

# ***IRCA ANNUAL REPORT***

## **Year 2024**

***The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most  
vulnerable members!  
Mahatma Gandhi***

## Introduction to IRCA's 2024 Annual Plan

The 2024 Annual Plan of the Institute of Roma Culture in Albania (IRCA) presents the organization's key goals, activities, accomplishments, and future priorities, emphasizing a year of meaningful progress and transformative impact. This document provides an in-depth overview of IRCA's efforts to empower marginalized communities, celebrate Roma cultural heritage, and advocate for human rights throughout Albania. Over the course of 2024, IRCA has remained steadfast in its commitment to fostering social inclusion, defending digital rights, promoting environmental sustainability, and supporting youth development. This plan underscores IRCA's dedication to tackling persistent challenges through collaborative partnerships, policy engagement, and community-led actions. By reflecting on the successes and lessons of the previous year, it also sets the direction for addressing emerging needs and advancing IRCA's mission of building a more equitable and inclusive society.

## *Letter from the Executive Director of IRCA*

***Dear Donors, Partners, Staff, Community Members, and Central and Local Institutions,***

As we reflect on the accomplishments of the past year, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to each of you who has contributed to the mission of the Institute of Romani Culture in Albania (IRCA). Together, we have achieved remarkable progress, overcoming challenges and celebrating successes that reaffirm our dedication to empowering the Roma community and supporting vulnerable groups. Our shared vision of an inclusive society where every voice matters has guided us every step of the way. To our donors, thank you for your invaluable support, which has not only enabled us to carry out our projects but has also demonstrated your unwavering commitment to equity, justice, and dignity for all. To our central and local partners, your collaboration has been instrumental in driving change and expanding our impact. Your partnership has strengthened our initiatives and allowed us to reach even more communities with meaningful programs and services. To the dedicated IRCA staff and volunteers, your tireless efforts remain the foundation of our work. Your passion, resilience, and compassion inspire all of us and bring our mission to life. Despite the challenges, you have consistently demonstrated the spirit of IRCA—one rooted in unity, respect for diversity, and perseverance. Most importantly, I want to thank the community members who inspire us daily. Your strength and determination remind us why IRCA exists and why we remain committed to fostering positive change. Our dedication to you extends beyond words, as we strive to create lasting impact through every action we take. Together, we are not just advancing IRCA's mission but building a foundation for a future where all communities in Albania can flourish. As we look ahead, IRCA remains committed to expanding opportunities, promoting education, advocating for digital rights, advancing environmental justice, and ensuring socio-economic inclusion. While the path forward may bring new challenges, the steadfast support and trust of our donors, partners, staff, and community members give us the confidence to continue transforming lives. Thank you for being an integral part of this journey. Together, we are shaping a brighter, more inclusive future for the Roma community and all vulnerable groups in Albania.

With deep appreciation,

**Bledar Taho**

Executive Director

*Institute of Roma Culture in Albania*

## Introduction and Mission Statement

IRCA was founded on July 1, 2011, drawing inspiration from advocacy services provided by institutions such as the Italian Institute of Culture in Albania, the Goethe Institute, the British Council, the American Corner, as well as research and documentation centers at universities across Europe and North America, many of which the founders of IRCA have personally engaged with.

### **Vision:**

*External Vision (for beneficiaries):* Roma communities are empowered, with meaningful access, engagement, representation, and participation in civic life and public decision-making at all levels.

*Internal Vision (for the organization):* IRCA strives to be a leading organization that advocates for a multi-ethnic, inclusive society, grounded in the universal values of human rights and equality.

### **Mission:**

IRCA is committed to fostering the equal and sustainable development of Roma communities by promoting advocacy, mobilization, empowerment, collaboration, policy-focused research, and participatory action. The organization works to ensure equal participation in democratic processes, fair access to rights and services, and the preservation and promotion of Roma culture and identity.

