace and Ecology Grant Application**

**Name of Applicant:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Name of Organization:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Organization Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Organization Email:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Organization Mailing Address:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Description of Organization:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of Proposal:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Description:** Please attach a 1-2 page document with the same "Name of Organization Proposal Description". Please be as specific as possible. Refer to the attached "Peace and Ecology Proposal Criteria Assessment" for guidance.  
**Objectives of Proposal:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Expected Start/Date/End Date:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Applicant:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

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mimemotherscenters.org

**Mothers for Peace and Ecology Grant Application Milestone Form**

Please attach a spreadsheet document with file name "Name of Organization Budget Form". Include a sheet for each milestone detailing the expected resources needed to start the Milestone and the expected contributions of those resources. You will need at least two Milestones, but there is no limit. Include a Milestone Form in your application packet for each Milestone of your proposal.

**Milestone Number:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Objectives (Please be as specific as possible. These objectives will be the basis for what you share to the coordination establishment space when the milestone is achieved for mutual learning): \_\_\_\_\_

**Expected Start/Date/End Date:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Coordinator:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Coordinator Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Coordinator Email:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Coordinator Mailing Address:** \_\_\_\_\_  
(Documentation also to verify spending (receipts, invoices, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_)

(Documentation also to record results of Milestone activities (workshops, talking points, lessons learned, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_)

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# Our Goals

In the MfP&E Project, we laid out five specific project goals:

1. Supporting Mutual Exchange and Network Building in the Danube Region
2. Developing and Adapting Educational Programs for Women and Their Supporters
3. Promotion of Ecologically-Oriented Mother and Family Centers and other Civil Society Organizations in the Danube Region
4. Strengthening Democratic Awareness
5. Supporting Disadvantaged Women-- Especially Roma & Refugees

The first four of these goals will have a dedicated section in this report. The fifth goal, supporting disadvantaged women, is addressed in all sections.

# Mutual Exchange in the Danube Region



One of the highlights of this project has been the establishment of the national mother center network in Bosnia & Herzegovina (BiH), or *Mreža centara za majke u Bosni i Hercegovini*. While the first mother center in BiH was established 25 years ago, the network's website now lists ten different centers, two of which are coordinated by Roma women for Roma communities, and many of which are in rural, underserved areas with little municipal support. The MfP&E project made it possible for the coordinators of Centar za majke Plamen, Senada Dzankic and Nada Crljic, to visit mother centers throughout BiH to give workshops on how to create a national network and the benefits that it could provide to all of its participant organizations. The network's focus is on creating self-sustaining systems of mutual support for centers in BiH. With sustainability, mother centers in BiH can do the transformational, multi-generational work of creating a culture of peace and inclusion in their country and region, one neighborhood at a time.

I am very proud of our network, of our hardworking women, who have slowly started to understand that [...] some people don't have opportunities to educate themselves, some aren't able to, some don't want to. But that doesn't mean that we need to undervalue them, and it's important to draw out of each and every person that which they can do to make people happier.

- Senada Dzankic, founder of the first mother center in Zavidovici, MINE Board Member and coordinator of BiH Mreža Centara za Majke.



# Mutual Exchange in the Danube Region



The new network hosted the project's closing meeting in Sarajevo in conjunction with the Mother Center Academy--a two day workshop to bring Ukraine and BiH into dialogue on how mother center methods can lead the way in post-war social recovery. The BiH mother center network reached out to both government representatives and commercial entities in Sarajevo to see what kinds of collaboration were possible. First Secretary Renata Rat of the German embassy in Sarajevo was able to provide funds for simultaneous translation, without which the quality of the dialogue between the BiH and the Ukrainian women would not have been possible. The Movenpick Hotel in Sarajevo provided the network with discounted, high-quality accommodation, and the local Restaurant Brix provided discounted group meals. The Ukrainian and Czech ambassadors in Sarajevo also attended the beginning of the academy and observed the network in action. The meeting space was provided by the mayor of New Sarajevo's office. It was a testament to the goodwill and community built by the BiH network. More than 50 attendees, including Bosniak, Serb, Croat, Roma, and Ukrainian participants and supporters and observers from Germany, Czechia and the United States, shared their stories of resilience and hope during the two-day academy. Even with the great dialogue that we had, we knew at the end that we had only scratched the surface of the potential of such a powerful exchange.

This kind of initiative is very important for Ukraine. Today, there is not a single city in Europe today that does not contain Ukrainian refugees. Ukraine is waging a struggle, and will wage it till the end. Unfortunately, Bosnia & Herzegovina has experienced its own war. But because of this, Bosnia & Herzegovina knows what kind of help to offer women and their children.

- Volodymyr Bachynsky,  
Ukrainian Ambassador to  
Bosnia & Herzegovina





Photos from the  
Mother Center  
Academy in  
Sarajevo

# Mutual Exchange in the Danube Region



Olena Makarevych helped develop the Victoria IDP Council in Volochysk, Ukraine when she, as an internally displaced person (IDP) herself, saw that integration into her new home in Western Ukraine was not as easy as expected. Finding new social support networks, opportunities for personal or professional development, and ways to advocate for the vulnerable population she now found herself a part of proved difficult. When MINE saw the work she and the Victoria IDP Council were able to do in Volochysk, we were eager to offer what support we could. Despite regular air raid alerts disrupting daily life and attacks on the local power grid that often left them without electricity, the Victoria IDP Council was able to conduct over 30 English classes, over 20 psychological self-help trainings for families, as well as several excursions for IDPs to learn more about the culture and history of the Western Ukraine, and a wide variety of holiday and community events to promote social integration.

What is most interesting, however, was how the Victoria IDP Council was able to collaborate so effectively with the city of Volochysk and a wide variety of Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian NGOs to achieve its ends. The Volochysk City Council cooperated with the council on several children's offers and the Pikluvannia Social Program, while over a dozen other NGOs besides MINE offered support to the council's activities through provision of space, subject experts for community workshops, tickets to cultural events, project materials, and funding. The council now has an *Offene Treff* that meets regularly in the Volochysk City Library, which has proved mutually beneficial to the council's IDPs, the established community, and the library itself. Their work has proved essential to raising the esteem of the IDPs in the eyes of locals, easing tensions and promoting integration in the region, as all of their activities are explicitly offered to both local and IDPs.



Photos from  
Victoria IDP Events



# Mutual Exchange in the Danube Region



Women from new mother center initiatives in Kyiv, Volochysk and Khmelnytskyi came to Stuttgart in November to visit several mother centers, particularly the Roma mother center MuKiz in Bad Canstatt. They were able to compare and contrast the many different forms and directions a mother center can take as well as speak to the mother center coordination teams in Stuttgart about networking methods they could use as initiatives so thinly and geographically spread.

