

The Feminist
Peace Organisation

Participation

Reportage → Young people
working for change

Glossary → Participation

Commentary → Together
against violence and
discrimination

Personally → Participation for
all, without restrictions

Zoom → Participation
promotes peace

Together for Change

Social and political participation is a cornerstone of feminist peace. However, in order to be able to participate, people need time, resources and safe, non-violent spaces. This is the only way they can build trust. Such spaces are created by the Frieda projects, for example with young people in Bosnia-Herzegovina, as you can read on pages 1-3. Although participation is enshrined in the 2030 Agenda and UN Resolution 1325, it is under pressure. Find out in this newspaper how Frieda understands, lives and promotes participation.



Young People Working for Change

Young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina are facing major challenges, first and foremost the socio-economic crisis. Many are looking for a better future abroad. Of those who stay, many are struggling with mental health problems. In the «Promjena – Change» project run by Frieda partner organisation Amica Educa, young people are campaigning for equality and the destigmatisation of mental illness.

Higher prices every day and a falling employment rate mean that some families can no longer send their children to school. «It's really difficult to survive with the prices we have,» says Ivona Erdeljac Senkas, Programme Director at Amica Educa in Tuzla. The education system also poses problems for young people because it does not prepare them adequately for working life. Neither the knowledge and skills relevant to the labour market nor everyday and life skills are taught to them. The labour market is so dry that they have hardly any economic prospects.

It has now become normal for young people to consider emigrating, says Ivona Erdeljac Senkas, it just depends on the opportunities. Not an easy situation, as the young educator and psychologist Ajla Jahić, participant and volunteer in the «Promjena – Change» project, explains: «It scares me that many successful young people don't find their place in their country. And those who do find a place and a job experience great pres-

sure from society and the system, which none of us are prepared for.»

Difficult relationship between the generations

The socio-economic situation is not the only burden on young people. Another problem that is becoming more acute is gender-based violence and feminicides. Last year alone, twelve women were killed in Bosnia-Herzegovina, some of them brutally. This has shaken up society. However, the authorities refuse to write femicide into the law as a separate criminal offence and to punish it more severely. Civil society organised large street protests demanding stricter punishment for perpetrators and specific training for staff who deal with cases of gender-based violence.

Relations with parents and their generation are also often difficult. «The consequences of the war, the post-traumatic stress of the adults and the transgenerational transmission to the young people are still present,» says Ajla Jahić. Ivo-

na Erdeljac Senkas explains: «The parents don't realise how difficult it is to grow up in this country. They compare the situation with their own childhood. But they had more opportunities, there was a certain security and stability. The-

«The consequences of the war, the post-traumatic stress of the adults and the transgenerational transmission to the young people are still present.»

Ajla Jahić

re was no talk about the war, there was no trauma, no PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), less poverty and corruption all around. Today, these are normal topics. When young people try to talk about problems, parents see this as resistance to authority or the usual adolescent rebellion. Young people don't feel heard or understood.»

Parents, for their part, fight for their autonomy on a daily basis and struggle with psychological problems. They lack the energy, time and money to adequately look after their children's needs. At the same time, society tends to view young people as passive and lethargic. Adults are reluctant to allow young people to participate and make decisions. This is where the «Promjena – Change» project comes in. «Young people are very interested, they want to be involved and participate in something that they find

Cover: Young people in the «Promjena – Change» project draw attention to their concerns in public squares in Tuzla.

Photo: Imrana Kapetanović



The exercises and discussions in the workshops enable the young participants to address difficult topics such as psychological problems and violence in relationships (above).

Photo: Imrana Kapetanović

Project participant talking to a passer-by at an awareness-raising event. (left).

Photo: Imrana Kapetanović

The project participants build trust in each other in the workshops and develop a strong sense of community. (below).

Photo: Imrana Kapetanović



necessary and that can initiate positive social change.» Ivona Erdeljac Senkas was pleasantly surprised. Last year, she received 80 registrations, far more than there was room for in the workshop room. She speaks enthusiastically about the young people the project is aimed at: «They are very motivated, think critically and are open-minded. They are not so influenced by society and tradition. That's why they are good agents of change.»

Focus on mental health

However, many young people have mental health problems that they either hide or, if they talk about them, are stigmatised as a result. «The situation is really alarming» says Ivona Erdeljac Senkas, «and there is hardly any support available for those affected.» In the project, the young people attend workshops on mental health, improving life skills, non-violent communication, but also on gender equality and violence in couple relationships. The young people perceive the workshops as a place of trust and a safe space where they can talk openly but also receive support. Individual counselling is offered for those who need it. All of this strengthens the young people in their self-confidence and in overcoming challenges and making positive changes to their lives and society.

The young people value the trust and sense of community, as well as learning together. Almost all of them feel better personally, they have fewer symptoms of stress and anxiety, fewer panic attacks and have the impression that their relationships have improved. Ajla Jahić adds: «In addition to the theoretical knowledge, I have learnt to reflect on myself, recognise difficulties and react to them.» She would like to pass this on to other young people. The young people in the project are trained in this peer counselling.

Training in political education is on the programme soon. «I want them to learn how to bring about social change at city level, focussing on the needs of young people and their mental health,» explains Ivona Erdeljac Senkas. Together, they will formulate initiatives, propose solutions, collect signatures for these proposals and send them to the city administration. In this way, the young people learn step by step how they can initiate and hopefully successfully bring about change.

They also learn how to carry out successful advocacy and media work. They organise awareness-raising campaigns for gender equality and mental health in public places in the city. The young people contribute to open dialogue and peacebuilding through non-violent communication with the public and others. They become social actors who stand up for the interests of young people in their communities and thus create prospects for them.

Translated with DeepL.com



Illustration: Isabel Peterhans

GLOSSAR

PARTIZIPATION

Frieda arbeitet mit einem menschenrechtsbasierten Ansatz und versteht Partizipation als Grundrecht eines jeden Menschen. Die Partizipation von Jugendlichen, Frauen, Männern und LGBTQI+-Personen legt auf individueller, kollektiver, systemischer und struktureller Ebene einen Grundstein für sozialen Wandel.

Partizipation bedeutet, Projektteilnehmende in allen Phasen eines Projektes aktiv miteinzubeziehen. Sie organisieren sich selbst, das Projekt wird «mit» ihnen und nicht «für» sie durchgeführt. Die Teilnehmenden lernen, ihre eigenen Gestaltungsspielräume und Ressourcen wahrzunehmen und diese zu nutzen.