Through a combination of volunteer advocacy, educational services, and recreational activities, IRCA has established three key youth networks: the Romani Students' Network, the Romani Corps of Volunteers, and the Romani Youth Parliament Forum. Additionally, much of IRCA's work is broadcast through its online radio station, "Capitol"-Radio, which highlights and amplifies the organization's activities.

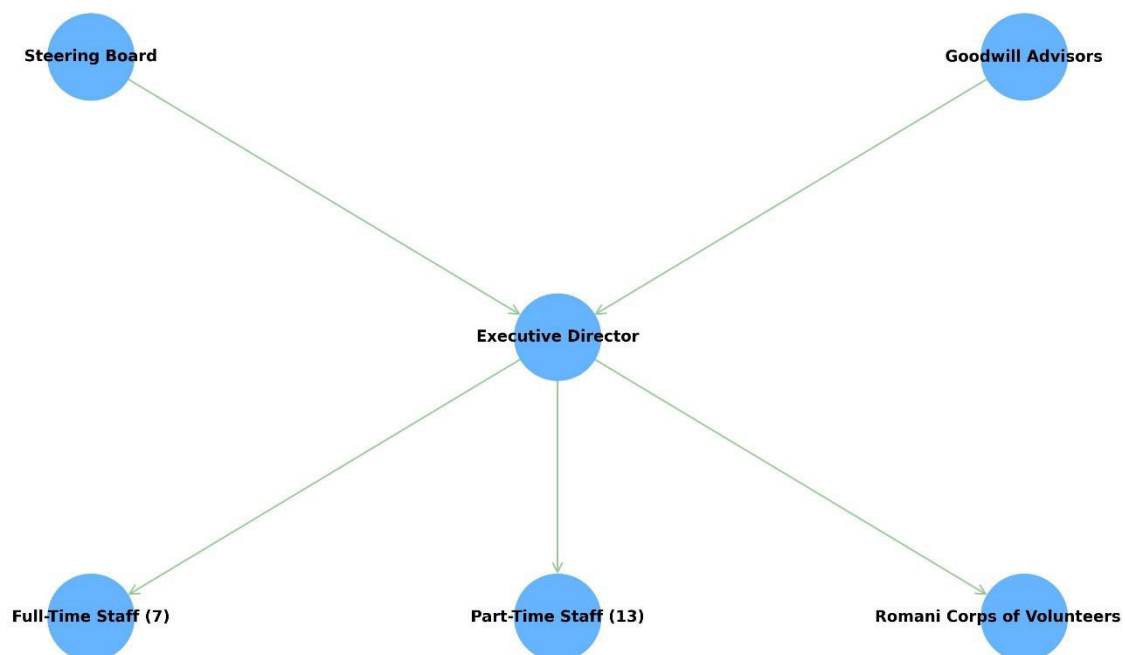
## *Work*

Impact of IRCA's work fall in 4 main categories:

- a) *Intercultural dialogue:*
- b) *Youth Empowerment:*
- c) *Advocacy and Participation*
- d) *Institutional Development and Partnership Building*

The organizational structure of IRCA includes the Steering Board, Goodwill Advisors, the Executive Director, and a team of 20 staff members, consisting of 7 full-time and 13 part-time employees. Additionally, IRCA has established the Romani Corps of Volunteers, which comprises over 210 members, including both Roma and non-Roma students and graduates. Since 2011, IRCA has also directed the Body of Actors, Visual Artists, and Musicians, which has performed and organized more than 85 activities in the field of arts and culture.

### *Organizational Structure Organogram*



*Throughout 2024, the Institute of Romani Culture in Albania has focused its efforts on:*

#### **Institutional Strengthening**

Enhancing staff capacities in project coordination, management, monitoring, evaluation, fundraising, and the development of internal policies and documents to improve organizational efficiency.

#### **Intercultural Engagement**

Promoting inclusiveness and fostering relationships among individuals from diverse cultural, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds. IRCA has emphasized respect for cultural diversity and created a supportive environment that values differences in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, ability, socioeconomic status, and language.

