Youth Agency for the Advocacy of Roma Culture «ARCA»





Foreword by the Director



The Youth Agency for the Advocacy of Roma Culture ARCA is committed to ensuring that the voice of the Roma community in Ukraine is heard. At the core of our mission is the protection of Roma rights, the preservation of cultural identity, and the pursuit of historical justice.

The years 2017-2021 were marked by persistent daily work — from documenting personal stories and developing local initiatives to implementing advocacy strategies, educational campaigns, and cultural projects that reshape public perception of Roma communities. We strive to build a society where every individual, regardless of origin, feels equal, dignified, and protected in their own country.

This consolidated report brings together the key achievements of our work over five years — the projects we've implemented, the partnerships we've built, and the stories of change and the people behind them. It is through this collective effort that we continue to move step by step toward a society where diversity is a strength — not a reason for bias.

Sincerely, Volodymyr Yakovenko



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Artistic Activism



Kyiv April 2, 2017

Roma youth from across Ukraine came together to explore their identities, the challenges they face in everyday life — both within and outside their communities.

For the first time in Ukraine, Roma youth were introduced to the method of playback theatre. This experience laid the groundwork for future collaboration and joint projects with the Kyiv-based playback theatre Timeless.



Exploring Roma Culture

Kremenchuk, Kyiv 2017

A series of art-based educational workshops were held to challenge stereotypes surrounding Roma history and culture.

During these events, participants of both Roma and non-Roma backgrounds had the opportunity to engage with experts, Roma activists, and artists to discuss some of the most pressing and relevant issues. These included topics such as historical origins, gender inequality, language, education, and employment.

Participants also explored these themes through creative methods and artistic techniques.







Evenings of Roma Poetry

Kyiv November 2017

Meetings with Roma Poets and Literary Readings November 5 marks the International Day of the Roma Language. To this day, Roma people still have limited access to literary works in their native tongue.

That's why we organized a series of Roma literary events. Young participants had the opportunity to discover literary publications in the Romani language, listen to poetry performed by Roma authors, and engage in conversations about their creative work and personal journeys.







Roma Resistance Day

Kyiv, Lviv April 2018

How can young Roma people learn about their own history when it's not included in school textbooks or featured in the media? The lack of knowledge about key historical events in the Roma people's past contributes to the stereotype of eternal victimhood.

On May 16 — International Roma
Resistance Day — we set out to break
the cycle of silence by organizing a
flash mob. Roma youth posted photos
using a common hashtag and shared
the story of the night of May 16, 1944,
when all Roma prisoners at AuschwitzBirkenau rose up in a desperate
attempt to resist extermination and
save their lives.





#Save_Roma_in_Ukraine

Kyiv, Kraków July 2018

In 2018, Ukraine was shaken by a wave of far-right attacks on Roma settlements. These assaults left many injured, destroyed makeshift homes and belongings, and led to the deaths of two individuals. The violence was accompanied by intense online debates and a surge in hate speech and public hostility.

In such a climate, unity and solidarity — both national and international — became more crucial than ever. Together with a group of Roma youth, we created an art installation to draw public attention to the crisis. The centerpiece was a map of Ukraine filled with eyes — each reflecting the horrors experienced by the Roma community. Participants added personal messages expressing their emotions and reactions to the violence.

