



# 2024 Annual Report Intercultural Cities Network of Ukraine

7 December 2024

## Summary

The year 2024 presented numerous challenges for Ukraine due to the ongoing conflict and its consequences for the country's demographics, economic, and political situations, yet the Intercultural Cities Network of Ukraine (ICCUA) continues to demonstrate great resilience and determination in promoting intercultural values, inclusion, and solidarity. Through a combination of local initiatives and international support, ICCUA has accomplished a number of significant activities addressing the unique challenges posed by the current situation. The support of the ICC city of Stavanger (Norway), similarly to the previous year, played a crucial role in the successful implementation of impactful projects that addressed the needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and vulnerable groups in ICCUA member cities. These projects focused on promoting social integration, supporting community cohesion, and providing essential services such as psychological rehabilitation and intercultural education. Notable initiatives included efforts in cities like Sumy and Lutsk to counter misinformation and strengthen community ties, as well as Vinnytsia's "Strength of Spirit" project, which provided vital psychological support to veterans and their families. Despite logistical challenges caused by the conflict, ICCUA's adaptability ensured the success of its initiatives. ICCUA representatives also participated in international conferences and events, demonstrating their commitment to inclusive policies and exchanging best practices on topics such as language preservation, combating hate speech, and promoting inclusive education. Looking ahead, the network plans to focus on scaling successful initiatives and deepening its partnerships with international stakeholders. ICCUA remains committed to strengthening its capacity to address the unique challenges faced by its communities, and to promoting intercultural integration, equality, and social cohesion.

*The opinions expressed in this document are the responsibility of the author Dr. K. Rubicondo, Coordinator of the Intercultural Cities Network of Ukraine and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the Council of Europe.*

## Network coordination

Throughout the year, ICCUA members continued to pursue their commitment to intercultural engagement and innovative urban policies implementation according to their intercultural strategies and plans. Despite the adversities of war, the cities demonstrated exceptional solidarity and mutual support. They also shown their continuous commitment to inclusive policy approach when welcoming and assisting in integration of internally displaced and delivering vital humanitarian aid, providing housing, available employment and other social services.

Even in the face of disrupted infrastructure and communication, the ICCUA Network convened multiple times online this year. Similar to the previous year, the implementation of a range of local intercultural initiatives in our member cities in 2024 was made possible thanks to the invaluable support of the ICC City of Stavanger. These initiatives addressed the challenges posed by ongoing internal displacement and the need for support in different areas of cities' services, such as health care and education, highlighting the resilience and proactive approach of ICCUA members. Examples of this support can be found in the following section of this report.

## Activities and Communication

### 1. Building Resilience Amidst Conflict

ICCUA started the year 2024 by revisiting its strategic priorities to adapt to the changing landscape brought about by the ongoing conflict. With the support of international partners, including ICC Stavanger, the network began laying the groundwork for several impactful projects tailored to the realities faced by its member cities.

Intercultural Sumy worked on countering misinformation that threatened to destabilize trust among its communities. By producing and screening the documentary *Beyond Borders*, the city sought to highlight shared values and experiences across cultural divides, promoting mutual understanding in a challenging context.

The City of Lutsk launched targeted initiatives and community-based workshops designed to foster connections between long-term residents and internally displaced persons, creating a sense of belonging in a time of uncertainty.

These initial efforts demonstrated ICCUA's ability to remain agile and innovative despite significant constraints. They underscored the importance of intercultural dialogue in fostering resilience, particularly in cities that host large number of internally displaced.

## 2. Fostering Intercultural Approach and Practices

As the year progressed, the second quarter saw ICCUA intensify its focus on intercultural education and engagement. Ukrainian ICC cities participated in international events, including [No Hate Speech Week](#), organized by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, France and joined by the representatives from Odesa and Vinnytsia. This participation allowed to exchange ideas, learn from best practices, and envision new strategies to combat hate speech and promote inclusive narratives.

On 5 November 2024, representatives of ICCUA participated online in the [5th edition of the "Safeguarding Romani Language" conference](#), co-hosted by the Council of Europe and the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC) to mark International Romani Language Day. The event brought together experts and practitioners of the Romani language, educators, and academics to discuss the protection, promotion, and harmonization of Romani language policies in alignment with Council of Europe standards.



