

2024 Periodic Activity Report

Intercultural Cities Network of Ukraine

July – September 2024

Summary

In the third quarter of 2024, the Ukrainian network of Intercultural Cities (ICCUA) continued to address the evolving challenges posed by the ongoing conflict while strengthening its commitment to intercultural values and community resilience. This period saw a significant focus on advancing project implementation and promoting intercultural dialogue within Ukrainian communities. The network's actions highlighted the vital role of intercultural understanding, dialogue and inter-community solidarity in fostering long-term recovery and social cohesion.

An online ICCUA Network meeting held in July 2024 reinforced the need for sustained international support in addressing the challenges faced by Ukrainian cities. Representatives from Stavanger highlighted their continued commitment to Ukraine's intercultural cities. The network's projects benefited greatly from this collaboration, enabling the launch of numerous initiatives, including art therapy workshops, plain air and exhibitions in Pavlohrad and Lutsk, as well as psychological support programs in Vinnytsia. In addition to these key projects, other Ukrainian cities also made notable progress. In Sumy, August 2024 saw commemorative events honoring the Roma victims of the Holocaust, while Pavlohrad hosted a memorial event for Roma genocide victims, showcasing the city's commitment to remembering historical tragedies and promoting intercultural solidarity.



The opinions expressed in this document are the responsibility of the author, Coordinator of the Intercultural Cities Network of Ukraine Dr. K. Rubicondo and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the Council of Europe. This document is published as it was submitted to the secretariat.

This painting by a schoolchild from Pavlohrad, UA, created as part of a project supported by the city of Stavanger, NO, was displayed in 'The Beauty of Diversity' exhibition in Pavlohrad in August 2024.

The ICCUA network remains steadfast in its mission to promote intercultural values and community resilience. Plans for the coming months include scaling up existing projects and deepening international partnerships, particularly with Stavanger and the Council of Europe. The network will continue to focus on revising intercultural strategies to reflect the demographic shifts and cultural challenges resulting from the war, ensuring that Ukrainian cities remain at the forefront of intercultural advocacy and social inclusion.

Network coordination and activities

1. ICCUA Network Meeting

During this quarter, an online meeting of ICCUA Network was held (11 July 2024) where the representatives from the City of Stavanger, Norway, also took part. The importance of sustained international backing was a central theme of the discussion. The meeting began with an overview of the current situation in Ukraine, with particular focus on the dangers faced by cities, especially those located near the Russian border. The critical need for ongoing international support was emphasized. The ICCUA representatives expressed their gratitude for the assistance provided by Stavanger, acknowledging the under-resourcing issues in their communities exacerbated by electricity cuts, bombings, and refugee crises. The discussion continued around the mechanisms for providing continued support to Ukrainian cities in 2024.

2. Support from ICC Stavanger and Project Launches

Thanks to the support from ICC Stavanger, several projects were launched this quarter. One notable initiative is the “Such Different/Close People” (“Таки Різ(Д)ні Люди”)¹ project in Pavlohrad. This project, focusing on art therapy and recovery workshops with an intercultural theme, aims to assist the displaced population, particularly children.



¹ Note: 'РІЗНИ' (different) and 'РІДНИ' (close) is a word play in Ukrainian.

Such Different/Close People

The project is being implemented by the Pavlohrad Historical and Local Lore Museum, the Pavlohrad City Centralized Library System, and the Pavlohrad School of Arts. It seeks to unite city residents of different cultural backgrounds, helping to integrate internally displaced families into the Pavlohrad community.

As part of this initiative, a series of events were held to enhance intercultural competence among the local public, allowing them to explore and understand other cultures. One such event was the Intercultural Puzzle titled "Different - United!" where librarians prepared activities discussing tolerance, customs, and traditions of the various nationalities living in our city. The quiz "Guess the Traditions" turned the library's Internet center into a research hub where attendees explored traditions from different corners of the globe. Children engaged in decoding Ukrainian proverbs, participated in team-building exercises, and enjoyed lively movement activities.