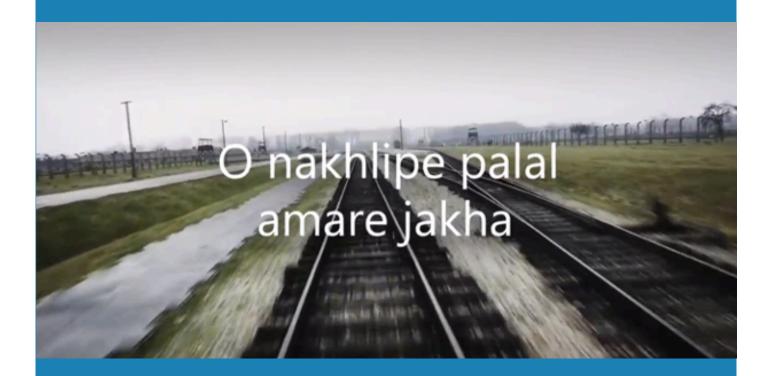
Yellow ribbons listed every known attack on Roma settlements. The posters were exhibited at various events, including the international project Dikh he na Bister / Look and Don't Forget in Poland. Visitors were encouraged to learn more about the attacks, leave messages of support for Roma communities in Ukraine, and spread awareness by taking photos and sharing them on social media using the hashtag #save_roma_in_ua.







«O nakhlipe palal amare jakha / Before Our Eyes»



Kyiv, Kraków July 2019

The struggle for the right to remembrance has become a central theme in the development of the international Roma civil movement. Volunteers from our organization created a short documentary film titled O nakhlipe palal amare jakha / Before Our Eyes, which explores international practices of commemorating the victims of the Roma genocide. The film is based on photographs and videos taken during a visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp.



Through My Mind to You Eyes

As part of the project, we conducted a study that was published as a brochure and developed an exhibition grounded in the testimonies of Roma genocide survivors.

Our goal was to restore the historical faces of Roma children and families who fell victim to the Nazi regime's mass extermination policies during World War II. This approach allowed us to look at the history of the genocide from a different perspective and learn about aspects not reflected in official records.

During the exhibition presentations, we organized trainings based on the materials and held discussions with youth about the importance of preserving historical memory and its role in combating contemporary discrimination.







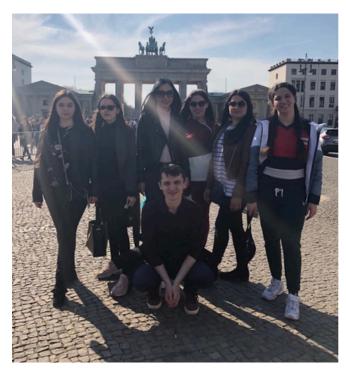
Know. Act. Change!

Berlin April 2019

How can theatre be used to combat stereotypes? Which is harder to overcome — external discrimination or internalized prejudice within the group? How can young Roma advocate for their rights?

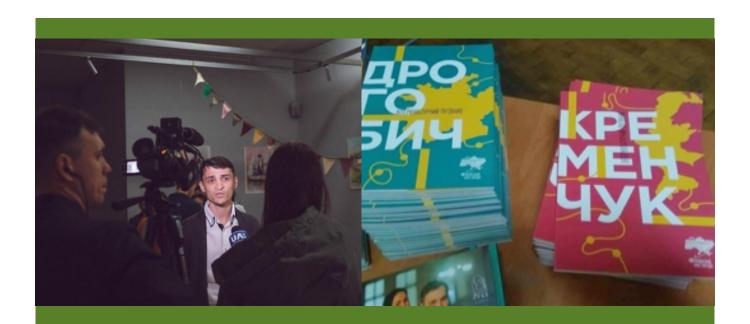
We explored these questions and more during an educational project as part of the Meet Up program. Over several days, a joint Ukrainian-German group of participants worked on developing a theatrical performance, which was later staged at the Maxim Gorki Theater in Berlin. Ukrainian Roma youth also joined a parade celebrating International Roma Day on April 8.







Ukrainian Bouquet of Nations



Supported by the Ukrainian Cultural Foundation Implemented in partnership with NGO STAN 2019

Nearly every city in Ukraine is home to representatives of diverse ethnic and national communities. This project aimed to help local residents discover new cultures, fostering unity among unique social and ethnic groups. Its objectives included promoting cultural diversity, overcoming community-level stereotypes, and ensuring respect for the cultural rights of all citizens and communities.