MINE also ensured that Ukrainian members of the initiatives were able to participate in in-person events in Bavaria, Slovakia, and BiH. Many of the women were unwilling to travel without their children, so we made sure there was room in the budget to offer Ukrainian participants family accommodation and extra days to stay in said accommodation to give their children time to adjust and to give them the opportunity to recharge in a supportive atmosphere. This created the unexpected opportunity to plant the seeds of youth collaboration between Ukrainian and Slovak groups, which will result in a youth exchange in Stuttgart in July 2026.

[We saw that] the leader should not be center of the mother center, that co-existence and actually living with each other are two different things. It was great to see contrast, to see what we can and cannot implement in Ukraine. We need to adapt what we have seen. Every center can be different to meet the needs of its community.

-Anastasiia Shestopalova,  
youth activist and member of the  
mother center initiative in Kyiv



# Mutual Exchange in the Danube Region

Photos from the Ukrainian Mother Center Initiative in Stuttgart.



Die Menschen im MüZe sind das MüZe.

Люди в MüZe- це MüZe

Турбота про себе

Турбота

MüZe Süd  
Familienzentrum Stuttgart e.V.

«Громадський простір для Українців»

відкрито щодня для українських родин, та усіх охочих нас підтримати

Понеділок, 16.00-18.00

# Mutual Exchange in the Danube Region



Below are responses from members of the Únia Materských Centier, the Union of Mother Centers in Slovakia (ÚMC) to the question “Is it important for us to be part of national and international organizations? What benefit does it bring us?”:

“Yes, it is necessary. Thanks to this, we grow better. Not only are we able to unite and help on the front lines in world crises [...] but we are able to intervene with a helping hand in the aforementioned crises earlier and more directly than politicians, cities, territorial units and institutions can even come up with any solution.”

“Of course - any cooperation at a higher level moves us forward as individuals, but also as a center - we broaden our horizons, improve language skills and, most importantly, we can feel a sense of belonging and the feeling that we are not alone in this.”

“Yes, it is certainly important. It will allow us to work with other states and organizations to solve common problems. Membership can bring us experience, knowledge, and perhaps resources that can be beneficial to our center. It's important to me. It brings me a lot of inspiration, new ideas, personal growth and at the same time the feeling that "I'm not the only soldier in the field.”

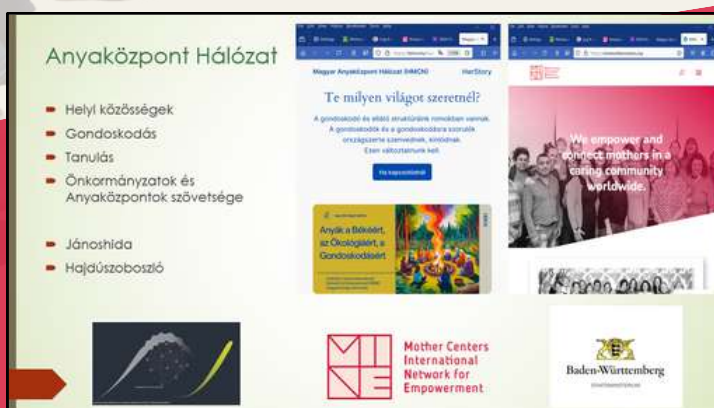
“It is certainly important for us to be a part of them. Thanks to these organizations, we can travel and learn about the functioning of mother and family centers not only in Slovakia, but also abroad. At the same time, we can be inspired, make new friends within the network, help each other and be an inspiration.”

# Mutual Exchange in the Danube Region



Mother centers were first introduced to Hungary in the early 2000s, and by 2012 there were over a dozen mother centers active in the country. They formed the first Hungarian Mother Center Network and became a member of MINE. But the network did not have the resilience to sustain itself in the following years when funding became scarce and the political landscape became hostile to the mother center model. Most of the mother centers in Hungary were forced to close.

With the MfP&E project, MINE partnered with the Hekate Conscious Aging Foundation, the HajráAnyu Association, and Jánoshida Szent Norbert Elderly Club in Hungary to revitalize the dormant Hungarian Mother Center Network. As a result, the Hungarian Mother Center Network was revitalized through a national mapping process that reconnected ten active communities. Regular online and in-person meetings rebuilt trust, strengthened cooperation, and defined shared priorities. A strategic partnership was established with the Hungarian Association of Local Municipalities (TÖOSZ), enabling structured dialogue between civil society actors and women-led municipalities. As a long-term structural outcome, participating organizations agreed to establish a new joint association to promote caring communities and strengthen advocacy capacity. Two of these ten communities are a newly-established intergenerational mother center in Jánoshida as of December 2024, and a second through municipal-grassroots cooperation in Hajdúszoboszló in January 2025. Both are open to the public and provide *Offene Treff* for their communities. At the Hungarian network's final networking event in February, members agreed to form a new joint association to promote caring communities and strengthen long-term cooperation. MINE hopes to be collaborating with them for many years to come.





# Development of Educational Programs

Great strides have also been taken to organize Ukrainian refugee women throughout the Danube Region, IDP women within Ukraine, and Ukrainian citizens living with war in daily life in Kyiv. These grassroots women organized three in-person workshops, one in Munich and two in Kyiv. The first two workshops focused on self-help methods of managing post-traumatic symptoms; the third workshop focused on core mother center concepts, such as the *Offene Treff*, or “public living room,” and the four pillars of the mother center movement in the context of the German reflective tool *Ich bin Clara* as a method that uses self-observation to facilitate collaborative and participatory problem solving.

The participants also hosted eight online workshops titled the Mother Center Masterclass. It focused on topics of mutual self-help, meant to bring Ukrainian women throughout the Danube region together to introduce the particular skillsets individuals using to navigate life during wartime into the wisdom of the group. Some women residing in Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria gave workshops on topics such as mother centers as learning space for democracy, while others focused on themes such as art therapy and fairy tale therapy for processing traumatic experiences.

Already in this difficult time, democracy is tolerance with each other. Democracy is to hear each other, to understand each other, and to see each other. Democracy is freedom of [speech]. In mother centers you can share your thoughts, you can share your ideas, and you are able to be free, to be sure, to be understood, and to share your ideas. And then we create some tasks: we can cook with our families and kids, we can go [on] excursions. It is democracy.