The "Wisdom of Nations" masterclass in the Family Leisure BiblioWorkshop allowed children to participate in a quiz about proverbs and create charming souvenir magnets in the shape of owls, the symbol of wisdom. The "Gathering" game provided an exciting journey through diverse cultures. During this adventure, participants learned interesting facts about the peoples residing in the Pavlohrad area, discovering that despite our differences, we share a common desire for friendship, exploration, and openness to new experiences. Additionally, the "Character of the Nation" initiative focused on reviewing the traditions of different peoples. Librarians discussed our tolerance towards other nationalities, and the children watched a film to learn about the national minorities living in Pavlohrad area.

“Over the past few months, we have collaborated to deepen our understanding of the culture, traditions, and characteristics of the various communities living in our city. Through open meetings, masterclasses, interactive workshops, exhibitions, and discussions, we not only strengthened the connections between different cultures but also built a solid foundation for future coexistence in harmony and respect. The project demonstrated that in our diversity lies our strength,” commented a librarian. As part of this project, an exhibition titled "The Beauty of Diversity" was also opened in the summer 2024, featuring 20 artworks by students from the Pavlohrad Art School. The exhibition showcased the diverse architectural forms and landscapes of European cities and Ukraine, promoting intercultural understanding and appreciation. One of the artworks is displayed on the front page of this report.

‘Lutsk European’ tour and ‘Intercultural Lutsk’ art plein air

In Lutsk, important steps are being taken to strengthen intercultural dialogue and understanding among the youth. A recent art initiative brought together 33 creatively talented children from the community, including internally displaced persons, representatives of national minorities, and students from the Lutsk Art School. These young artists gathered at a historic city location to create works on the theme "Lutsk - an Intercultural City."

As part of their preparation, the children went on a thematic tour titled "[Lutsk European](#)", during which they visited significant historical sites and learned about the city's rich cultural heritage and diversity. They explored how Lutsk, a historic European city, is a unique blend of different cultural influences, which they reflected in their artistic compositions. The children worked passionately to recreate iconic landmarks such as the towers of Lutsk Castle, the Peter and Paul Church, the Lutheran Church, the Church of the Holy Protection, and the synagogue. Using acrylic painting techniques, they depicted these architectural treasures on canvas.



At the end of the initiative, the participants were awarded certificates and gifts. Deputy Mayor of Lutsk addressed the young artists and thanked them for capturing the essence of the city and its history. "It is significant that, in addition to local children, those who have found refuge in our city also participated. We wanted to understand their feelings, and we saw them reflected in these works. Today, as our culture, language, and children are under attack, it is crucial to instill a love for beauty in

their hearts. I wish you creative success and, most importantly, peaceful skies, so we can hold such events without worry," she said.

The plein air exhibition will be displayed at the "Lutsk" art gallery until the Artists' Day. With support from the city of Stavanger, Norway, and local participants, these initiatives continue to build a strong foundation for an inclusive future in Ukrainian intercultural cities.

Strength of Spirit: Psychological Support for Veterans

With the financial support of Stavanger, Norway, and the Intercultural Institute Ashburn, Luxembourg, the city of Vinnytsia has launched the "Strength of Spirit: Psychological Support for Veterans" project on September 14. This initiative aims to provide psychological support and rehabilitation to wounded veterans of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds.



The project focuses on strengthening soldiers' psychological resilience, addressing symptoms of post-traumatic stress, and supporting their reintegration into society. Psychologists will conduct individual and group sessions, including art therapy, to facilitate recovery and personal development.

3. Other Intercultural Initiatives in Ukrainian Cities

This quarter also saw important intercultural activities in other Ukrainian cities:

Sumy

On August 2, Sumy commemorated the 80th anniversary of the Roma Holocaust honoring the victims. The event included the raising of the Roma flag at Independence Square and a gathering at the memorial for victims of Nazi concentration camps. Head of the Romani National Association of Sumy Region, highlighted the inclusion of a Roma family in the memorial at the time of its creation. Acting Mayor stated, "The Roma ethnolnational community is an integral part of the Ukrainian people, and is a full-fledged member of our Sumy community."



Our common and most cherished desire now is to achieve victory in the war against aggression, and for neither Ukrainians, nor Roma, nor any other nations in the world to know war. Every nation deserves free development, a prosperous and happy life in its own country." The ceremony included a minute of silence and the laying of flowers, reinforcing the commitment to remembering and condemning all forms of racism, discrimination, and war crimes. It should be noted that Sumy is a long-standing member of the Ukrainian Intercultural Cities Network, where inspiring work has been done on the intercultural strategy adoption and implementation.

