



BUDAPEST, 5 MAY 2025, DFD-YD/ETD (2025) 94

YOUTH IN LEADERSHIP TODAY: THE PATHWAY FORWARD

**REPORT OF THE STUDY SESSION HELD BY
WORLD STUDENT CHRISTIAN FEDERATION IN EUROPE-
WSCF-EUROPE**

**IN CO-OPERATION WITH THE
EUROPEAN YOUTH CENTRE OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

**EUROPEAN YOUTH CENTRE BUDAPEST
MARCH 3-7, 2025**

This report gives an account of various aspects of the study session. It has been produced by and is the responsibility of the educational team of the study session. It does not represent the official point of view of the Council of Europe.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) is one of the oldest faith-based youth organisations globally. As part of a global fellowship of Student Christian Movements, WSCF-Europe shares the mission of putting faith into action to advance human rights, justice, and peace. From 3 to 7 March 2025, WSCF-Europe held a study session at the European Youth Centre in Budapest. Titled “**Youth in Leadership Today: The Pathway Forward**”, the session aimed to empower young people within its member movements by strengthening leadership capacities rooted in inclusivity, equity, and social justice.

The event brought together youth leaders from across Europe and beyond **to empower young people involved in our member movements by developing their leadership skills, with a specific focus on fostering leadership approaches that champion inclusivity, equity, and the advancement of social justice for transforming communities, societies, and the world.**

To achieve this objective, participants worked to improve their self-awareness, intercultural competence, and understanding of intersectionality, while also developing strategies for effective knowledge sharing and shared decision-making within youth organisations.

Central to the programme was the creation of safer spaces for intercultural dialogue and personal reflection on leadership values and roles. Participants explored leadership not only through workshops but also as active contributors to the learning environment. Sessions emphasised intersectionality and systemic privilege as frameworks for building inclusive and impactful social justice campaigns.

Key **challenges** identified during the study session included the need for leadership to be value-driven and inclusive, the importance of incorporating intersectional perspectives, the necessity of structured knowledge transfer to ensure sustainable leadership, and the critical role of mental health support in preventing burnout. Participants also noted that youth leaders continue to face persistent stereotypes, which must be countered through intentional empowerment strategies.

Outcomes from the session include the creation of creative and practical tools to carry the learning forward, such as a podcast, mind map, social media content, and interactive resources. Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive, with expressions of gratitude and a strong sense of community and achievement.

The session contributed directly to **Priority 4 of the Council of Europe’s youth sector strategy** by supporting leadership development through non-formal education. It also aligned with Priorities 1, 2, and 3 by fostering intercultural dialogue, advancing inclusive practices, and supporting youth participation in building more just and peaceful societies.

Moving forward, WSCF-Europe has committed to sharing the insights gained through a targeted dissemination strategy. This includes engaging in intergenerational leadership discussions with the Conference of European Churches and integrating findings into global planning through WSCF’s Youth Ecumenical Leadership programme.

One direct outcome of the session was the application to the European Youth Foundation under the Special Call for Ukraine, inspired by powerful testimonies shared by participants from war-affected regions, whose stories underlined the urgent need for spaces of solidarity, healing, and mutual support among young people living through conflict. **An international activity will take place in Italy in September 2025.**



INTRODUCTION

From 3-7 March 2025, the World Student Christian Federation in Europe held a study session at the European Youth Centre in Budapest titled “**Youth in Leadership Today: the Pathway Forward**”. The study session aimed to **empower young people involved in our member movements by developing their leadership skills**, with a specific focus on fostering leadership approaches that champion inclusivity, equity, and the advancement of social justice for transforming communities, societies, and the world.

This introduction provides an overview of the topic’s relevance, outlines the event’s aims and objectives, summarises the key themes discussed and their significance to the Council of Europe, and describes the participant profile. The subsequent sections of the report present the results and conclusions of the study session, offer a detailed account of the programme, and outline the planned follow-up activities. The appendix includes the study session programme, a list of participants, links to communication activities, and links to the material developed by participants during the session.

The World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) is one of the oldest faith-based youth organisations globally.

Since 1895, it has played a vital role in promoting human rights, democratic participation, and social equity alongside thousands of young people worldwide. WSCF-Europe works closely with the global federation and other regional ecumenical bodies to empower and inspire Christian youth to become transformative agents of change in their communities and beyond.

As part of a global fellowship of Student Christian Movements, WSCF-Europe shares the mission of **putting faith into action to advance human rights, justice, and peace**. We combine our core values of love, respect, and unity with **grassroots activism and mobilisation**. All of our trainings, campaigns, and advocacy efforts are rooted in the vision of building a just, peaceful society that upholds the dignity and rights of all.

In summer 2023, WSCF-E took part in the General Assembly of the Conference of European Churches (CEC), where discussions with youth delegates highlighted the **need for support, guidance, and soft skills development to help young people advocate effectively in international spaces**. In response, WSCF held an online webinar in October 2023 titled “Youth in Leadership Today”, recognising that while young people bring broad expertise, they require further training in leadership, negotiation, and networking.



When

3-7 MARCH



Participants

19



Facilitators

5



Countries

13

At the March 2024 meeting of the European Regional Committee - our governing body - a needs assessment identified key challenges facing national Student Christian Movements: recovering from COVID-19's impact, empowering young people into diverse leadership roles, and improving communication and retention, especially of students who began university remotely.

To address these, WSCF committed to creating a platform for leaders past, present, and future to share experiences and support each other, strengthening sustainability, diversity, and representation across WSCF-E. Study sessions were therefore identified as a tool to facilitate leadership development.

* Aims and objectives

The specific objectives of this study session were therefore designed to respond to the needs identified:

1. **Enhance the collaboration between national organisations (SCMs) and WSCF-E as an umbrella organisation**, by supporting SCMs in finding their uniqueness and communicating it to build connections and collaborations.
2. **Improve young leaders' self-awareness, intercultural competence and intersectional knowledge**, through personal reflection, games, and creativity, as well as specific information and knowledge.
3. **Encourage knowledge transfer and shared decision-making**, providing an overview of critical times for knowledge sharing, and providing collaborative solutions to the challenges.

4. **Foster a sense of belonging to the organisation through heritage sharing to develop a common identity**, by not only retracing the organisation's history, but also facilitating conversations about our core values and identity as activists

The session aligned **with Priority 4 of the Council of Europe youth sector**, focusing on youth work and leadership development. It aimed to empower young leaders through non-formal education, equipping them with the skills, values, and strategies needed to strengthen and sustain their organisations. In response to challenges identified in the ERC's needs assessment and particularly the impact of COVID-19 on student engagement, the session also addressed democratic participation and leadership continuity. Additionally, it supported Priorities 1, 2, and 3 by promoting inclusive, intersectional approaches to leadership and fostering dialogue across diverse backgrounds to combat discrimination and build peaceful, cohesive societies.