This participation highlights ICCUA's commitment to the values of intercultural dialogue and inclusion, particularly through the preservation and promotion of linguistic diversity, which is a cornerstone of interculturalism. For ICCUA network, this engagement aligns with its broader goals of supporting vulnerable communities, including Roma, in Ukraine and reinforces the network's efforts to encourage linguistic and cultural inclusion. ERIAC's [Romani Language Initiative](#), which aims to become a transnational center for language and education, offers an inspiring example for ICCUA cities seeking to integrate minority languages into local educational frameworks and community-building strategies, promoting mutual understanding and respect.

This year, the ICCUA also joined the [Placemaking Week Europe in Rotterdam](#), an event that exemplified the transformative potential of inclusive urban development. This dynamic gathering of urbanists, city planners, and creative professionals provided a platform to explore innovative solutions for urban resilience, climate adaptation, and community engagement - issues directly relevant to ICCUA's goals in Ukraine.



Through thematic workshops, immersive city tours, and collaborative discussions, the event highlighted the critical role of placemaking in fostering community cohesion, addressing global challenges, and reimagining public spaces.



Sessions such as "There's no place like Keilewerf" and guided tours of

Rotterdam's neighborhoods gave a practical insight into urban transformation, illustrating how empty or 'forgotten' spaces can be revitalized to become vibrant centers of community interaction. The Rotterdam rooftop tour showcased innovative methods for transforming rooftops into sustainable urban space, contributing to climate resilience and green infrastructure. These discussions echo ICCUA's commitment to adaptive urban planning that responds to the diverse needs of its communities, creating inclusive, sustainable and dynamic cities.





It is noteworthy that with financial support of the Intercultural Cities Programme, the Ukrainian city of Vinnytsia took part in two-year pilot capacity-building initiative “Intercultural Cities in Placemaking” implemented by Placemaking Europe in collaboration with the Council of Europe. This participation reflects the relevance of placemaking approaches for ICCUA member cities. For Ukraine, confronting the challenges of both war and displacement, the lessons from Placemaking community offer concrete strategies for rebuilding urban spaces with a focus on inclusion, sustainability and intercultural dialogue.

In November, the ICCUA coordinator also joined the International Conference on "Inclusive Educational Environment: Challenges, Prospects, and Best Practices," hosted by the [Open International University of Human Development "Ukraine"](#). Supported by the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Social Policy, and the Ministry of Health of Ukraine, the conference brought together experts, educators, and policymakers from around the globe, highlighting the importance of fostering inclusive approaches across various domains. Participants from several international organizations and countries, including Germany, Lithuania, Poland, the United States and Canada, contributed to the event with their insights, showcasing best practices and research on inclusion and social integration. This gathering highlighted the global relevance of the topic and provided valuable opportunities for knowledge exchange and collaboration. ICC Ukraine’s contribution to this significant platform emphasized the network's commitment to advancing inclusive and intercultural policies in alignment with local needs and global standards. In her presentation, the national coordinator highlighted the critical role of inclusion in shaping effective intercultural approach. Participation in such high-profile international events allows the ICCUA network to expand its horizons, establish new connections, to align with global best practices and strengthen its mission of promoting diversity, equality and anti-discrimination.

### 3. Deepening International Collaboration

ICCUA’s lasting partnership with Norwegian city of Stavanger underscores the importance of global solidarity in addressing local challenges, particularly during times of crisis.

Thanks to the financial support provided by Stavanger, Pavlohrad implemented the “[Such Different/Close People](#)” project that brought together families from diverse cultural backgrounds for a series of art therapy and storytelling sessions. The sessions were organized in groups and highlighted personal narratives from minority and displaced residents. These activities not only offered psychosocial support but also created an environment for meaningful intercultural interactions.



Similarly, [Lutsk](#) held an open-air art plain-air event for children and youth, using creative expression as a way to celebrate diversity and establish friendships among internally displaced people and locals. These activities demonstrated the role of cultural exchange in breaking down barriers and promoting unity.



In September, Vinnytsia launched targeted initiatives to address the challenges related to health and social needs of war veterans. The “Strength of Spirit” project provided psychological support to Ukrainian veterans to help them recover from trauma and reintegrate into civilian life, utilizing intercultural dialogue as a means of healing.



