

Reflections: “Strengthening Collaboration for Youth Mental Health, Safeguarding, and Gender Equality”

Date: 21 – 24 October 2025

Place: Riga, Latvia



The Center for Innovation and Development INOS had the opportunity to participate in the Partnership Building Activity (PBA) “Strengthening Collaboration for Youth Mental Health, Safeguarding, and Gender Equality”, organized by 35 Above (Youth NGO) and Academy of Experience (Hungary). This PBA offered a unique platform for INOS to engage with experienced youth organizations from across Europe, explore innovative practices, and build networks for future collaboration.

For INOS, this was an especially valuable experience as a newcomer to large-scale international partnership activities. From the very first day, the energy, motivation, and wealth of experience shared by other participants were inspiring. Engaging with peers who had successfully implemented youth projects gave us concrete examples of what is possible and encouraged us to think more ambitiously about our own work.

Throughout the PBA, INOS actively participated in a variety of activities. Interactive workshops provided practical insights into safeguarding, youth mental health, and gender equality. We were able to share experiences from our regional projects in North Macedonia and discuss challenges specific to the Western Balkans context. The networking sessions were particularly enriching, offering a space to meet potential partners, exchange ideas, and explore opportunities for joint projects. Collaborating in small groups to brainstorm project concepts allowed us to apply the methods and frameworks presented during the sessions in a hands-on way.





One of the most valuable outcomes of the PBA was the exposure to practical tools and methodologies that we can now adapt to our regional context. The trainers were instrumental in guiding us through the process, offering feedback, and ensuring that even newcomers felt supported. Their expertise and facilitation helped transform complex concepts into actionable strategies that can be applied in INOS's future youth initiatives.

Of course, as with any intensive training, there were challenges. Initially, it was a bit overwhelming to keep up with the fast pace of discussions and the diversity of participants' experiences. Additionally, while the thematic focus was broad and enriching, time constraints made it difficult to explore each topic in full depth. Nevertheless, these challenges became learning opportunities, helping us better understand how to navigate international youth partnerships and project design processes.

Looking ahead, INOS sees several ways to build on this experience. We plan to follow up with organizations met during the PBA to explore joint projects, integrate safeguarding and gender equality frameworks into our ongoing youth programs, and strengthen our internal capacity by sharing the knowledge gained with our team. We also hope that future PBAs will consider incorporating more hands-on project development sessions and follow-up mechanisms to maintain momentum and maximize collaboration opportunities.

Overall, participation in this PBA was a highly enriching experience for INOS. It provided inspiration, practical knowledge, and valuable connections that will contribute to the development of more innovative, inclusive, and impactful youth projects in North Macedonia and the wider region.