#### **Youth Empowerment**

Equipping young people with the necessary skills and capacities to become catalysts for positive change in their communities and beyond.

#### **Advocacy and Civic Participation**

Implementing programs that enable Roma citizens to collectively advocate for changes in public policies and processes. This work has focused on empowering communities, promoting government transparency and accountability, and fostering responsive governance.

- *A Journey Through IRCA's 2024 Projects*



## ROMACTED - Promoting Good Governance and Roma Empowerment at the Local Level- Phase 2

Throughout 2024, we successfully implemented the second phase of the project "ROMACTED - Promoting Good Governance and Roma Empowerment at the Local Level," funded by the European Union (DG NEAR) and the Council of Europe. This eight-year initiative was carried out in 10 municipalities: Elbasan, Përmet, Gjirokastrë, Fier, Korçë, Vlorë, Pogradec, Lushnjë, Çerrik, and Roskovec.

### Key Achievements of ROMACTED Program in 2024

Secured employment and self-employment opportunities for Roma
Promoted vocational training enrollment for Roma individuals
Increased Roma registration at Employment Offices
Supported Roma participation in house reconstruction projects
Facilitated house legalization applications for Roma families
Created Institutional Action Groups and Municipal Task Groups
Established Community Action Groups in 10 municipalities
Enhanced local authorities' accountability for Roma integration
Improved Roma self-organization and communication with institutions

*The project equipped local authorities with tools and knowledge to better address Roma needs, improving their responsiveness and accountability. It also worked to enhance the efficiency and sustainability of local policies and services while fostering inter-municipal cooperation for joint integration projects, including the management of small grants of up to 15,000 euros for each municipality.*

## **Promoting Political Inclusion of Marginalized Youth in Albania**

The project "Promoting Political Inclusion of Marginalized Youth in Albania", implemented by the Institute of Roma Culture in Albania (IRCA), was carried out with the generous support of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) over the period July 2021 to June 2024.

### ***Key Achievements of the Initiative***

- ☞ **Podcast Production:** Created and shared 10 podcasts discussing democracy, active citizenship, political participation, and government processes, reaching a wide audience.
- ☞ **Youth-Led Initiatives:** Supported 10 self-determined democracy initiatives led by trained youth, enabling them to implement their knowledge and skills in real-world contexts.
- ☞ **Internship Opportunities:** Facilitated 3-month internships for 30 Roma youth in collaboration with local and national government institutions, providing hands-on political experience.
- ☞ **Roma Talks:** Organized 16 public forums, titled "Roma Talks," to spotlight Roma concerns and engage decision-makers in addressing these issues.

## **Strengthening national and local systems to support the effective socio-economic integration of returnees in the Western Balkans**

With the support of the United Nations Development Programme Albania, within the framework of the project: "Strengthening national and local systems to support the effective socio-economic integration of returnees in the Western Balkans," IRCA implemented the project titled "Training services in entrepreneurship, business start-up, business growth and providing mentorship for returnees in Devoll, Berat, and Fier."

### **Key Achievements of the Initiative**

- **Coaching Cycle Groups:** Organized coaching cycle groups in three regions of Albania: Berat, Fier, and Devoll, involving 80 young unemployed jobseekers.
- **Professional Guidance:** Guided participants toward professional courses or self-employment opportunities.
- **Employment Success:** Successfully facilitated the employment or self-employment of 43 participants in the initiative, helping them secure stable livelihoods.



## **Increasing the Political Participation of Roma Youth**

The "Increasing the Political Participation of Roma Youth" project, supported by the National Endowment for Democracy and the National Democracy Institute (NDI), focused on empowering Roma youth to actively participate in political life in Albania. It addressed various topics, including protection from hate speech, cyberbullying, and other forms of violence, with particular attention to gender issues. These efforts aimed to remove barriers to the inclusion of girls and women in political life.