Pavlohrad

The ICC Pavlohrad also hosted an event in memory of the Roma genocide victims during World War II, as reported by local newspaper Step. A thematic exhibition opened at the Pavlohrad City Museum for International Roma Holocaust Memorial Day. In the morning, flowers were laid at the memorial for those who died defending Ukraine since the Russian aggression in February 2022. Among the defenders of Ukraine are also Roma.



Challenges

The third quarter of 2024 presented ongoing and intense challenges for the ICCUA network. Ukrainian cities have continued to face attacks, infrastructure damage, and the pressures of managing refugee crises. Cities near conflict zones are under constant threat, causing significant disruptions to daily life and project activities. Yet, local ICCUA coordinators have persevered, continuing their work amidst the dangers.

The increasing numbers of internally displaced (IDP) are placing additional strains on resources and complicate efforts to maintain intercultural initiatives. The network members have had to adapt rapidly to these challenges, ensuring that both local residents and IDPs receive the necessary support.

Amidst these challenges, there has been a growing need to revise the intercultural strategies of Ukrainian cities to address the significant changes in demographics and cultural dynamics due to the war.

- *Demographic Changes:* The population composition in ICCUA cities has shifted drastically, necessitating updates to the city's intercultural profile.
- *Intercultural Policy Adjustments:* The war has intensified the societal response to Russian culture and language, leading to an urgent need to reconcile intercultural values with the prevailing interethnic tensions and aggressions.
- *Social Inclusion and Diversity:* There is an increasing need to promote social inclusion, manage the language of war, and address the accumulated social aggression and fatigue within communities. Effective communication strategies and conflict prevention measures are critical in this context.
- *Support for Displaced Ukrainians:* Both internally displaced individuals and those returning from abroad require focused efforts to facilitate their reintegration into Ukrainian society, considering the cultural norms they might have absorbed during their displacement.

Media and Communication

The network also encountered challenges related to media communications, including issues with content moderation on social platforms. Feedback from these experiences will guide future strategies for ensuring that the network's messages reach the intended audience effectively.

One of our ICCUA Network posts, featuring a gathering of people protesting the shelling of a children's hospital in Ukraine, faced an unexpected setback. The aim of the post was to raise awareness and call for support for peace in Ukraine. However, the message, which aimed to shed light on the dire situation faced by those affected by ongoing violence, was flagged by the platform as potentially containing violent content. The platform reviewed the post and determined that, while it did adhere to their Community Standards, it would still be moved lower in the feed, significantly reducing its visibility.

This decision by the platform left the authors of the post in a difficult position. Their attempt to reach a broader audience and gather much-needed support for victims of the aggression was effectively hindered, as the reduced reach of the post limited its impact. While our network members understand the platform's need to manage sensitive content, they find it concerning that a message intended to help is being suppressed. This experience highlights the challenges of using social media as a tool for advocacy in times of crisis, as the voices of those who need help the most can sometimes be silenced when they should be amplified.



Next steps

Looking ahead, the Ukrainian ICC network will prioritize expanding the reach and impact of its ongoing projects, with a particular focus on deepening intercultural dialogue and community resilience across more cities. Building on successful initiatives like Lutsk's "Lutsk European" thematic tour, art plein air, or Pavlohrad's "Such Different/Close People" project, the network aims to foster greater youth engagement and intercultural understanding through creative and historical experiences that unite diverse communities. This will further strengthen the bonds between communities, ensuring harmonious coexistence and mutual respect.

Additionally, the network will continue to work on unique initiatives like Vinnytsia's "Strength of Spirit: Psychological Support for Soldiers" project, which provides vital psychological rehabilitation for veterans from diverse cultural backgrounds. The Ukrainian ICC network will also maintain ongoing engagement with international partners, including ICC Stavanger and the Intercultural Institute of Ashburn, Luxembourg. These partnerships have been instrumental in securing the financial and logistical resources needed to sustain key ICC Ukraine projects.

Engagement with the Council of Europe remains a top priority. By staying at the forefront of intercultural advocacy and reconciliation, the Ukrainian ICC network aims to strengthen its role in fostering recovery, resilience, and social cohesion amidst the challenges of war and displacement. Through a commitment to intercultural values and international cooperation, the network will continue to lead efforts toward a more inclusive and united future for Ukrainian cities.