-Olena Kulykova, co-coordinator for the Ukrainian Mother Center Initiative in Kyiv and MINE coordinator for Ukrainian Community Relations





# Development of Educational Programs

Below are samples of Oleksandra Shestopalova’s pamphlet on psychological self-help translated into English from Ukrainian. The pamphlet is a self-published list of techniques that helped Shestopalova perform radical self-care after the death of her husband at the beginning of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. She is now a key member of the Ukrainian Mother Center Initiative in Kyiv.

**- Look for support -**

- ▼ within and from yourself (wherever we are, we always take OURSELVES with us). Don't forget that you have yourself. And you are the same person who can help you, and vice versa, harm you
- ▼ from other people
- ▼ from concepts and ideas
- ▼ within your own experience

**- Maintain a balance between work and personal life -**

- ▼ turn off notifications in work chats during non-working hours
- ▼ do not bring work home
- ▼ rest on time and well

**- Eat properly and regularly -**

- ▼ do not skip meals
- ▼ stick to a balanced diet
- ▼ reduce your intake of simple carbohydrates to prevent sharp changes in blood sugar levels
- ▼ drink enough water

**- Stick to a sleep schedule -**

- ▼ sleep 7-9 hours if possible
- ▼ try to go to bed at the same time every night
- ▼ before going to bed, thank yourself for the day and remember the good things you did for yourself today
- ▼ if necessary, use special apps on your phone to help you fall asleep
- ▼ you can use special breathing techniques to fall asleep quickly

**- Don't be afraid to ask for help -**

- ▼ sometimes a heart-to-heart conversation with your best friend can be very helpful and useful
- ▼ seek help from a psychologist or therapist if you can't cope on your own

**- Rely on your inner strength -**

- ▼ Meet with like-minded people for support and energy through conversation or simply drinking tea together
- ▼ Participate in activities where people do something together: drawing, knitting, crafting, cooking, sports, etc.
- ▼ Arrange a "warm evening" for yourself. Surround yourself with warmth in both the literal and figurative sense:
  - create a comfortable and cozy place for yourself and "wrap" yourself in it like a cocoon (soft pillows, a blanket, candies, pleasant light music)

**How to communicate with a person in the acute stage of stress**

- ▼ **do not ask «how are you?»**  
The person does not know what they are feeling or how to help them. It is better to ask something specific: «how are you feeling», «how was your day», or «how can I support you?» Tell the person that you think about them and want to support them, and that it is important for you to be there for them. Do not ask about traumatic events, just keep the conversation relevant and focused on something current. If you do ask, be careful and be prepared to accept and endure any emotions the person may have (anger, tears, fear), and to hear the answer «nothings» or «bads»
- ▼ **don't ask «how to help you?»**  
Instead, offer real help: bring them something to drink, give them a blanket, go to the shop, tidy the house, cook a meal, take their kids for a walk. These are all elements of «grounding» that will help the person return to the «here and now» and relieve the burden of daily responsibilities
- ▼ **do not tell the person how to behave or how long to stay in a depressed state**  
Phrases such as «stop crying» or «it will get better in a couple of days» do not provide support, but rather show the person that no one understands them (as they perceive it). It is better to say: «I can't imagine how you feel, but I am here for you», «cry as much as you need to»
- ▼ **do not say «if you need anything, let me know»**  
Most likely, the person will not ask for help. It is better to offer real help and say: «I can take care of...» (a specific task).
- ▼ **it is better to avoid saying «everything will be fine»**  
Because you don't know that for sure. And you don't know when exactly things will get better. Usually, a person in trauma is very skeptical about this phrase, because right now, when you say it, they feel bad
- ▼ **do not say «pull yourself together», «you have children so you have to be strong» or things alike**  
Such phrases only make the person feel guilty because they cannot cope and do not live up to your expectations
- ▼ **it is better to avoid the phrase «hang in there»**  
Because there is usually nothing to hang on to, even if there are people around who are helping them
- ▼ **do not say «you are not alone» or «it didn't happen only to you»**  
With such words, you devalue the person's experience, even if you have experienced or are experiencing something similar. It is better to say «I have had a similar traumatic experience and I know how difficult it is for you»

-Oleksandra Shestopalova, co-coordinator for the Ukrainian Mother Center Initiative in Kyiv





Mother Centers  
International  
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Landesverband  
Mütter- und  
Familienzentren  
in Bayern e.V.

# Development of Educational Programs

Our other training and development events were focused on building leadership skills and organizational sustainability into mother center methods. Many of the leaders of the mother center movement in Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria have retired from activism and coordination or were burnt out from the pressure that comes with such roles, and with this project MINE set out to determine methods of finding and supporting the next generation. The Landesverband Mütter- und Familienzentren in Bayern e.V. coordinated two in-person and four online trainings on how mindfulness techniques can help leaders not only manage the stress that comes with their position, but also clarify difficult decisions and navigate the interpersonal conflicts that often undermine and fracture grassroots organizations.

As the leaders of the various networks within MINE dialogued on their experience with mindfulness techniques and the stresses that come with coordinating a mother center, we determined as a group that training the individual is not enough. There are many self-help resources available on mindfulness practices--but how do we empower mother center women to use them consistently? How can we ask the next generation of leaders in the mother center movement to take on more responsibility before this question is answered? How to create an organizational culture that fosters self-care is the important question that arose out of these deliberations; it will be a major focus of our next projects.

I learned that mindfulness is not just about pushing away my stress. Mindfulness is meant to quiet the mind so you can think clearly about difficulties that need to be addressed *instead* of pushing them away. We cannot address what we are not aware of. Mindfulness is the process of intentionality. And intentionality is essential to good leadership.

-Rachel Castleberg,  
Assistant Project Coordinator, MINE e.V.





Photos from the Mindfulness in Leadership Workshops in BY and BW.



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Empowerment



MüZe Süd

Familienzentrum Stuttgart e.V.

# Development of Educational Programs

Müze Süd Familienzentrum has taken an active role in empowering the Ukrainian refugees living in Stuttgart to organize themselves to verbalize and meet their own needs. In the course of the MfP&E project, they hosted the “Wohnzimmer auf Ukrainisch” to allow the participants to work through the purpose and design of the *Offene Treff* in the mother center movement. They accomplished this by working through the all of the nine dimensions of *Ich bin Clara*, which also aids organizations in implementing and nurturing the *Offene Treff* in their own spaces. Participants engaged in deep dialogue on what a mother center might look like in a Ukrainian context, which laid the foundation for the Ukrainian Mother Center Initiative that grew out of the MfP&E project. After interest was expressed by the participants, Müze Süd Familienzentrum enabled a member of the initiative, Liudmyla Kyselova, to job shadow the coordinators and familiarize herself with the everyday, participatory methods of a mother center, allowing her to add nuance to the Ukrainian concept of the *Offene Treff* and cross cultural divides. The Ukrainian participants are also in post-production of a series of video interviews about the value they have drawn from the mother center model.