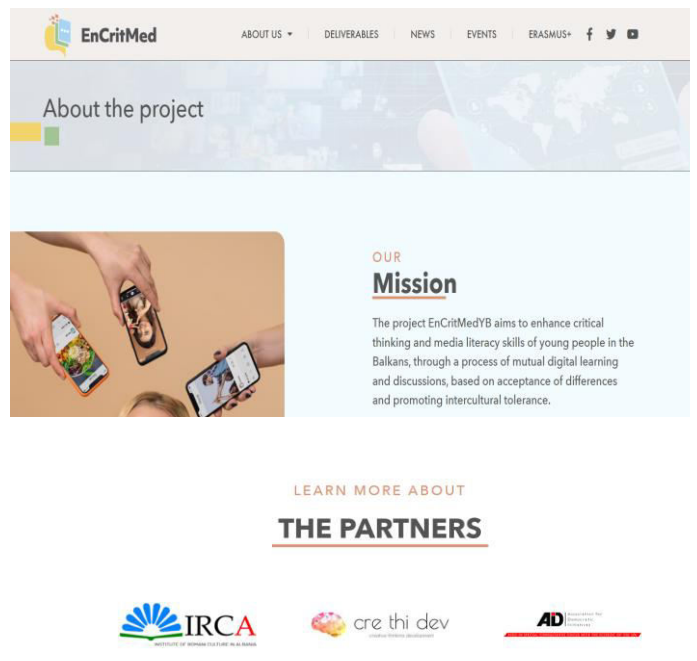
### **Erasmus+ project "EnCritMedYB (2023-2025)"**

*IRCA is a partner in the Erasmus+ project "EnCritMedYB," funded by the European Union. The project aims to enhance the critical thinking and media literacy skills of young people in the Balkans through mutual digital learning and discussions that foster acceptance of differences and promote intercultural tolerance.*

**Read more on the project website: [Encritmed](https://encritmed.org)**

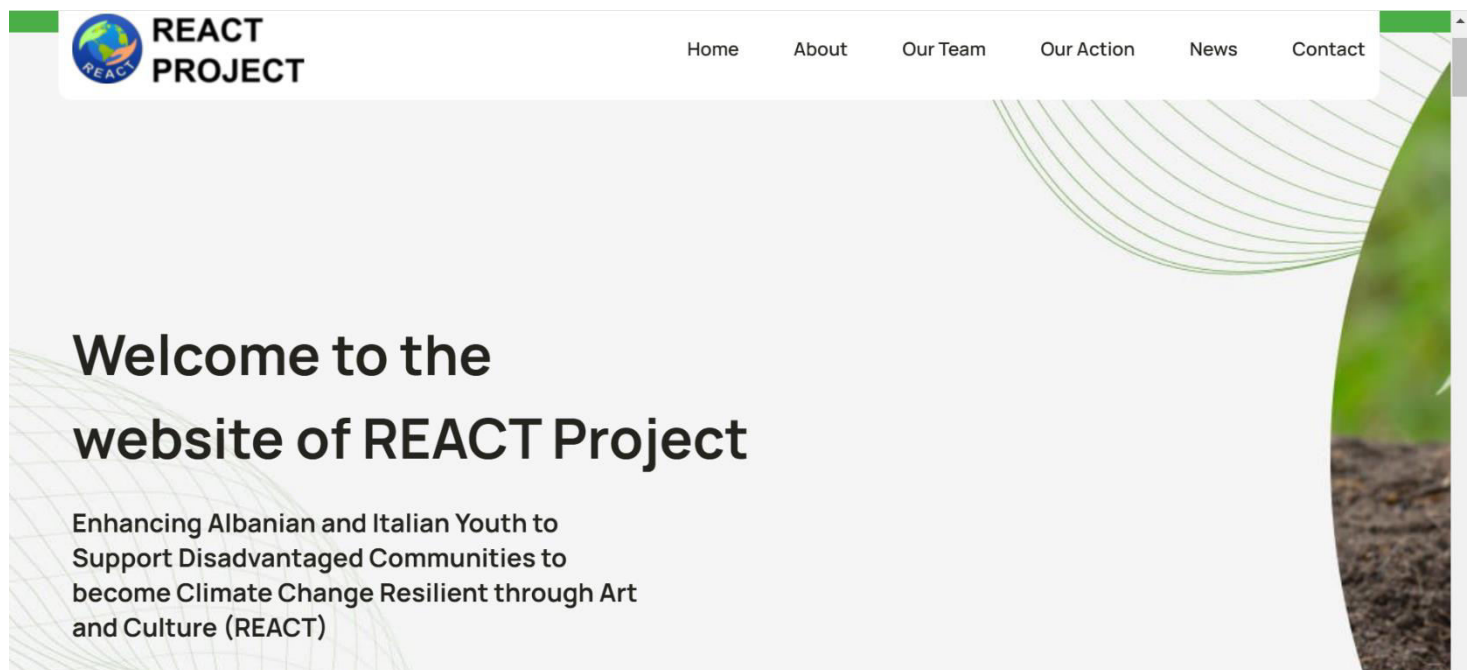
#### **To achieve this objective, the project will:**