* Topics and main issues discussed

The study session focused on **strengthening youth leadership while promoting intersectionality, social justice advocacy, and sustainable development within youth Christian and faith-based organisations**. Key themes included creating safer spaces for intercultural dialogue and exploring how these practices could be applied locally. Participants also reflected on their personal values and experiences in various leadership roles. Leadership values, styles, and personal development were explored not only through dedicated sessions but also through active participation, with participants contributing as co-creators, facilitators, and experts. Sessions incorporated intersectionality and systemic privilege as key frameworks for crafting impactful social justice messages.

* Participants

The participants included **19 young leaders** and activists, and **5 youth workers**, representing **9 Council of Europe countries**, as well as **3 delegates** from Lebanon, Mexico, and Zimbabwe, reflecting our global network. Most participants came from Student Christian Movements, while others were affiliated with church-based youth groups aiming to establish youth organisations aligned with our values, or were active in civil society organisations without faith-based affiliations.

The group reflected a wide range of cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds. Participants also brought varied levels of experience in leadership and activism, with some new to organised activism. While this diversity initially posed a challenge, it ultimately enriched the group dynamic by offering multiple perspectives on leadership.

All participants demonstrated a strong commitment to human rights, social justice, and democratic engagement, whether through youth organisations, religious institutions, universities, or NGOs.



Participants discussing



Participants playing icebreakers

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The main findings of the study session include a profound understanding of ideal youth leaders and the qualities that a youth leader ideally possesses. Participants openly discussed the soft and hard skills needed to lead a Student Christian Movement effectively and reflected on their own skills and attitudes. The study session clearly identified the main challenges for young people in leadership positions or considering leading a youth organisation.

Five main themes were underscored by participants:

1. Effective leadership for youth organisations needs to be value-driven, inclusive, and aware of the context and the needs of the group it represents.

While this principle reflects how young participants envisioned leadership, concrete challenges to transforming this vision into a reality were identified. Youth leadership roles are often short-term because of age limits, study schedules, career changes, the lack of structural funding for local organisations, high rates of staff and volunteer turnover, knowledge transfer and management and communication skills. Often, youth organisations suffer from insider/outsider divides and difficulty in passing down organisational history and procedures to newcomers, which can alienate or slow down leadership transitions.

2. Intersectionality must inform all youth leadership and activism work: if youth organisations want to amplify the voices of young people, they need to be aware of the different identities represented.

Youth organisations can not only talk about intersectionality, but also implement it in their structures, exploring intersectional tools and practices in their structures. Additionally, being aware of intersectionality is vital in designing and drafting social justice messages, to reach even more young people. Participants discussed how their vision was shaped by privilege and access to privilege but could also be shaped by structural circumstances in their country of childhood or development, cultural circumstances etc. Only after developing a deep understanding or being intentional in building this understanding, do we see the different elements or intersections within someone's background or identity.

3. Sustainable youth leadership requires structured knowledge transfer.

WSCF was founded in 1895 and is one of the world's oldest youth organisations. National movements have decades of experience, some are even as old as the global federation. The organisation's legacy may be a burden or an inspiration, based on how such history is passed down from generation to generation, and how the values and relationships have been shaped by previous and current leaders.

More practically, on a daily basis, youth organisations see leadership changes very often, sometimes even yearly, and frequent handovers can affect what kind of information is available to current and future leaders. While briefs, shared online tools, meetings and structured handovers are considered vital, it is the intangible knowledge and the relationship that may be lost or transformed along with the changes

4. Mental health support is vital for leadership resilience.

Whether a leader is isolated or surrounded by a large number of activists, activism can take a toll on their mental health. Participants discussed the risk of overworking, burnout, and the need to maintain personal resilience for sustainable leadership. Having tools and a community for taking care of the leader's wellbeing may also include counselling, supervision and peer support. While some highlighted that the "imposter syndrome" is always a threat, celebrating big and small accomplishments is vital to ensure that everyone, including the leader, feels valued. Activism can sometimes be used as a coping tool against uncertainty and a sense of powerlessness, a sense of life, but this coping tool could be detracting from mental health. Ensuring a balance is key, but resources (funding, time, human resources) remain scarce.

5. Youth face persistent stereotypes that must be challenged through strategic empowerment.

Overall, participants confronted biases and misconceptions which undermine not only their credibility as interlocutors, but also their capacity to enter, operate and succeed in leadership roles and decision-making spaces. They highlighted discomfort when they are lumped into one group and treated as an unidentified mass.

On several occasions, participants restated their desire to have their voices heard and agency respected, enacting changes, showing a high degree of motivation to work on social justice issues. Participants highlighted frustration with the dismissal of youth perspectives and experiences by older generations. They clearly stated that offering "engagement opportunities" is insufficient if young people's contributions are not genuinely respected and integrated into

Participants highlighted that WSCF-Europe should promote systemic intersectional thinking in all its activities and strengthen support structures to ensure the mental health of youth leaders, building on the annual project on mental health implemented in 2024.

As an umbrella organisation, WSCF-Europe should also facilitate knowledge-sharing mechanisms for national youth organisations to ensure leadership continuity and lead the way in combating youth stereotypes by stepping up its advocacy.

At the Council of Europe level, great support in facing the challenges identified would be to:

- Expand leadership development programmes that prioritise intersectionality and resilience-building.
- Support knowledge management initiatives in youth organisations, including smaller ones and informal groups.
- Improve access to platforms for cross-regional youth collaborations, such as the Learning and Networking Days organised by the EYF.
- Promote mental health awareness in youth leadership and participation strategies.
- Improve the reach of youth voices of the Youth Advisory Board beyond the youth sector and into all policy areas.





PROGRAMME INPUTS AND DISCUSSION

The 19 sessions of the programme were designed around the four objectives of the study session.

The four primary objectives of the study session included:

- Enhancing the collaboration between national organisations and WSCF-E as an umbrella organisation
- Improving young leaders' self-awareness, intercultural competencies and intersectional knowledge
- Encouraging knowledge transfer and shared decision-making
- Fostering a sense of belonging to the umbrella organisation through heritage sharing to develop a common identity

Overall, the program aimed to promote transformative and sustainable leadership practices in youth movements. The first day was devoted to setting the ground for the study session, with activities to promote inclusive group settings that participants can replicate in their context. Here, participants established a mutually respectful basis for collaboration as a framework for the study session.