# Ecological Practices & Permaculture Values in Mother Centers



MINE believes that climate change is a humanmade problem with human solutions and that co-creating a future in which all of us thrive, including the environment, is necessary to build resilient organizations and societies. In the MfP&E project, we wanted to explore how building a relationship with nature and viewing ourselves as part of a greater eco-system could change our capacity for environmentally friendly practice and enhance both the material and social sustainability of grassroots communities.

The Mother Center Academy in Sarajevo was our network’s first deliberately “zero-waste” conference. Participants were gifted a coffee mug and a cotton dishcloth designed and embroidered by one of our Ukrainian attendees at the beginning of the conference, and these were used for beverages throughout the conference. All other dishware was borrowed from local mother centers and returned afterward. Many food and refreshments during the conference were supplied from the farms and gardens of BiH mother center women. Was it a truly “zero-waste” conference? No. But we visibly reduced our waste and held space for nature in our dialogue. MINE has decided that this sort of conference will be the first of many, and that the environment itself will be viewed as a stakeholder and a voice in our efforts moving forward.



Produce, juices, and baked goods from the farms and gardens of grassroots women of BiH Mreža Centara za Majke.



# Ecological Practices & Permaculture Values in Mother Centers



Kinga Milankovic, of the Conscious Ageing Foundation and co-coordinator of the newly revived Hungarian Mother Center Network, and Nada Crljic from the BiH network, gave presentations on both traditional and social permaculture methods at the Mother Center Academy in Sarajevo. Afterwards, women from our various networks throughout the Danube discussed methods they already used in their home centers and techniques from permaculture that they believed could or could not be adapted to increase the resilience of their centers when outside funding becomes unreliable. There was particular interest from the representatives of the BiH mother centers, many of which are rural and/or Roma, where living off the land is already a core principle. In our next project, we have proposed a mutual learning exchange between members of the BiH network and Hungarian network on permaculture techniques. Of particular interest to MINE coordinators was the concept of social permaculture, which views societies as living eco-systems that derive their power not just from individual participants, but from the bonds formed between participants. This echoes the connectedness we value in our own network and warrants further investigation as we co-create a more resilient future.



Baden-Württemberg  
STAATSMINISTERIUM

## Introduction to Permaculture

Sarajevo

01 Nov, 2023

Trainer: Kinga Milankovics

# Ecological Practices & Permaculture Values in Mother Centers



The ÚMC developed, distributed, and analyzed a survey on the implementation of ecological approaches in 41 different mother centers throughout Slovakia. Our Slovak partners wanted to see if they could determine where the disconnect occurs between knowledge and behavior when it comes to practices that promote environmental sustainability. Many eco-friendly practices are well-documented and promoted throughout the Danube region, but education does not entirely bridge the gap to meaningful action for the necessary percentage of the population. While the impact of the individual is limited in the face of such large and complex crises as climate change and the dwindling of natural resources, awareness and collective action have the power to put pressure on institutions and corporations to make more strides towards effective change.

The survey revealed that many of the mother centers attempt to reduce energy usage and use reusable cook- and dishware. Broken items are fixed, and many “new” items are bought secondhand or salvaged. These are nodes of action that are both environmentally friendly and cost effective, so motivation to do these tasks is high. As tasks require more labor, more time, or more money, they become more unlikely to happen in mother centers, which is to be expected. However, the survey did find a positive correlation between how ecologically-aware coordinators rated themselves and how many less-convenient behaviors were implemented in the center, pointing to the importance of leadership education. Another recurring theme was the acknowledgment of an unacted-upon desire to implement more eco-friendly practices, which resulted in requests for additional mentorship and mutual learning from the network.

The survey also included questions about the centers’ usage of artificial intelligence (AI) and knowledge of AI’s environmental impact, the use of which is only growing in Slovakia and the rest of the Danube region. More than half of the mother centers surveyed used AI, but only a third of all of the centers surveyed were aware of how data centers effect their surrounding environment.

# Democratic Awareness & Civic Engagement



MINE hosted two online Dialogue Spaces, one in German and one in English with Ukrainian translation, on the topic of democracy in mother centers. Gisela Erler, author of *Demokratie in stürmischen Zeiten* and well-known researcher and politician, spoke at both, and then she was followed by a discussion among the participants on the topic.

It became clear through the dialogues that, when visitors consider mother centers as mere social service providers, the democratic and participatory methods at the heart of the mother center movement become veiled. When visitors understand the purpose of the *Offene Treff*, however, and how the *Offene Treff* is meant to bring diverse individuals with unique needs and skills into a space that encourages connection and relationship building, they enter a learning space for democratic practice.

[...] we listen actively to each other. We respect each other. We don't interrupt each other. We don't polarize. [...] And there are tools: so we don't get into fights, so we don't get impatient, so we learn to be effective, even though we are different in nationality or in political outlook. And that is the school of democracy, tolerating that we have different ideas to some degree, but that we also have common projects.

-Gisela Erler at the second Dialogue Space  
in the MfP&E Project



In the course of the dialogue Olena Makarevych of the Victoria IDP Council in Volochysk, Ukraine found strong similarities in purpose and structure between the integration center in Khmelnytskyi and the mother center model in its desire to offer low-threshold opportunities for IDPs to socialize with local citizens. She also recommended collaboration with local-level municipality, who, seeing the benefit the Victoria IDP Council could offer to the community in Khmelnytskyi, found funding and space for them to continue their work.

# Democratic Awareness & Civic Engagement



Serhii Yatskovskyi, member of the IDP Coordination Council in the Khmelnytsk City Territorial Community and Ukrainian political scientist specializing in local self-government, echoed Olena Makarevych's recommendation of collaboration with municipalities as a step towards more stable and resilient mother centers. He also elaborated on the need for organizations that, now that the basic material needs of Ukrainian refugees and IDPs has been met with help of international aid, focus on the social needs of IDPs and refugees as they try to integrate into new communities. Many of these people are women with children whose husbands and fathers are deployed, and the stipend they receive from the government is often not enough to cover rent. Childcare is difficult to find as many children only attend remote classrooms online. Finding ways that effectively single women with children can work and thrive in this phase of life is something only possible with collaboration between organizations like mother centers and local governance.