Dikh Na Bister. UA

Supported by the Roma Program of the International Renaissance Foundation

Kyiv, 2018–2019

A three-day seminar for Roma youth was held to raise awareness about the history of the Roma genocide and draw parallels between historical events and the current situation of Roma communities in various European countries.

After the seminar, participants joined the international Roma genocide remembrance initiative Dikh he Na Bister in Kraków.





Opre Roma! Listen to Be Heard

Supported by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation in Ukraine Kremenchuk, Kherson, Kyiv — 2019

Dnipro, Kremenchuk — 2020

We organized a series of empowerment trainings for Roma youth. The project focused on strengthening their capacity to participate in public life, represent their communities and culture, advocate for their rights, and formulate political messages. It also aimed to build understanding of how to engage in decision-making processes and influence policy within Roma communities in Ukraine.



Time to Remember

Supported by the Council of Europe and the Roma Program of the International Renaissance Foundation

Kyiv

September 27-29, 2019

This educational and memorial event brought together 50 young Roma and non-Roma from across Ukraine and Europe on the eve of the Babyn Yar Remembrance Day.

The initiative aimed to restore national historical memory of the Roma victims of Babyn Yar and other mass killing sites in Ukraine. It also sought to raise awareness among young Europeans, civil society actors, and decision-makers about the Roma genocide, its local specifics, and the mechanisms of antigypsyism amid the rise of racism, hate speech, and extremism across Europe.



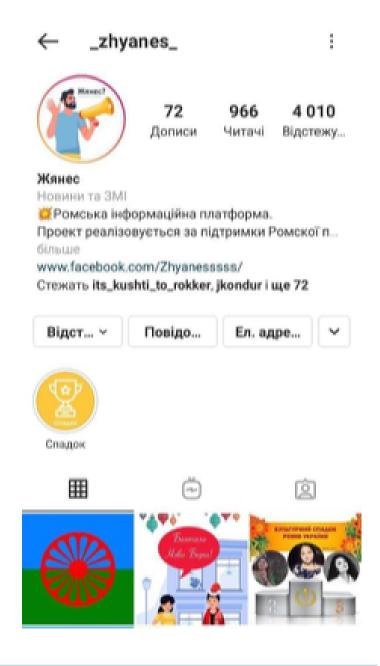


Djanes? Information Platform

Initiated by the Roma
Program of the
International Renaissance
Foundation
2020

The Roma information platform Djanes? was launched as a six-month pilot project. Through six thematic sections, it spotlighted prominent Roma figures, Roma-related news, human rights issues, the Romani language, lesser-known facts from Roma history, and efforts to preserve Roma heritage.

In April of that year, the project received confirmation of expansion thanks to the support of the European Youth Foundation, paving the way for broader reach and deeper impact.





"Djanes?": Roma Media Lab

Supported by the European Youth Foundation Odesa, Okhtyrka and Online

This initiative quickly gained traction, resonating with both Roma and non-Roma audiences. Its success confirmed our belief in the urgent need for a full-fledged information platform—one that involves professional journalists and experts while also offering young Roma the opportunity to train and gain hands-on experience in media communications.

The project's core idea included preparatory training for Roma and non-Roma youth, along with the actual creation, development, and operation of a Roma media platform.





Roma Heritage Preservation Initiative



2020

Launched as a flashmob, this initiative aimed to document and preserve both the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the Roma community. Participants were invited to define for themselves what they considered most valuable in their families and what constitutes Roma heritage.



Analytical Study on the Situation and Needs of Roma Youth in Ukraine

Supported by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation in Ukraine Ukraine 2021

This project aimed to analyze the situation of Roma youth in Ukraine, identify instances of discrimination, abuse, or mismanagement, assess legislative gaps, and review the practices of state bodies and civil society institutions in relation to young members of the Roma minority. It also sought to reflect the conditions within Roma communities.