Within these initial sessions, participants worked toward familiarising themselves with the objectives of the study session, the background of WSCF-E as an organisation, and building points of common understanding between each other. The foundation of these sessions sought to enhance the social cohesion and inclusiveness of the group at large and ultimately produced a common group agreement, including values and behaviours that the participants agreed to uphold throughout the week to maintain a safer space necessary for learning and dialogue.

The subsequent sessions progressed from individual perspectives on leadership to collective understanding. Building upon the foundation of a strong emphasis on personal reflection and self-awareness on day one and the initial sessions of day two, participants were invited to consider their own values, experiences, and identities in relation to leadership.

In line with this approach, participants also agreed to assume that others mean well and may just need language support to express themselves better in English.

In the afternoon, in session 3 “**Setting the ground, group agreement**”, the conversation was prompted by from the following definition of a dialogue “Dialogue is a form of communication wherein two or more people exchange thoughts, opinions, and ideas reciprocally, It is a conversation in which a flow of words and active listening is established among participants. It is important that dialogue come from a place of empathy, respect, and openness, allowing all voices to be heard and valued.”

From the definition, participants created a word cloud and then, in small groups, considered their experiences related to cultivating a safer space, respectful and inclusive dialogue, and productive leadership.

After, participants collaboratively established a set of group norms with the goal of upholding respect and fostering mutual engagement, and constructive communication throughout the duration of the study session.

Several common values and behaviours rose to the forefront including: honesty, forgiveness, but also learning from your mistakes, being attentive and committed, inclusivity, asking questions, and validation of experiences and points.

What are some elements of a productive dialogue?

48 responses



* Personal Leadership Skills and Values

The last session of day 1, **session 4**, introduced leadership as a topic.

Each participant shared their connection with the topic: current or desired leadership experience, the dominant feeling they associate with leadership, and a word or phrase that captures what leadership means to them.

The session provided participants with the opportunity to understand each other's backgrounds and experience levels, allowing for

potential future collaborations between participants and organisations.

Additionally, the session included exchanges on different approaches to leadership, experiences, and expectations.

On one hand, participants discussed that leadership can be burdensome, deterring individuals from taking on such roles. Despite this, leadership can bring a sense of fulfilment as well.



Leaders have a responsibility to be proactive and dynamic, but also to listen and foster positive communication, which requires a commitment to cultivating trust and resilience within a team.

Herein, participants emphasised how critical it is for leaders to **strike a balance between delivering on objectives and opening themselves to outside perspectives, as well as encouraging collaboration within the group.**

One participant shared their leadership quote, *“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”*

Developing respectful, constructive, and open communication as a leader is especially important in fostering peaceful and inclusive societies.



Participants pointed out that it is important to navigate advocacy and solidarity work for marginalised voices in a way that amplifies them, rather than speaking over them. Imposter syndrome was also mentioned as a challenge. This session set the stage for day two, which dove deeper into the identifiable elements of successful leadership values and skills by allowing participants to recall personal examples in their own life, but also by encouraging them to share areas where they see themselves as being able to grow.

Day two transitioned from the initial focus of establishing the groundwork with introductions and group dynamics to a deeper exploration of leadership skills and values.

As participants continued to familiarise themselves with one another and connect their personal experiences to broader struggles, the program turned toward developing the self-awareness, communication skills, and core competencies essential to transformative, effective, and sustainable leadership.

In Session 6 **“Where do I stand with my values,”** began with an interactive activity wherein participants positioned themselves across the room to demonstrate agreement or disagreement with various values-centre opinion statements. Discussion from participants following this session touched on how values can shift and change, are often highly personalised, but also how individuals may apply them differently to themselves and others.

Participants acknowledged that values are influenced by different elements, such as age, gender, cultural background, knowledge and experience levels, personal objectives and expectations, thus introducing the intersectional approach to leadership. Participants also highlighted the potential disconnect between values and behaviours, and how leadership is a practice that needs continuous adjustments.

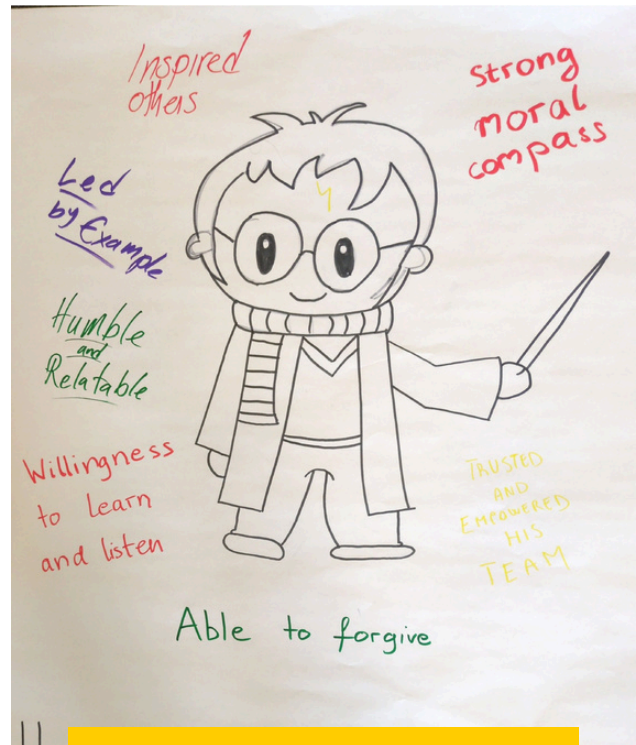
The aim of the session was to create self-awareness in participants and to lay the foundations of the following sessions.

In **Session 7, through the fishbowl method**, participants were invited to anonymously write statements about leadership, and then discuss them. Some statements proved more controversial than others, with participants exchanging conflicting perspectives throughout the interactive activity and often agreement was not reached on some statements. Nevertheless, the activity fostered critical thinking and underscored that leadership is nuanced and that there is not a one size fits all leadership style. Ultimately, the style and method of communication is sometimes dependent upon the person, group or context. An awareness of contextuality was created.

