

**Official justification for awarding the 2026 Max van der Stoel Award
to the non-governmental organization Education for the 21st Century from Serbia**

The Jury of the Max van der Stoel Award has decided to honour Education for the 21st Century with the 2026 Max van der Stoel Award in recognition of its work to promote tolerance, inclusion and respect for diversity through education.

Since 2011, Education for the 21st Century, led by its founder and director, Lidija Županić Šuica, has helped young people in Serbia and across the Western Balkans to understand the complexity of identity in a multicultural society, and how that is reflected in historical narratives and memory. The Belgrade-based organization is dedicated to modernizing education in a way that raises the visibility of national minorities, promotes inclusive historical narratives and supports social cohesion across the region.

Through its efforts to create opportunities for representation, inclusion and equal participation in educational and cultural initiatives, Education for the 21st Century improves the position of national minorities. It builds on connections between different communities and strengthens regional co-operation to address national minority issues. The organization has developed recommendations on deconstructing stereotypes in education, culture and the media. It has contributed to a museum project that provides structured teaching materials, workshops and public programmes that support teachers, students and young people from Serbia and the region in engaging critically with the legacy of the conflicts in the 1990s. It has also created on-site and classroom teaching resources about public memorials, particularly those related to minority communities.

Education for the 21st Century uses history education and cultural heritage as tools to support societal change in the region. It promotes the development of critical thinking skills with regard to historical narratives and minority groups, and utilizes intercultural understanding as a way of connecting communities with diverse historical experiences and identities. By creating spaces for exchange, collaborative learning and dialogue on shared histories and contemporary social challenges, the organization supports mutual trust among young people, educators and local partners, and thereby contributes towards the resolution of outstanding issues in post-conflict societies.

Director Županić Šuica has authored scholarly contributions and practical educational resources that promote inclusion, highlight the contributions of national minorities and challenge preconceptions in school curricula. She is a co-author of the *Manual for Teachers of Civic Education in High School* (2020), which was also supported by the OSCE Mission to Serbia.

For these reasons, the Jury has unanimously awarded Education for the 21st Century with the 2026 Max van der Stoel Award.