- ✎ Co-create educational materials addressing media literacy, critical thinking, and intercultural dialogue, tailored to the regional context and specific country realities.
- ✎ Disseminate these materials broadly to youth workers, young people, and civil society organizations (CSOs) in North Macedonia, Albania, Greece, and Kosovo.
- ✎ Organize and deliver 30 regional digital events that involve youth from the target countries, using the educational materials.
- ✎ Utilize these events as a platform to enhance critical thinking and media literacy skills among youth participants.
- ✎ Foster mutual digital learning and debate to build an environment of intercultural understanding and tolerance.



## *Enhancing Albanian and Italian Youth to Support Disadvantaged Communities to Become Climate Change Resilient through Art and Culture (REACT)*

With the support of **Allianz Foundation** and in partnership with Associazione di Promozione Sociale Giallo Sassi, IRCA has led the implementation of the project ``*Enhancing Albanian and Italian Youth to Support Disadvantaged Communities to Become Climate Change Resilient through Art and Culture (REACT)*``. The main goal of the project was to strengthen climate change resilience and transform the lives of communities by empowering youth through an international education program based on culture and art.



The project successfully created the Academy for Climate Ambassadors, training 40 youth from Albania and Italy to become agents of change in addressing climate change impacts on vulnerable communities. A series of 10 open lectures titled "Climate Talk" were held in schools and universities, fostering dialogue on climate change effects and solutions. The initiative also organized art competitions, exhibitions in Matera and Tirana, community workdays for environmental greening, and meetings with local governments to advocate for practical climate resilience measures. Additionally, the project produced a documentary on climate change consequences and concluded with impactful closing events in Tirana and Matera, bringing together youth, activists, and citizens to discuss and promote climate action.

**Read more on the project website:** [REACT](#)

## AGORA

The project titled “*Advancing Gender Equality through Oversight and Reporting in Albania*” (AGORA), funded by the **EU**, is implemented by the Institute of Romani Culture in Albania (IRCA) in collaboration with the Gender Alliance for Development Center (GADC) as the lead applicant and Together for Life (TFL). The project aims to empower diverse women’s civil society organizations (WCSOs) and grassroots groups, including Roma and LGBTQI+ communities, to monitor and hold institutions accountable for implementing the legal framework on gender equality and addressing gender-based violence (GE&GBV). Targeted municipalities include Tiranë, Korçë, Lezhë, Kukës, Fier, and Elbasan. The initiative focuses on women and girls, particularly survivors of GBV, Roma women and girls, and LGBTQI+ individuals, alongside WCSOs, primary health care centers and practitioners, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, municipal authorities (mayors, GBV coordinators, and referral mechanisms), the Parliament of Albania, and media representatives. By involving these stakeholders, the project seeks to enhance institutional accountability and strengthen efforts to promote gender equality and combat gender-based violence in Albania.