Meanwhile, Sumy leveraged digital platforms to engage its residents in dialogues about intercultural understanding, providing an accessible means for participation despite ongoing disruptions.

#### 4. Challenges Encountered in 2024

The continuous war in Ukraine posed significant challenges to ICCUA’s activities throughout the year. One of the most pressing issues was the logistical difficulty of organizing events and maintaining consistent communication between member cities. Sirens, power outages, and infrastructure damage frequently disrupted planned activities, requiring flexibility and resilience from all participants and organizers alike.

Another challenge stemmed from the demographic shifts caused by the conflict. The movement of internally displaced continues to alter the social and economic fabric of many cities in Ukraine, including ICCUA members, creating both tensions and opportunities. While some cities are more successful in integrating new residents into their communities, others struggle to address the needs of diverse groups amid limited resources.

Additionally, resource constraint is a recurring issue. With much of the national budget directed toward defense and humanitarian aid, ICCUA often relied on external funding to implement its initiatives. This dependency highlighted the need for sustainable financial models to support long-term intercultural efforts.



## Conclusions and Next Steps

The Intercultural Cities Network of Ukraine has demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability in 2024, achieving significant progress despite the existing challenges. As the network looks to the future, it remains committed to intercultural values of inclusion, mutual understanding, and building bridges between diverse groups. By continuing to learn from best practices and adapting to the evolving needs of its cities the network members continue to promote intercultural policy throughout their actions, while emphasizing unity, solidarity, and collaboration. Their active engagement with international partners, participation in seminars, and advocacy for intercultural dialogue even in times of crisis showcases their dedication to intercultural approach and human principles.

An essential factor in ICCUA's success this year was its partnership with Stavanger, a city that not only symbolized solidarity but actively supported the implementation of ICCUA's local initiatives. This collaboration is a testament to the power of intercultural cooperation, proving that communities could thrive amidst adversity when bound by shared values and a spirit of inclusivity and support.

Moreover, discussions are currently underway regarding the implementation of future ICCUA projects with the support of Stavanger. One of these initiatives, planned for Odesa in 2025, will feature a series of artistic expressions and events for Ukrainian veterans, their families, internally displaced persons, and the general public. These activities will include performances of Ukrainian folklore, orchestral works by international composers, poetry readings by both Ukrainian and international authors, and other activities. The project aims to bring together audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds, serving as a symbol of solidarity with those affected by the ongoing conflict. The project will be coordinated by a non-governmental organization “International Cultural Diplomacy” in partnership with the Salik Music Theatre, a municipal institution in Odesa. Musicians and actors from the theatre will volunteer their time and talent for this initiative.







This project will offer a meaningful opportunity for intercultural interaction and exchange, promoting unity and resilience during these challenging times for Ukraine, and Odesa in particular.

In addition, the "Strength of Spirit: Psychological Support for Soldiers" initiative, successfully launched with the support of Stavanger in Vinnytsia this year, is set to continue into 2025. This initiative provides psychological support and rehabilitation to wounded veterans from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The project focuses on strengthening psychological resilience, addressing post-traumatic stress, and aiding in the reintegration of veterans into society. The ICCUA network seeks to expand such unique initiatives, ensuring continued assistance to cities and communities in need and promoting intercultural approach in health and across other city services and departments.

Looking ahead, ICCUA acknowledges the importance of building on its achievements while addressing ongoing challenges. The network members recognize that the conditions and needs of their diverse populations in the context of war are significantly different from those of other ICC cities and networks. It is crucial that ICCUA member cities do not face these unique challenges alone. As proud members of the ICC Programme of the Council of Europe, they need strong, direct, and continued support from ICC Global and the Council of Europe.

Since its establishment in 2014, the Ukrainian ICC network has played a key role in promoting intercultural values and missions in Ukraine, serving as vital bridges through which European values and principles have reached a post-Soviet country. Preserving the integrity of these bridges today, while upholding the values of democracy and human rights, is essential.

Partnerships with other ICC members remain the most valuable way to maintain and reinforce these bridges. Such collaborations not only assist Ukrainian cities in addressing the current challenges but also help sustain their intercultural commitment, proficiency, and spirit, ensuring their long-term resilience. With the unwavering support of ICC Global and the Council of Europe, they will continue to contribute to building an inclusive and brighter European future for all.

#StandWithUkraine