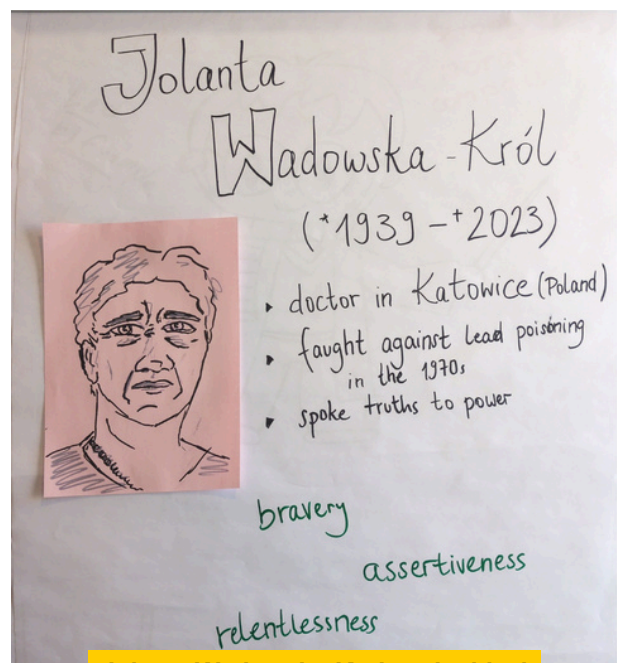
In the afternoon, session 8 **“Leadership styles and communication”** required participants to identify historical or fictional leaders and encouraged them to reflect on diverse leadership qualities and values, while also critically examining how some admired figures may not align with traditional or sustainable models of leadership.

The day ended with session 9 **“The Ideal Youth Leader”**, aimed at enhancing participants' self-awareness through a personal SWOT (Strengths - Weaknesses - Opportunities - Threats) analysis, helping them identify their personal features as leaders.

The analysis addressed these aspects in the context of internal and external factors that may either help or hinder goal achievement.



Harry Potter as an ideal leader



Jolanta Wadowska-Krol as the ideal leader



Participants continued to creatively collaborate to define the traits of an ideal leader and explored strategies to address these challenges and prevent burnout. The discussion also linked leadership development to volunteer work, highlighting the importance of motivation, balance, inner strengths and sustainability.

The session underscored the need for support structures in leadership development, particularly to prevent burnout, a theme repeatedly emphasised throughout the week. It highlighted personal resilience as a critical component of effective and sustainable leadership, which is often overlooked in traditional capacity-building approaches, especially within volunteer-driven, non-profit, and activist contexts where a culture of self-sacrifice is prevalent.

This aligns with the Council of Europe's commitment to fostering sustainable youth participation.



In **Session 15**, through “**Storytelling and Sharing Experiences**,” participants explored diverse leadership styles, organisational models, and approaches to activism. These reflections enabled them to critically assess their own leadership roles and deepen their self-awareness as activists within their respective contexts.

Statements were laid down on flipcharts and participants left comments on them. Participants confronted common biases and misconceptions about youth work, such as:

- “Volunteers don’t have a work-life-balance and are constantly stressed.”
- “Youth don’t understand policies.”
- “Gen Z is too emotional.” (Explanation of Gen Z)
- “You can only afford activism if you are rich.”
- “If you are a leader, you like power.”

They expressed the frustrations they encounter in their roles, and offered counter-narratives. They also critically examined the needs of youth workers and leaders, particularly in relation to mental health and the importance of adequate support systems. Then, through the Staffetta method, they summarised the learning into do’s and don’ts lists for youth leaders.



* Strengthening youth organisations

Day 4 was devoted to meeting the objective to foster a sense of belonging to the organisation - at the European and global level - through heritage sharing to develop a common identity, and to enhance the collaboration between national organisations and WSCF-E as an umbrella organisation.

For the first morning session we welcomed our **lecturer Saara Alamäki**, chairperson of SKY, our Finnish movement, and vice-chair person of our sister organisation EYCE (Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe). Saara presented SKY and EYCE, while our Regional Secretary presented WSCF-E. The presentations focussed on the history of the organisations, their presence in Europe, their collaboration, and their decision-making processes.

In her presentation, Saara emphasised that often membership to ecumenical organisations overlaps, and that historically some of the movements have ties due to their geographical proximity, shared goals and/or personal relationships.

Participants noted that organisational knowledge about ecumenical organisations in Europe and worldwide can often feel inaccessible, particularly for newcomers. While experienced members acknowledged the complexity, they emphasised that much of this knowledge is acquired gradually through engagement.



There was consensus on the need for clearer, more adaptable knowledge-sharing practices, as organisational structures and terminology often evolve. It was also highlighted that umbrella organisations play a vital role in connecting smaller movements and supporting capacity building, but also participation in events organised by other ecumenical bodies in Europe.

The following session **15, “Keeping History and Identity Alive; Knowledge Transfer”** was designed to improve the participants’ knowledge about the importance of fostering a well-structured knowledge management in their respective organisation to keep it well functioning and sustainable.

A presentation highlighted critical moments in a movement/organisations development wherein knowledge transfer is difficult and suffers greatly. Movements in general, but especially youth movements are confronted with the challenge to maintain their collective knowledge throughout the time. Some critical points are: on and offboarding, elections, dropout of members, lack of resources and missing organisational structures.

Participants gained key insights into knowledge management and also discussed their own experiences with how to handle knowledge transfer. It was useful to have a mixture of experienced, moderately experienced, and less experienced individuals who provided diversity in perspectives from all sides of “knowledge exchange” and onboarding.

The elements from this session were incorporated in the final session on creating concrete tools for knowledge sharing, wherein participants drafted ideas on how to transfer organisational knowledge.

In the afternoon session **16 on “Elevator pitches”**, through the method of speed dating, the participants were able to develop concrete ideas and action plans for collaborations, such as the formation of a Polish movement and other collaborations between organisations and between members within the same organisation.

Participants sat in front of each other keeping their own uniqueness, organisational identity, and support needs in mind and exchanged ideas.

It was in this session that the proposal of an international youth gathering supporting the resilience of young people from Ukraine and the Middle East in times of war was further developed.



* Taking the learning home

On Friday, **sessions 17 and 18** were devoted to producing concrete tools to share and disseminate the knowledge acquired during the study session.

The topics were grouped by participants and a creative method was chosen:

TOPIC	METHOD
Do's and don'ts of leadership	<u>Bookmark</u>
Intersectionality	<u>Podcast</u>
Knowledge transfer	<u>Mindmap</u>
Leadership styles	<u>Reel</u>
ABC of ecumenical organisations in Europe	<u>Post for Social Media</u>
Mental health	<u>Reel</u>

BECOME
A GOOD
LEADER:

LEAD BY EXAMPLE
LISTEN ACTIVELY
ENCOURAGE
GROWTH
FOSTER
COLLABORATION
STAY
ACCOUNTABLE
EMPOWER
OTHERS
COMMUNICATE
CLEARLY



Bookmark on good
leadership

* Evaluation

At the end of each day, participants joined small reflection groups, after retracing the activities of the programme, participants reflected on the daily learning process through different playful methodologies, identifying challenges and opportunities for further improvement of the programme and of the methodology and in order to reflect on the personal learning progress and acquired growth.