Based on the findings, recommendations will be developed for government bodies and civil society organizations to help improve the situation of Roma youth and foster more effective integration of the Roma minority into Ukrainian society at large.



Sastipe: Challenging Prejudice

2020-2021

An international educational initiative for youth, implemented by three organizations: the Youth Agency for the Advocacy of Roma Culture - ARCA (Ukraine), Denk Global (Germany), and Palikerav (Slovakia).

The project initially envisioned an in-person gathering in Budapest for youth from Germany, Slovakia, and Ukraine to meet, confront stereotypes, and explore key aspects of Roma history and culture. However, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted these plans, requiring several revisions. Ultimately, the training took place online.

From August 20–22, fifteen young participants explored the history of the Roma genocide, learned about the current situation of Roma communities in Europe, and developed creative storytelling approaches to share experiences and personal narratives.

The most active participants were selected to travel to Heidelberg to visit the Documentation and Cultural Center of German Sinti and Roma.



Sterebreakers: Educational and Artistic Initiative

Supported by the "Strengthening Cross-Sectoral Collaboration for Social Cohesion (SC3)" Project, co-financed by the European Union and the British Council in Ukraine, as well as the Roma Program of the International Renaissance Foundation

August 6-8, 2021

We meet each other almost every day, yet too often fail to truly see the human being behind the labels. Prejudice stands in the way of dialogue and prevents us from discovering ourselves through conversations with the "other."

As part of the Stereobreakers project, young people engaged with the Roma community, explored shared experiences, and sought out meaningful stories and strategies to challenge stereotypes.

Coming from different backgrounds and perspectives, we searched for a common language and reflected on how to bring together three seemingly unrelated themes: the city, youth, and Roma...

Over the course of three days, we worked with the urban space—its voices, experiences, and stories. We spoke with residents and visitors, recorded interviews, and later shared our creative work and reflections through a final performance event, consisting of three parts:

- 1. Artistic intervention a course titled Okhtyrka in Action: Movements, Voices, Words, Thoughts
- 2. Memorial ceremony commemorating the Roma Genocide Remembrance Day
- 3. Post-documentary performance based on the real-life stories of people living nearby—about the city, about youth, about Roma.



Week of Remembrance: Roma Genocide Commemoration Initiative

Supported by the Documentation and Cultural Center of German Sinti and Roma

August 2-8, 2021

ARCA organized a series of events under the umbrella of the Week of Remembrance, dedicated to commemorating the victims of the Roma genocide.

Key elements of the 2021 program included:

- Stereobreakers, an educational and artistic initiative that brought together 15
 Roma and non-Roma youth in the small town of Okhtyrka, Ukraine. The
 participants explored the roots of stereotypes and antigypsyism, reflected on
 shared experiences, and drew parallels between present-day realities and
 significant historical events, such as the Roma genocide. Their work
 culminated in a documentary theatre performance, followed by a discussion
 to reflect on the themes raised.
- An educational session on preserving historical memory of the Roma genocide in Ukraine, led by experts in Holocaust and genocide studies.
- A public memorial ceremony at the Okhtyrka memorial site, where members of the local Roma community were executed during World War II.

2017-2021 Річний звіт 22



At the Crossroads of History: Past, Present and Future

Funded by the "MEET UP! Youth for Partnership" Grant Program of the EVZ Foundation (Remembrance, Responsibility, and Future) and the German Federal Foreign Office
2021

In partnership with Denk Global (Germany)

This project is an educational and artistic initiative for Roma and non-Roma youth from Ukraine and Germany, aiming to explore their shared cultural and historical past—particularly the period of the Roma genocide.

Through modern methodologies of historical memory preservation and transmission, the project seeks to confront current challenges and promote inclusive and trust-based coexistence between Roma and non-Roma communities in the future.

The project includes both online and offline educational sessions and creative workshops. Its outcome will be an online theatre production, featuring personal stories based on documentary sources, which will be archived on the project's digital platform in the form of videos and photographs.

