

# NGO LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP BRATISLAVA

MARKING  
**10 YEARS**  
OF EMPOWERING  
NGO LEADERS

MAY  
26—30  
2025

## FINAL REPORT

# NGO LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP BRATISLAVA

MAY 26—30, 2025

In May 2025, civil society leaders from 11 countries across Central and Eastern Europe came together in Bratislava, Slovakia for the 14<sup>th</sup> NGO Leadership Workshop — a special edition marking the program’s 10-year anniversary.

Throughout a dynamic, immersive week, participants engaged in impactful training designed to help them lead more effectively in increasingly complex and high-pressure environments. At a time when civic space is shrinking and democratic values are under pressure, the need for resilient, well-connected NGO leadership has never been more critical.

Participants represented organizations working in human rights, the rule of law, and democracy building. Sessions addressed urgent leadership challenges such as navigating change, building resilient teams, making strategic decisions under pressure, managing stress, and motivating employees.

Some of the most powerful moments took place beyond the classroom sessions — over shared meals, in informal evening conversations, and during our off-site retreat to the nearby Slovak countryside. Participants forged cross-border relationships and laid the groundwork for continued cooperation and support. The NGO Leadership Workshop is now 350 alumni strong!

As we mark this 10-year milestone, we are deeply grateful for the vision and support of Ronald Weiser, former U.S. Ambassador to Slovakia and University of Michigan Regent emeritus. Ambassador Weiser’s commitment to civil society and democratic values has made these workshops possible from the beginning. His belief in the importance of a strong and vibrant civil society continues to inspire and sustain this growing network.

## **PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS**

The NGO Leadership Workshops are sponsored by the University of Michigan's Weiser Center for Europe and Eurasia (WCEE), in partnership with the William Davidson Institute (WDI) at the University of Michigan. The workshops are organized in partnership with the Slovak-based NGO Hekima, which supports civil society change-makers and activists, and addresses gender-specific issues through entrepreneurship and education.



## **ABOUT OUR PARTICIPANTS**

The participants were selected through an invitation process and attended at no charge. They represented the following organizations:

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| ● <b>Anti-Corruption Fund Foundation</b>   | ● <b>Kharkiv Institute for Social Research (KhISR)</b> |
| ● <b>Association for the Defence of Human Rights in Romania – the Helsinki Committee (APADOR-CH)</b> | ● <b>Macedonian Young Lawyers Association</b>          |
| ● <b>Atlatszo</b>  | ● <b>Metamorphosis Foundation</b>                      |
| ● <b>Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, Kosovo</b>  | ● <b>Open Society Foundation, Slovakia</b>             |
| ● <b>Belgrade Centre for Human Rights</b>  | ● <b>Partners for Democratic Change Serbia</b>         |
| ● <b>Bulgarian Helsinki Committee</b>  | ● <b>Razumkov Centre</b>                               |
| ● <b>Center for Democracy and Human Rights (CEDEM)</b>   | ● <b>Rule of Law Institute</b>                         |
| ● <b>Centre of Policy and Legal Reform</b>   | ● <b>Stefan Batory Foundation</b>                      |
| ● <b>Institute for Democracy and Mediation</b>   | ● <b>Stop Corruption Foundation</b>                    |
| ● <b>Institute of Peace and Common Ground</b>  | ● <b>The Reanimation Package of Reforms Coalition</b>  |
| ● <b>Investigative Center of Jan Kuciak</b>  | ● <b>Transparency International Hungary</b>            |
|  | ● <b>Youth Initiative for Human Rights</b>             |
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CONTENT

DAY  
1

## RESILIENT LEADERSHIP: STRATEGIES FOR STABILITY AND MOTIVATION IN NGOs

**INSTRUCTOR:** Julie Felker, (William Davidson Institute, University of Michigan, USA)

This session focused on equipping NGO leaders with the tools to lead through uncertainty, build trust, sustain motivation, and empower teams. Through discussions and hands-on exercises, participants developed leadership strategies for maintaining stability during difficult times.

### SELECT FEEDBACK:

- *Super useful!*
- *I'm going to organize a presentation with senior management to share what I've learned in these sessions.*
- *Julie is a perfect instructor. It was a pleasure to listen to her.*





DAY  
2

## BUILDING PERSONAL SUSTAINABILITY & RESILIENCE IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD

**INSTRUCTOR:** Olivia Hurbanová (HighBröws, Slovakia)

This session explored how leaders can develop personal sustainability and emotional agility. Participants gained insights into how stress and uncertainty affect leadership performance and learned practical strategies for maintaining focus, resilience, and well-being.

### SELECT FEEDBACK:

- *Very much needed in different contexts. This kind of knowledge and awareness cannot be easily gained.*
- *It was interesting, emotional, and inspiring.*
- *The case studies and games were on point!*



DAY  
3

## ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP: NAVIGATING CHANGE IN NGO MANAGEMENT

**INSTRUCTOR:** Frank C. Schultz (University of California, Berkeley, USA)

This session introduced the concept of adaptive leadership and explored tools NGO leaders can use to help their organizations respond effectively to ongoing change. Participants assessed their leadership styles and considered how to adapt to shifting internal and external conditions.





DAY  
4

## MASTERING DECISION MAKING: ENHANCING NGO IMPACT IN DYNAMIC ENVIRONMENTS

**INSTRUCTOR:** Frank C. Schultz (University of California, Berkeley, USA)

This session focused on making strategic decisions under pressure. Participants examined decision-making frameworks, reflected on their own leadership tendencies, and learned how to create cultures that support thoughtful, mission-driven decision making.