Friday afternoon (session 19) was devoted to the evaluation of the whole programme: a questionnaire and a creative thinking methodology were combined to support participants in reflecting on the different elements of holistic learning and their cultural, emotional, intellectual, moral, and spiritual development.

Overall, the feedback was marked by positivity, gratitude, euphoria, and joy.



Evaluation

* Prayers

As a Christian faith-based organisation, we try to provide a space to those who find motivation, inspiration, and community in prayer. Every day was kickstarted by a moment for prayer, and each day was organised by participants from different denominations and traditions, so that our ecumenical identity, as well as the Protestant, Orthodox and non-Christian traditions were represented.

On the last day, the liturgy of the Universal Day of Prayer for Students (UDPS) was adapted to the event. UDPS is one of the oldest traditions of WSCF. It is a moment when students, church leaders, and faith communities around the world come together in prayer, reaffirming our common hope in faith.

Since 1898, this ecumenical tradition has united students in different contexts, giving them space to reflect on their faith, express solidarity, and commit to action.

The theme for 2025 was “Resilience and Faith: Strength in Times of Crisis”.



Final prayer - Universal Day of Prayer for students

LINKS WITH COE PRIORITIES

Overall, the study session contributed significantly to the Council of Europe's priorities by equipping young people with the competencies, networks, and critical thinking needed to act as multipliers for human rights, democracy, and inclusion within their organisations and communities. More in detail:

* **Priority 1: Revitalising pluralistic democracy**

Overall, the study session contributed significantly to the Council of Europe's priorities by equipping young people with the competencies, networks, and critical thinking needed to act as multipliers for human rights, democracy, and inclusion within their organisations and communities. More in detail, this priority was addressed through the sessions that strengthened participants' understanding of democratic leadership, civic responsibility, and participatory practices. For example:

In Session 11: Social Justice Messaging, participants developed advocacy tools tailored to real-world issues, such as gender rights, mental health, and political activism. They learned to craft messages for different audiences, emphasising the importance of civic engagement and democratic voice.

Session 9: Ideal Youth Leader involved self-assessment through SWOT analysis, fostering awareness of personal strengths and challenges in leadership.

This built a foundation for participants to engage meaningfully in democratic processes within their organisations and communities.

Throughout the week, participants consistently discussed the need for authentic representation and agency, especially in Session Fifteen, where they challenged stereotypes about youth and demanded greater recognition of their roles in democratic life.

* **Priority 2: Young people's access to rights**

The study session placed a strong emphasis on enabling young people to understand and advocate for their rights, and for the rights of the community they represent, through an intersectional lens:

In Session 10: Diverse Identities and Intersectional Lens, participants explored how different aspects of identity (e.g., race, gender, disability, socio-economic status) intersect to shape access to rights and opportunities.

Discussions revealed how these layers of identity often determine access to power and inclusion, and what can be done to expand access to rights when in a position of power/privilege.

This session and the social justice messaging activities in Session 11 empowered participants to build campaigns that amplify marginalised voices and confront systemic discrimination.

Throughout the week, sessions also addressed mental health as a rights-based issue, especially in sessions 9 and 15, where the well-being of youth leaders was acknowledged as a prerequisite for full participation.

* **Priority 3: Living together in peaceful and inclusive societies**

Creating inclusive, respectful environments was a foundational element throughout the session, starting from Day 1, and conflict prevention, management and resolution was an embedded framework for activities.

Sessions 1 through 4 focused on building a safer space, intercultural understanding, and mutual respect. These sessions established a group agreement, reflecting values of honesty, inclusivity, empathy, and validation.

Discussions on intersectionality (session 10) reinforced the understanding that social inclusion must go beyond visible diversity to consider deeper structural inequalities.

In Session 7: Fishbowl Simulation, participants debated controversial statement on leadership styles, encouraging open dialogue around difference, and practicing listening skills that support peaceful debate, disagreement and understanding.

* **Priority 4: Youth Work**

The session had a major focus in building the capacity of youth organisations and highlighting the importance of sustainable youth work, sessions 13 and 14 addressed the historical development of youth movements and the importance of knowledge management. Participants discussed how insider knowledge can alienate newcomers and proposed strategies for effective knowledge transfer to ensure organisational resilience.

In session 17 : Building the Toolkit, participants translated the week's learning into practical outputs, creating educational and organisational tools that can be used beyond the session.

Session 16 : Elevator Pitches fostered inter-organisational collaboration and highlighted the unique strengths of different movements. The session resulted in concrete proposals, such as the creation of a Polish youth movement and a potential Ukraine–Middle East youth conference on resilience.

Mental health and wellbeing were a recurring theme and were framed as essential for sustainable activism, especially in contexts where self-sacrifice is often normalised. This reflects an urgent need for youth organisations to prioritise leader wellbeing alongside impact.



FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

Our follow up activities involve several dimensions.

WSCF-Europe will develop a **dissemination plan** to ensure that our stakeholders in civil society and in the ecumenical world are aware of the topics, challenges and opportunities discussed during the study session. For example, WSCF-Europe will join a working group coordinated by the Conference of European Churches on the consultations on the Intergenerational Fairness Strategy, bringing the perspective of young people on access to leadership, mentorship and role models.

Our global program coordinator for Youth Ecumenical Leadership participated in the study session; she will **bring the insights into the global conversation and strategic planning**, to ensure a coordinated response of WSCF as a global federation to the needs raised by young people.

Internally, we will discuss measures to support young people in taking leadership positions in national movements (SCMs) and with WSCF at the European and international level. To start, we would like to establish monthly meetings in the form of “virtual shared lunch breaks” with the staff or leadership of our national organisations to provide closer support to local activities, and discuss challenges and opportunities.

Re-establishing in-person staff and officers meetings will be our key priority. Staff and officers meetings used to be our tool to support national movements in providing a dialogue platform to collaboratively anticipate and face challenges and develop tools and strategies for the sustainability of national organisations and, therefore, of WSCF-Europe as their umbrella organisation.

After COVID-19 hit, we lost funding to support this activity, however, our fundraising efforts

are such that we anticipate good chances of being able to re-establish this practice from 2026 onwards.

Participants were encouraged to use the Whatsapp group created for the event to keep supporting each other and are encouraged to use the outputs produced to kickstart conversations at the local level. The participants from Poland have expressed their interest in forming a movement connected to WSCF-Europe in the country. As of April 2025, participants discovered that an existing Polish organisation was a member of WSCF in the past and are exploring ways to re-activate membership.

A **concrete outcome of the session** was our application to the European Youth Foundation for an international activity under the Special Call for Ukraine. During one of the sessions, participants from Ukraine and the Middle East shared powerful testimonies about the realities of living in war-affected regions. These deeply moving exchanges sparked the idea of creating a space where young people could come together, share their experiences, and find solidarity and healing through mutual support.