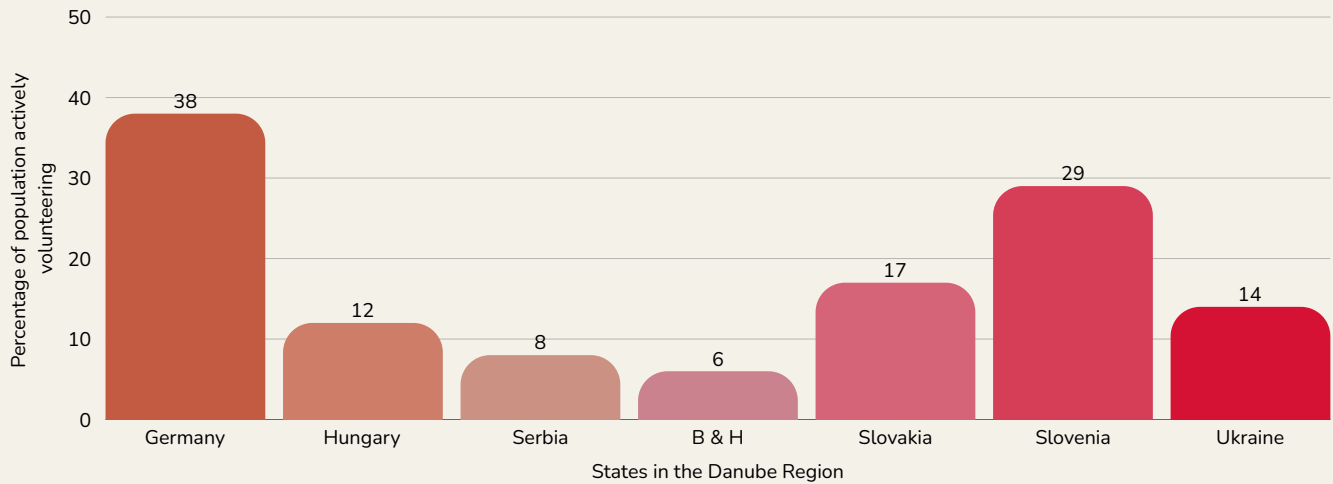
There is this mutual interest now, a growing interest between municipalities and mother centers, local initiatives, and caring communities to follow a participatory approach regarding actions. [...] we experience that the care and the mother centers can be, are getting to be, the heart of local communities where municipalities understand these issues.

-Kinga Milankovic, co-founder of the Hekate Foundation and co-coordinator of the Hungarian Mother Center Network



Tomás Gulán, representative of the Naboso Family and Youth Center, a collaborative effort that houses *Offene Treff* for mothers with young children, youth, Roma, and Ukrainian refugees in a shared space, in Martin, Slovakia, pointed to the overwhelm many Slovak activists feel when faced with corruption and polycrisis. What makes mother centers unique, in his view, is that mother centers seem to be small islands of optimism in this grim landscape. He concluded by saying that a mother center “is one of the few places where it's not about conflict, but about listening to those who might have a different opinion than yours. But [mother centers] have the same goal [as other CSOs], and that is creating a safer environment and better civil society.”

# Democratic Awareness & Civic Engagement



While researching the levels of voluntary engagement in various nations in the Danube region (as of 2023), Madlen Lausterer discovered significant differences in legal and structural conditions for volunteer work, both in terms of legal foundations as well as practical implementation. These differences may account for the percentage gap between Germany and other states in the Danube in terms of percentage of the total population actively involved with at least one (1) volunteering activity. These structural deficits in civic engagement in these countries should be the focus of further study and represent much of the target population of MfP&E.



-Madlen Lausterer,  
Education Researcher  
and member of the MINE  
coordination team



# Democratic Awareness & Civic Engagement



Our Slovak team, which included Mária Ondráčková, the representative of the mother center side of Naboso Family and Youth Center, and Tomás Gulan, developed a survey for the ÚMC to determine how visible democratic and participatory values were in Slovakia's mother center network.

The results were surprising. Many of the participants in the survey reported feeling supported and empowered by the center and feeling like they had influence over decision-making. They also viewed mother centers as places where they could start their own initiatives and could find parenting support from their peers. When the participants were asked who had what responsibilities in their center, however, the participants assigned the coordinator the overwhelming majority of tasks even though coordinators are just as likely to be grassroots volunteers with the same qualifications and availability as any other staff member.

This points to a disconnect between how mother centers in Slovakia, and likely the rest of the Danube region, are conceptualized versus how they are run in reality. Analysis of these disjointed results raised questions about the resilience of organizations that have concentrated power structures due to lack of volunteers--communities expecting coordinating volunteers to run mother centers by themselves are headed towards an inevitable loss of knowledge and experience when that coordinator retires or burns out. How can we make the responsibility of administrating a mother center more participatory in practice and not just in rhetoric? How can we clarify the process that empowers visitors to become volunteer co-leaders? These are key questions to building the social sustainability of mother centers and civil society organizations that we want to address in future projects.

The aim of the joint discussion was first to understand our centers both from within and through the eyes of our visitors, second to share good practices and reflect together on our weak sides, and the ultimate goal to think about ways and preparing tools for the newly emerging mother centers in our countries and especially in Ukraine. We saw that the prepared questionnaire can serve as a good tool both on international level, but also in micro-context of any single mother center.

-Tomás Gulan, co-coordinator of the Naboso Family and Youth Center



# Democratic Awareness & Civic Engagement



Our Slovak team also arranged an international mobility in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia on mother centers as learning spaces for democracy. In addition to representatives from all of our project components, we also hosted the Ukrainian NGO Rokada, which has been at the forefront in finding material and psychological support for IDPs in Western Ukraine. They were curious to learn more about mother centers and the participatory processes that make them unique. Altogether we had 35 participants from five different countries.

Ema Ondráčková, herself a child of the mother center movement who now works in youth activism, led a workshop on how democratic principles can be taught even to young children. She walked us through the stages of childhood development, giving examples of how democracy could be embodied for a child in that stage, and then the group discussed methods they had used with their own or others' children. She also had us split into small groups to work through roleplay scenarios that might occur in a mother center that might require a participatory or inclusive approach. This revealed interesting cultural differences between the Ukrainian attendees and the rest of the group--with each roleplay situation, the Ukrainian attendees always wanted to turn to an authority figure to handle the conflict of the roleplay. For example, one roleplay situation asked us to imagine that you are a volunteer at a mother center, and that a visitor comes to you and asks for advice about her child. Her child is being left out of games by other children at school because her nationality is different. While those women who had more experience in mother centers suggested finding peer support or helping the mother organize an inclusivity initiative, the Ukrainian attendees' first suggestion was to call child protective services to speak with the parents of the non-inclusive children and then to find a child psychologist for the child. This led to a robust discussion of Ukrainian social norms (bullying or mobbing is taken very seriously in the Ukraine and could warrant a visit from child protective services to the bully's parents) and the differences between grassroots and professional approaches to everyday conflict.