### SELECT FEEDBACK:

- ... Very empathetic and charismatic lecturer!
- ... Well organized and insightful.
- ... The module is just perfect.
- ... The sessions helped me reevaluate my own capabilities and limitations.



DAY

**4**

**SPECIAL SESSION**

# UNLOCKING OPPORTUNITIES: EU COMMISSION FUNDING FOR NGOS

Representatives from the European Commission shared an overview of funding programs available to NGOs. Participants learned how to access EU support and align their work with funding priorities.



**ONLINE LEARNING**

Online learning modules dedicated to the following topics were offered on ExtendEd, the program's online learning management system. Participants will retain access to this elearning content for one year:

**Conflict  
Resolution  
in Leadership**

**Social Media  
Marketing**

**Marketing  
Strategy**

**Communication**

**Leadership**





**INSTRUCTORS****Julie Felker**

is a Faculty Affiliate at the William Davidson Institute at the University of Michigan. She develops and delivers management education and provides organizational development capacity-building expertise in transition and emerging economies to strengthen educational and economic infrastructures and promote positive social change. She has worked on a variety of projects around the world, including in Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, the Philippines, Algeria, and Bahrain.

**Olivia Hurbanová**

is the founder of HighBröws, a leadership and change management consultancy based in Slovakia. She is a positive skeptic, lecturer, and author of the “Future Skills” concept. She teaches in Slovakia and internationally, blending hard science with soft skills to better understand human behavior. Her clients include IBM, Lenovo, Dell, Swiss Re, Allianz, PwC, O2, and Henkel.

**Frank C. Schultz**

is a Faculty Member and Distinguished Teaching Fellow at the Haas School of Business, University of California, Berkeley, and a Faculty Affiliate with the William Davidson Institute at the University of Michigan. He teaches courses on strategy and leadership and has served as Faculty Director of Berkeley’s Center for Teaching Excellence and International Business Development program. A former MBA instructor at the University of Michigan, he has taught around the world, including in Japan, India, Saudi Arabia, China, Brazil, and across Europe.

## WORKSHOP OUTCOMES

In line with the goals of the workshop, the participants:

- ✓ Gained effective leadership strategies for guiding teams through instability, focusing on trust-building, motivation, and communication
- ✓ Developed the ability to manage stress, maintain focus during challenges, and enhance personal well-being to improve leadership effectiveness
- ✓ Acquired the skills and tools needed to adapt their strategies and leadership styles to the dynamics of challenging environments
- ✓ Refined their decision-making abilities to make crucial, long-term choices that steer their organizations toward sustainability and greater societal impact
- ✓ Learned how to cultivate an organizational culture that embraces and drives change, enhancing adaptability and innovation
- ✓ Gained practical knowledge about EU funding mechanisms for NGOs
- ✓ Expanded their regional networks and cross-border collaboration opportunities

## WHAT PARTICIPANTS SAID

*"The workshop meets a very important need. NGOs should be professionalized in order to be sustainable and impactful in the long run."*

...

*"The workshop effectively fostered a spirit of resilience, learning, and collaboration among CSO leaders!"*

...

*"The workshop offers a valuable space for peer exchange and an opportunity to learn from and speak with high-profile trainers."*

*"I have upgraded my skills and abilities and now understand what changes I need to introduce in my NGO."*

...

*"Excellent for networking."*

...

*"The workshop served as a safe space to learn, ask questions, and share the challenges I face in my organization."*

...

**WHAT THE ORGANIZERS SAID**

*The Weiser Center for Europe and Eurasia is proud to partner with the William Davidson Institute and Hekima to host NGO leaders from Central, Eastern and Southeast Europe during this critical period for civil society and democracy in the region and at home. It was a privilege to meet and support these inspiring leaders who advance the cause of democracy, often under adversarial circumstances, and I trust this workshop will leave them better equipped to continue this vital work.*

**—Geneviève Zubrzycki, WCEE Director**



*It's so rewarding to see how far this network has come since we began in 2015. We regularly hear from past participants who tell us how valuable the connections and skills gained through the workshop have been to their professional growth. At a time when civil society is under increasing pressure—and when the essential work of defending human rights, democratic values, and civil liberties is being challenged—these leaders are more vital than ever. Their courage, dedication and impact are what keep us going!*

**—Amy Gillett, WDI Academy**

*At Hekima, we work every day with young people who lead with heart and purpose to bring positive change to their communities and countries. Partnering on the NGO Leadership Workshops allows us to extend this mission to experienced civil society leaders from Central and Eastern Europe who carry the long-term weight of social change, often quietly and under pressure. The workshops offer rare and necessary space for them to pause, reflect, exchange ideas, and build strength through connection. They remind us that the future of democracy in our region depends on leaders who are deeply rooted in their communities, open to collaboration, and equipped to lead with clarity and resilience.*

**—Ivana Uličná, Hekima CEO & Founder**





## **NETWORKING & ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT**

Participants joined the NGO Leadership Workshop alumni network, connecting them to over 325 civil society leaders across the region. They also gained continued access to online learning modules via the ExtendEd platform and remain connected through informal WhatsApp and Facebook groups.



## **FUTURE PLANS**

We plan to continue offering the NGO Leadership Workshop in 2025 and beyond, with an upcoming workshop to be held in Warsaw, Poland, in October 2025.

### **HOW TO GET INVOLVED**



The NGO Leadership Workshop is offered by invitation only. If you are an NGO leader interested in being considered for a future workshop, please contact **Ivana Uličná** at [ivana.ulicna@hekima.sk](mailto:ivana.ulicna@hekima.sk)



We also welcome interest from **sponsors** who want to support civil society leadership across the region. To learn more about partnership opportunities, contact **Amy Gillett** at [gilletta@umich.edu](mailto:gilletta@umich.edu)