The idea resonated with our leadership who were present at the session and we committed to bringing this vision to life.

The **international activity was funded in May 2025 and will take place in September 2025 in Italy.**

Combined, these different actions will contribute to ensuring the sustainability of the results and the visibility of the outcomes, as well as our support to our young people in leadership positions in national movements, to ensure that WSCF-Europe can reach impact in implementing its vision across Europe, and cooperation with the Youth Department of the Council of Europe.

APPENDIX I - PROGRAMME

STUDY SESSION YOUTH IN LEADERSHIP TODAY:THE PATHWAY FORWARD

PROGRAMME
3-7 MARCH 2025
ARRIVAL: 2 MARCH
DEPARTURE : 8
MARCH

	DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5
9-9:20	Morning prayer (for those who feel comfortable)				
9:30-10:30	Welcome from the deputy director of EYCB Getting to know each other	Where do I stand with my values?	Interactive activities exploring diverse identities through intersectional lenses	Heritage and history of collaboration of youth Ecumenical Movements in Europe	Workshop: drafting intersectional social justice messages II
10:30 -11	BREAK				
11-12:30	Introduction Hopes concerns and expectations	Fishbowl simulation: Leadership styles	Workshop: drafting intersectional social justice messages I	Keeping the history and identity alive - knowledge transfer and decision-making	Building the toolkit : creative output, concrete follow up and plans for collaboration
12:30-14	LUNCH				
14-15:30	Setting the ground - group agreement	Interactive input: Leadership styles and communication		Storytelling and sharing experiences on the life of the movements	Individual evaluation and group evaluation
15:30-16	BREAK		Free afternoon: Budapest walking tour	BREAK	
16-17:30	Sharing personal experiences and connection with the topic	Group work: the ideal youth leader		Elevator pitches: finding your uniqueness and areas for collaboration	Graduation and closing prayer Universal Day of Prayer for Students
17:30-18	REFLECTION GROUPS			REFLECTION GROUPS	
19-20	DINNER				
20:30-22:00	Informal time	Intercultural evening	Free Evening	Participant-led evening	Final party

APPENDIX II - LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Country	Full Name	Organisation
Finland	Katri Malmi Usva Palola	Suomen Kristillinen Ylioppilasliitto (SKY)
Germany	Henriette Greulich Lydia Metz Eleonore Seiferth	Bundes-ESG and WSCF-E chair Bundes ESG Illustrator at WSCF-E
Italy	Anna Adamczyk Antonio Canosa Marco Panizzon	n/a FUCI FUCI
Kosovo*	Granit Sadiku Albina Avdyli	RinON
Latvia	Evelyn Plitman	n/a
Poland	Zuzanna Cebula Julia Golubiewska Oliwia Kukla Olaf Woltman	Youth group of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Poland
Sweden/Ukraine	Yulia Naidych	Reading circle "Philokalia"
Lebanon	Melissa Bridi	Regional Secretary of WSCF Middle East and Global programme coordinator for Youth Ecumenical Leadership
Mexico	Monica Treviño Alvarez	Regional Secretary of WSCF Latin America and Caribbeans and Global programme coordinator for Identity, Diversity and Dialogue
Zimbabwe	Lillian Tinotenda Muhwandavaka	Student Christian Movement Zimbabwe

*All reference to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

LECTURER

Saara Alamäki, Chairperson of Suomen Kristillinen Ylioppilasliitto (SKY) and vice-chairperson of the Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe (EYCE)

PREPARATORY TEAM

Full Name	Country	Organisation
Sarah Eulitz	Germany	BUNDES ESG and Links coordinator at WSCF Europe
Maria Mountraki	Finland	Board member - Council of European Churches
Emma Perry	Hungary	Refugee Ministry - Hungarian Reformed Church Aid
Hannah Wehner	Ireland	Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women

COURSE DIRECTOR

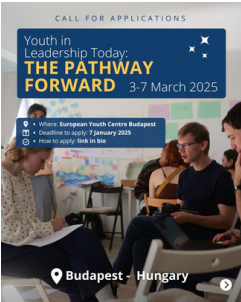

Serena Tiburtini

EDUCATIONAL ADVISOR

Nelli Gishyan



APPENDIX III - COMMUNICATIONS

Before the study session	During the study session	After the study session
<p>Application form: disseminated on our website, newsletter and social media</p>	<p>Post 1</p>	<p>Article on the website and newsletter about the event</p> <p>Article on the website with excerpts from the Podcast</p>
 	<p>Post 2</p>	<p>Reel on Leadership Reel on Mental Health</p>
	<p>Post 3</p>	<p>ABCs of Ecumenical Movements - Carousel</p>
	<p>The Instagram stories and posts published on our social media included the hashtag #coeyouth</p>	<p>Dedicated “Youth Leadership” hub on the website with all the resources produced</p>

APPENDIX IV - BOOKMARK ON DO'S AND DONT'S OF LEADERSHIP

BECOME
A GOOD
LEADER:

LEAD BY EXAMPLE

LISTEN ACTIVELY

ENCOURAGE
GROWTH

FOSTER
COLLABORATION

STAY
ACCOUNTABLE

EMPOWER
OTHERS

COMMUNICATE
CLEARLY



A BAD
LEADER:

MICROMANAGES

AVOIDS
DIFFICULT
CONVERSATIONS

PLAYS
FAVOURITES

RESISTS CHANGE

IGNORES
OTHERS
WELLBEING

IS INACCESSIBLE



APPENDIX V - ABC'S OF ECUMENICAL ORGANISATIONS

WSCF

- WSCF is an acronym for World Student Christian Federation
- Founded in 1895 by John R. Mott as an ecumenical movement
Global community of Student Christian Movements
- committed to dialogue, ecumenism, social justice and peace
- WSCF has 118 member movements in 94 countries and 6 regions



EYCE

- EYCE is an acronym for Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe
founded in 1969
- 20 member organizations
- Aim to create a dynamic, relevant, and engaging ecumenical youth platform for young Christians across Europe.



WCC

- WCC is an acronym for World Council of Churches
- Founded in 1948 as an global Christian inter-church organization
- WCC has 352 member churches in more than 110 countries
- It promotes ecumenism, with a focus on unity, justice, and peace



CEC

- CEC is an acronym for Conference of European Churches it was founded in 1959 as an Ecumenical fellowship
- CEC has 115 member churches from Orthodox, Protestant and Anglican traditions
- Committed to promoting reconciliation, dialogue, and unity among European churches and to advocating for peace and justice in society



APPENDIX VI - PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Between March 3 to March 7, WSCF-Europe

Katri: Hello, welcome to Budapest. This is the last day of the Youth in Leadership Today study session with WSCF-E in Budapest, and we have been participating in quite an intensive week. There have been a lot of topics about leadership, but the ones we're going to cover is intersectionality and communication, and we want to go through some of the insights that we have learnt during this week. Before we do that, let's introduce ourselves. My name is Kaatri I come from Finland. My pronouns are she and her.