Here MINE coordinators realized the necessary tension of, on the one hand, educating the Ukrainian mother center initiative about participatory methods, and on the other hand, acknowledging that our Ukrainian partners must shape their mother centers to meet the unique needs of their own communities rather than merely copy others. The Danube region is a diverse and heterogenous space that needs locally-tailored approaches to its various challenges.

# Democratic Awareness & Civic Engagement




The international mobility also hosted Martin Strižinec, spokesperson of former Slovak president Zuzana Čaputová. Having served within a progressive administration and now living through a movement towards autocracy in Slovakia, he was able to share insights on how mother centers and similar small CSOs could build relationships with local government to bring democratic values to the forefront. An unexpected result of Strižinec's visit to the mother center Mamina in Banská Bystrica was a deep discussion of politics between Strižinec and the mother center women washing dishes in the kitchen. It was rare and spontaneous opportunity for them to be able to speak candidly as grassroots activists with someone with a professional background in politics, and it speaks to the potential mother centers have to be learning spaces for democratic practice.

Over the course of the mobility, the MfP&E partners also visited the Naboso Youth and Family Center and were able to experience first hand how they were able to serve such diverse populations with limited space. The space divides its focus by time slot--Ukrainian refugee women and young mothers with children meet in the morning, young people, including Roma, meet in the afternoon. The space, which is one large square room with a central kitchen space, is also compartmentalized based on purpose--there is a play area in one corner, for example, and then a small library and tables for coffee on the other side of the room. However, the play area changes into a teen hangout in the afternoon through creative use of loft bed, and there is quiet closet area available all day for those in need of peace. The center was designed by Synergia, a network of CSOs with dovetailing interests in grassroots community development, based on the direct input of those who attend the center, especially youth and refugees whose art can be seen on every wall. It is continuously updated and visitors are encouraged to make recommendations based on their needs and to take ownership of the space through their contributions.



A mother's group meeting in the Naboso Family and Youth Center



A democracy workshop in mother center Mamina

# Democratic Awareness & Civic Engagement

Photos from the  
International  
Mobility in  
Slovakia



# Democratic Awareness & Civic Engagement



Inspired by the conference on democracy in Slovakia in May, 2025, and the Mother Center Academy and Participation Day in BiH the following November, Ema Ondráčková has organized two youth-centered mobilities with collaboration from other youth activists she met through the course of the MfP&E project.

Food, Friends, & Future (FFF) is a small scale partnership between local centers in Slovakia and Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria. In this youth mobility, a group of young people from both countries will visit Stuttgart to learn more about intercultural differences, the environment, and social sustainability and solidarity in July 2026. During the mobility, the 16 participants and 4 group leaders will visit at least 4 local community organizations in Stuttgart (MüZe Süd, MuKiZ, Supp\_optimal, and Harry's Bude have all agreed to take part in the exchange already) and engage in interactive workshops with local young people that will lead to an increased understanding of active citizenship and social solidarity. The project's long-term mission is to foster a new generation of socially responsible, environmentally aware, and inclusive young leaders who are motivated to create positive change in their local communities and contribute to building a more sustainable and united Europe.

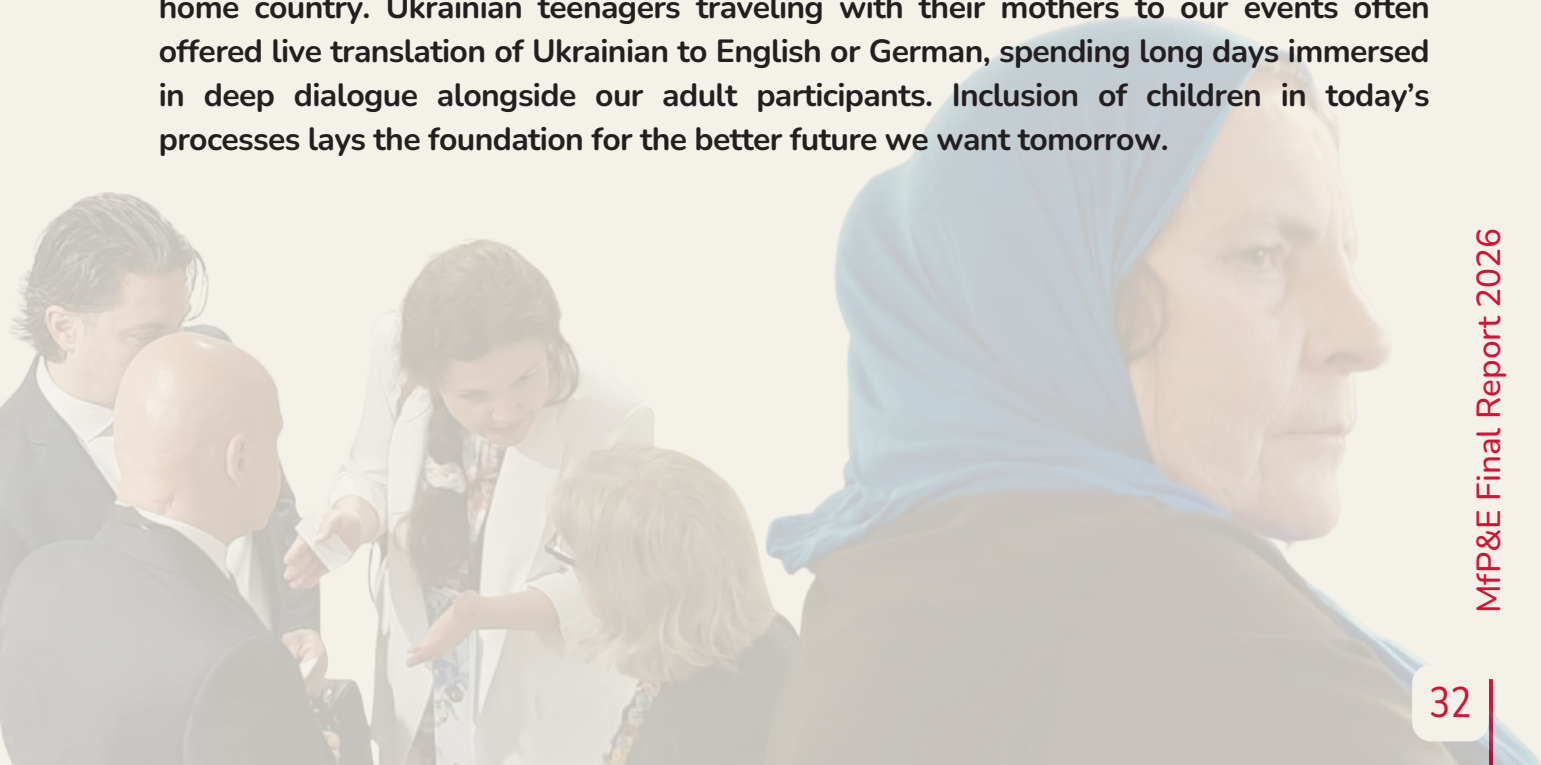
The proposal for the @Feministleader project was submitted in February 2026, to the EU Solidarity Corp initiative. The main goal of @Feministleader is to create a group of young leaders and opinion makers who are interested in learning about social media, identity, gender roles and feminism who will then be able to confidently and responsibly communicate their values to their peers. The project is built on mutual learning about participants' lived experiences and deepening their understanding of social media trends and the impact they have on the identity and behavior of young people. The project also aims to educate participants through a series of workshops led by experts in social media, algorithms, gender issues and feminism. Ideally, participants will develop the communication skills they need to speak about these topics sensitively, convincingly and confidently. We hope that after completing eight meetings, young leaders will be able to independently prepare and implement their own educational activities for their peers and thus actively contribute to open discussion centered on fostering a value-based environment for young people by young people.

# Democratic Awareness & Civic Engagement

We realized that many Ukrainian women were anxious about traveling to attend conferences or workshops because they did not want to be without their children, even if they had sufficient childcare. In wartime, separation anxiety is multiplied.

So we made accommodations that Ukrainian participants could bring their children. Not only did this allow these voices of IDP and refugee women from throughout the Danube to be heard in mother center spaces, but it also gave the women a true sense of what it means to have their voices valued. Mothers think about their children all day long, especially in times of crisis. Knowing someone else is not only tolerating your child in their space but also thinking about your children's needs and wants so you can participate in civic society is true community. It is good to express sympathy for the plight of others, but it is also easy. Making accommodation is more costly, but it brings in diverse voices and is key way to indicate to marginalized groups that their voices are valuable to our discourse. Through accommodations such as these, IDPs, refugees, and Ukrainians still living in their hometowns under siege are able to unite to make effective grassroots change.

This also gives children a chance to view democratic principles in action and grow up in a caring community model that they can carry into the world in adulthood. Several of our key participants, such as Ema Ondráčková, grew up as children of the mother center. Nikola Brkic, who spent time in the Roma Mother Center Aurora in Serbia as a child, is now a lawyer and self-described feminist supporting the mother center movement in his home country. Ukrainian teenagers traveling with their mothers to our events often offered live translation of Ukrainian to English or German, spending long days immersed in deep dialogue alongside our adult participants. Inclusion of children in today's processes lays the foundation for the better future we want tomorrow.



# Democratic Awareness & Civic Engagement

Ukrainian youth at MfP&E events



# 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Danube Participation Day

Tuesday, November 4th, 2025, was the 12th Annual Danube Participation Day, which took place in Sarajevo. The Mother Center Academy in Sarajevo and the closing meeting of the MfP&E project were scheduled for October 31st through November 3rd so attendees could easily attend Danube Participation Day as well.

At the beginning of the day, we attended a panel discussion on how civil society organizations (CSOs) can influence EU policy through their work. We heard from representatives of the European Commission, a representative of the office responsible for preparing Montenegro for EU accession, and a representative of civil society from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The representative of the European Commission spoke about how this cooperation is progressing and how important local organizations and their work are. We also found the contribution from Montenegro interesting, which talked about how the country is preparing for EU accession and, in particular, how it must prepare processes to ensure that EU funds actually go where they are supposed to.

However, the representative of civil society, Ms. Aida Dagonasa, had some very critical points to contribute. She began by saying that for years she has been hearing about how important local work is, but she has yet to see any EU governance include it in legislation, advisory bodies, and groups; in short, despite promises, it is not being taken into account politically. She said that praise alone is not enough, because organizations need direct help, not just promises. These were indeed strong words, but then she also addressed CSOs directly. She pointed out that a weak point is that non-profit organizations and activist-based organizations are not united in their negotiations, are not prepared to express their demands correctly, and their representatives lack professionalism in their conduct. All these aspects then hinder negotiations aimed at supporting the entire sector. In a personal conversation later in the day, she stated that we must get rid of fear and dependence, and on the other hand, we must not neglect preparation for negotiations. The openness, format, and respect that the discussants showed each other, even when they disagreed, was very valuable. We had the opportunity to ask questions via an online app, and even critical submissions were addressed by the panel.

# 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Danube Participation Day

During the lunch break, we participated in the Agora. Attending organizations had the opportunity to prepare two posters in advance and present their work during the lunch break. As the largest contingent in attendance, 17 people, we made full use of the time. We networked with every other organization present, and we hope to include them and our dovetailing interests in the Danube region in future collaborations. Our corner of the room was also visited by Florian Haßler and Niombo Lomba of the Ministry of State of Baden-Württemberg, who have been essential contributors and mentors in the course of the MfP&E project.