Anna: My name is Anna. I come from Poland, and my pronouns are also she, her.

Lydia: My name is Lydia, and I'm from Germany. I am also with the pronouns she and her.

Usva: My name is Usva I come from Finland. And my pronouns are they/them.

Katri: So, the topic of communications, our group here, has been quite diverse. We don't only have Europeans; we also have people from around the world. Even in Europe, we have very different people. One thing that we have learned is that when you have a group, you can't just jump into it. You need to think about some things you need and learn strategy is how you can communicate in such a way that everybody feels safe and everybody can actually understand what you mean and have the space to talk about their experiences.

And the first thing we want to cover with Usva is safer spaces.

Usva: In WSCF events, we usually follow safer space guidelines. Safer spaces mean spaces where we try to think about everyone and their needs, recognise them, and communicate so that everybody can feel safe and it is possible to be vulnerable. And we are trying to be sensitive towards all of us.

And why do we need a safe space? Well, it kind of feels to me a bit obvious, but so, everybody can feel good within the space and that we can accomplish things together. If you don't feel good, if you don't feel safe, it is hard to make something happen and be efficient and actually do something groundbreaking, possibly.

Why do you all think we need safe spaces? Is there a need for them in your country? Is it common to have safer space principles used, maybe Anna?

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the podcast



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Anna: So, in my country, there's not much recognition around safe spaces. They aren't really considered a thing in most official situations. In student organisations or student situations; we usually make sure that everyone feels comfortable and will be able to speak up if they feel the need. But most discussions are rather aggressive and not really easy to cut into, which makes it hard, especially for young people who maybe don't feel especially secure in their position to speak up.

Usva: Safer spaces: they are for all but extremely important to marginalised people that come from different minorities, and they might need them even more. For me, this week here in Budapest has felt very, really safe. Have you all also felt that and why do you think that is? For me, one thing is that we did go through [ground rules]. We are going to follow, say, the safer space principles. We also made our programs known when we started discussing them. But what else?

Anna: I didn't feel like I belonged at the beginning of the session, mostly because I am not actually a leader. So, I felt like I was a bit standing out. But everyone—I don't know how to put it into words—but let's say that the vibe was really nice. Everyone is very welcoming, always smiling, always nice. And you feel like even if you don't have, let's say, the authority or the experience to say something, you can still speak your mind.

Lydia: I think, for me, it was very important to see how vulnerable everybody was directly from the first day. It also made it easier for me to open myself up and talk about problems. And I think this is what's made it easier for me. So, just the honesty of everybody else.

Katri: I think, on top of, you know, going through that kind of ground rules that we set for ourselves, it's also important that we have been using a lot of different methods, and we have also been discussing things in small groups and not just big ones. So, there's more trust in a small group, and you actually learn to know each other. And I think, on top of having this kind of official safer space [principle], there are also a lot of methods and ways we work together that build trust and connection to each other.

Usva: And it can also be a lot about the attitude. For example, saying that we use safer space principles might be kind of new, but of course, people have tried to do that before. It hasn't been called this, but it has just been called being nice, being welcoming. So it's not really anything new that you have to learn, but I believe everybody has, hopefully, already followed safer space principles in their life.

Usva: We have been talking a lot about leadership this week. What is a good leader? What is a bad leader? What do you think? How can we make safer space principles happen as young leaders?

Anna: That's a hard question. Well, if you are a leader, there are people depending on you. And I think that the most important thing is a close relationship with the people that trust you just so they can feel that you trust them back. And then everything should go smoothly, and everyone should feel comfortable.



Usva: Yeah, a big thing is that introducing safer space principles to your community can be the first step. And then making sure that we follow them also. And checking in with the people who might feel a bit anxious or see that they are not feeling that good and asking them what could we do to make you also feel safe?

Lydia: It's, I think very important that you just are like, open for mistakes so that they are, like, open that they can be criticized and that they, yeah, can also change things because then people may be. Yeah, like are not hiding mistakes themselves, but they can also talk like openly about it.

Usva: And the reason why we call them “safer space” principles, not the “safe space” principle, is that it is not possible to make a completely safe space for everyone. And the point is that we try and we are open to becoming better. We want to become better. We want to develop the situation, and our communities.

Katri: Well, this is a good point to continue. I think we all have a responsibility to behave in a way that it is comfortable and as safe as possible for everybody. But the leader has a specific responsibility for that. And a part of it is that the leader has a responsibility to recognise the points that might make the situation unsafe for somebody. And a lot of things are built into this, but one of them is privilege. So that's where we're going to move next. Anna, could you please share some ideas about this?

Anna: Yeah, So I think that to move on to the topic of privilege, first, we need to mention topics of intersectionality and interculturality. Those two words mean having people from different backgrounds in the simplest words possible. We here have people from different parts of the world, from different organisations. We have people that are part of a student community, people that are representing their church. Speaking of churches, we have people from a lot of different denominations. We're an ecumenical community here. And I feel like this is a good moment to ask about some interculturality examples from you all. What is an experience where you felt that there was a cultural clash that happened?

Usva: I can start. I come from Finland. We are very precise and very efficient. We will be on time. If you say the party starts at 8, people will be there at 8:00 or 8:30 at the latest. And that is not the case with many, many other countries. And here, I have learnt to have a bit more patience with other people. Trying to accept that this is the way things are. It doesn't need to always be how it has been in my country.

Katri: I have an example in WSCF-E events. We have a policy that we have vegetarian food, and this is because of climate reasons and ethical reasons. And for me, in Finland, it is very, very common. Almost all the student activities nowadays have vegetarian food; it would feel odd to serve meat in a student context. It would be something weird [to serve meat], it would feel like that. But, this is not the case for every participant here, and you can really see like some [participants] really struggle with it, and for some, it is a completely new thing.

And on the first day, I felt that it was, it is laughable. Like, you know, like, why are you having such a hard time with it? But it was a real point of learning for me. When I reflected about it, I realised that it is kind of unfair of me to laugh at it. It is really more difficult for other people. And I can't expect them to be familiar with something that, you know, is familiar for me. And I think that was good for me to realise that.