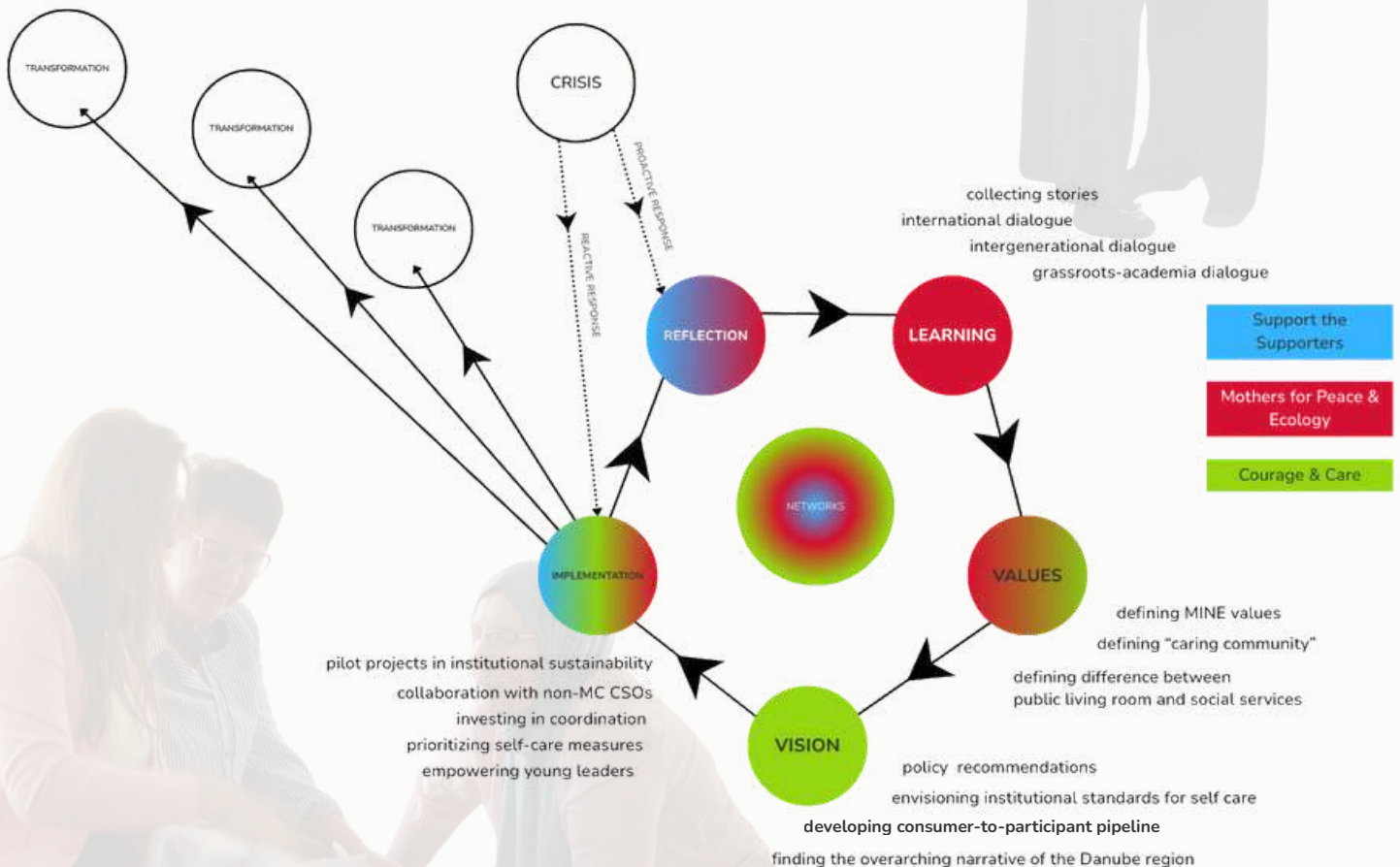
In the afternoon, the program continued in a world café format. Our large group was able to be seated at every table simultaneously. The topics were “Strengthening Civil Society for Policy Translation and Transformation,” “From Local Action to European Impact: Strengthening Municipal Capacity for Enlargement,” and “Generation Participation – Youth in Action for a Stronger Europe.”

The impact of Participation Day on our network partners who were able to attend, from the ÚMC, the BiH network, and the Ukrainian mother center initiative, was immeasurable. It was validating to see our group compare ourselves against the criticisms of Ms. Dagnasa and see that MINE and its network partners were united, clear, and professional. We were particularly proud of Ms. Shestopalova, who embraced her expertise and made herself heard as a youth activist experiencing war in Kyiv first hand.



# Polycrises & Polysolutions

The MfP&E project gave MINE and its network the unique opportunity to define a process for cultural transformation. As complex polycrises are on the rise in Europe and around the world, innovative approaches are critical to creating a socially and materially sustainable future for our children and grandchildren. The graphic below, also part of our grant proposal for our follow-up project “Courage & Care,” visualizes a virtuous cycle of transformation that is designed to turn learning spaces, like those in mother centers, into epicenters of action whose effects ripple out into their broader communities. This model emphasizes the cyclical nature of cultural change, which must happen slowly and deliberately to be sustained, as well as how polycrisis itself creates the opportunity for us to innovate polysolutions. Through authentic dialogue and mindful collaboration, MINE endeavors to bring the future to be born into the present.



# Policy Brief



Europe is undergoing a profound transformation shaped by overlapping demographic, ecological, social, and political challenges. Population ageing, declining birth rates, migration, and growing urban–rural divides are reshaping the continent’s social and economic fabric. These dynamics are compounded by a “polycrisis” — the intersection of multiple structural crises in care, housing, climate, ecology, and mental health. Our contributors from Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria, BiH, Hungary, Serbia, Slovakia, Czechia, and Bulgaria agree that these forces threaten social cohesion, strain local welfare systems, and test the resilience of municipalities across Europe.

The policy brief “Transition into a Caring Europe,” developed within the MfP&E project,, argues that Europe’s future depends on a fundamental shift in how care, inclusion, and community well-being are understood and organized. The paper translates these insights into practical recommendations for municipalities and the Danube Region Interreg Programme.

At the heart of this vision are mother centers and caring communities — grassroots, community-based spaces that nurture social connection, inclusion, and local resilience. They represent a pragmatic, place-based model of social innovation that responds directly to citizens’ needs and can be scaled across diverse European contexts. Building a “Caring Europe,” the paper contends, must begin at the local level — through collaboration between municipalities and community initiatives that bring care, dignity, and participation into the core of local governance.

Caring and inclusive local spaces such as mother centers are essential to the continuing functionality of democratic society, not the social luxury as they have been portrayed; they are part of the social infrastructure that keeps communities connected. Connection and integration do not happen by accident. Civic engagement needs spaces where everyone can participate and gather. In this uncertain time people need to know they are needed, impactful, and value-added. They need routes into community life that are practical, dignifying, and open to them whether through a shared commitment to service, or through local spaces where everyday connection can take root. We can only provide these spaces if local governments and engaged citizens work together. Our deep reflection in this policy brief will spread this grassroots knowledge throughout the Danube region.

Please see the appendices for our policy brief in its entirety.

Thank you to the Ministry of State and the Servicestelle Donauraum, for their open and deep ongoing dialogue with MINE and its network throughout the course of this project. They encouraged us to pursue innovation and open up to new and different aspects of the political and economic situation in the Danube region. The Mothers for Peace & Ecology Project would not have been possible without their availability for consultation, their time, their trust, their critical feedback, their financial support, and their willingness to collaborate with us to find new ways to bring the future we all want to be born into the present.



# Baden-Württemberg

STAATSMINISTERIUM



Mother Centers  
International  
Network for  
Empowerment