Lydia: During the week I figured out that I'm staring quite a lot. Because, for me, it's a sign of: "OK, hey, I see you, I'm listening to you, you have like all my attention." But, some people, they are feeling kind of weird, because I'm staring for maybe for 5 or 10 minutes and I even don't get it. So yeah, it's the first thing that I learned this

Anna: My cultural difference example is something that I was aware of before, but being here, I've gotten into conversations that helped me realise how big of a difference it is. I am from a Lutheran Church in Poland. We are a very, very tiny minority. Speaking to my friends from Finland, who have the opposite experience, Lutheranism is the main religion. And just talking about how we are technically parts of the same community, but our experiences are so drastically different, really opened my eyes to how differently I can perceive my own religion.

Anna: Now, this is a good time to talk about privilege. It's privilege, and the lack of it is very connected to our backgrounds and where we live, how we were brought up. The most important part, while being in a multicultural setting, is to acknowledge everyone's experience. The exchange of realities is something that's—I cannot stress enough about how important it is to just listen to what other people are saying. Even if, for example, there's someone from the Global South and you're a European, and you feel maybe in your comparison your struggles are not comparable to the struggles of people from a different setting, that is not true.

You are still valid. Everything you experience is still something that is in your heart. But you need to be aware of your privilege, of the fact that you might be. You may have it a bit easier in some ways, but you know, you need to be able to communicate what you're talking about. And I think communication is the very first and the most important step when being in an intersectional, intercultural situation. We need to talk and listen to everyone.

Usva: I could share an example about intersectionality. Even though I am from the Global North Europe, Finland, a very wealthy country, still in my country, I belong to different minorities, several different minorities. So, even though I am technically very privileged, there are also challenges that I face within my country and also globally. And it is very interesting to kind of see what everyone's experiences are and how these things can be so drastically different in other countries: what is acceptable, what is not.

Anna: My example is a bit different. I am a cultural studies major. That's what I do in university. Being here, I've heard a story from a person where they were putting down their culture, and in a way, they were comparing themselves to the European standard, and they were being very harsh on their heritage. And my initial reaction was, no, don't do that. It's your culture; it's beautiful; don't put it down. But then I reflected, and I realised, OK, yeah, they are putting down their culture, but also, they are the ones living in it. They are the ones that are experiencing this. They know better than me if that's something that deserves critique. So, after that comment and discussion, I apologised for just intruding and telling them how to feel about their own experience because that's something you shouldn't do.

So, an example of bad communication, the good thing is it got resolved. Everything's all at peace because we respect each other, and that's the most important thing. And also reflect on your privilege because I was in a very privileged position in that situation. I just made some assumptions which I shouldn't have done.

Kaatri: Thank you for sharing also a vulnerable moment of your own experience.

Anna: I just wanted to say that it's important to also be able to critique yourself.

Kaatri: Well, that also takes some courage, I think. We don't want to be stuck only on the differences we may have. If we only focus on that, then we will never be able to build a community. So, it is equally important to talk about how we can overcome the different situations where we come from. And Lydia has something to share about that.

Lydia: I cover many differences throughout the whole week inside the groups. For example, language barriers and also cultural differences. We had different upbringings and different childhoods that we actually also talked about. And still, I think we managed to grow together as a group and also became friends. And there were many moments during this week when we were like just one unit just laughed about some, yeah, maybe some stupid joke, but we also have some inside jokes now after this week.

I think these moments they're really beautiful for me. I kind of asked myself, how can you overcome these differences so quickly and so easily? And I think the first thing that was said before is that you have to keep in mind that they are like differences. Every individual in the room has their background and their own story. So, the first thing is to acknowledge these differences and these experiences. The second step is to get through these differences and understand each other. So, you get the other person, and then you can connect maybe on values from the same values or the personality you are.

So, I want to know from you all which commonalities you discovered throughout the week inside the group?

Anna: I feel like even though there is a bit of a cultural language barrier, I mean, we still managed to get along. I don't think this was done intentionally, but one of the first things I noticed on my first day was that we were kind of all paired up in the sense no one was alone, [in the sense that] speaking a language that no one else in the room would know.

Most people had another native or really good speaker of the language. It just so happened that I speak both Polish and Italian. And some of the people who struggled with English, I also speak those languages. So, I was able to help them overcome the language barrier, which just felt like a very coming-together moment. We truly are not that different. Even if you have a tiny problem with communicating, communicating how you wish you could without any troubles, there's always someone that can help you with it. And we also have resources. We live in the age of Internet. Everyone has a cell phone. So, common ground is very easy to achieve.

Usva: And I think when it comes to overcoming differences, a lot is about reflecting and wanting to do better.



Not as heavy of example: I've noticed that music brings people together. People dancing, even though they might not listen to the same type of music. When you have music in the background, people are just like, more easy-going, happier. You can vibe to it together, have a little laugh and dance moves. I've noticed that those common experiences are very important and can be very heartwarming.

Katri: Also, for me, maybe the most striking thing was the kind of commitment everybody has to similar values and goals. In our different contexts, I think everybody wants to strive for justice and equality and all those things. And it was kind of shared a very strong feeling of, you know, commitment both explicitly talked about and also something that comes through [actions]. Even though people might approach some things from a little bit different angle and have a little bit different questions, maybe different things are kind of relevant to them. But still, there's the will to strive for a more just society. And that is something that brings us together, I think.



Usva: And actually, that reminds me of our common agreement that we signed at the start of the week. We came up with it together, set ground rules and everything. Those also included forgiving, trying to improve yourself, and trying to communicate as clearly as possible. So, I think that's a good example of committing to things.

Anna: Regarding the agreement, my favourite part was the assumption of no ill intent. That was very important.

Lydia: Maybe I can summarise. I think for me it was very inspiring to see every single person in the room because I think there's so much potential and creativity. I mean, we worked through many, many topics and tasks this week. And I think everybody was involved and very passionate about it. So, I think this makes me also passionate about the topic. And also, seeing so many young leaders, I think this is what I'm going to take home, even though I'm going to miss the people. But I think we can still stay in contact back through social media and everything. But that's what was very hopeful for me.

Usva: It's very encouraging to see other people doing stuff, being so passionate, and saying that there is hope, that there is a community that can support you, and that it is possible to create such tight communities within a week or even five days. It's very inspiring.

Katri: I think passion is a wonderful word to close. I think [the audience] can feel the energy and inspiration and passion and that this learning has brought this group and also the whole bigger group. Continuing in that, I would encourage you to also learn, learn about these topics and find inspiration about how we can grow closer together and overcome differences in a way that doesn't just bypass them. I would definitely recommend applying for the coming WSCF-E study sessions. I think you would all agree, but there are also a lot of other opportunities, and I really encourage you to look for them. Thank you.



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