## ❖ *Roma Culture and Tradition: A Value of Diversity in Albanian Cultural Heritage*

With the support of the **Ministry of Economics, Culture, and Innovation**, IRCA implemented the project "*Roma Culture and Tradition: A Value of Diversity in Albanian Cultural Heritage*." This initiative aimed to revitalize Roma culture and folklore, providing support to young Roma artisans and stylists to showcase their talents and promote their crafts. The project also focused on fostering intercultural dialogue by emphasizing the importance of Roma identity as an integral component of Albania's rich cultural heritage. Roma youth were the central focus of the project, with tailored non-formal educational methods employed to deepen their understanding of Roma culture, traditions, and history. Through interactive learning, workshops, and creative activities, the youth engaged directly with their cultural roots, strengthening their sense of identity and pride while also fostering a greater appreciation for diversity within Albanian society.





**✚ Transparency and Accountability in the Implementation and Reporting of Budgetary Expenditures under the National Action Plan for Equality, Inclusion, and Participation of Roma and Egyptians 2021-2025**



With the support of **IDM** and **EU** funding, IRCA is implementing the project *"Transparency and Accountability in the Implementation and Reporting of Budgetary Expenditures under the National Action Plan for Equality, Inclusion, and Participation of Roma and Egyptians 2021-2025."* The general aim of the project is to enhance transparency and accountability regarding the implementation and budgeting of housing, employment, and empowerment issues outlined in the National Action Plan for the Integration of Roma for 2024. To achieve this, the project focuses on monitoring the allocation of budget funds dedicated to key strategic objectives of the National Action Plan. In addition, the project aims to strengthen the capacities of civil society actors and Roma and Egyptian communities in continuous monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the action plan.


As part of the project, a monitoring application has been designed, enabling users not only to access information about the progress of the National Action Plan for Equality, Inclusion, and Participation of Roma and Egyptians 2021-2025 but also to actively engage by sharing comments, suggestions, challenges, and positive practices across Albania.

For more information, visit the platform: [Monitoring Platform](http://www.monitorimi.irca.al)



### **Improving Roma Access to Quality Healthcare and Education Services**

The project "Improving Roma Access to Quality Healthcare and Education Services" was implemented by IRCA in partnership with the "Rromano Kham" Association, financially supported by Together for Life as part of the SPACE grants. This initiative aimed to enhance the access of vulnerable groups to education and healthcare through the creation and empowerment of advocacy groups.

Learn about the project's work through an informative video: [Video](#)



**Integrimi social dhe forcimi i kapaciteteve te Qendrës Komunitare Savër**

### **Integration and Capacity Building of Saver Community Center in Lushnja**

With the support of UNDP, IRCA is currently implementing the project "Integration and Capacity Building of Saver Community Center in Lushnja" (SAVER-4-ALL) in the Municipality of Lushnja. The main objective of the project is to contribute to the social integration and well-being of families in economic difficulty, particularly marginalized and vulnerable women, children, and elders, including those in need, marginalized and disadvantaged minorities such as the Roma and Egyptian communities, and people with disabilities residing in the Saver Administrative Unit of the Lushnja Municipality.





## *Facilitating the Management of Social Care Cases for Returnees in the Municipality of Fier.*

Supported by UNDP, this project focused on assisting returnees and improving their access to essential services, including education, healthcare, and employment. A key component was the provision of psychological support for girls and women who were victims of gender-based violence. This support included individual and group therapy sessions, art and play therapy, role-playing, and other therapeutic methods.

As part of the project, two supportive materials were developed: one designed for adults and another for children. These tools were centered on guiding the application of psychological techniques and served as a practical foundation for enhancing resilience and self-care. Inspired by the approach of the "Positive Thinking Clinic," the documents aimed to strengthen individuals' mental well-being and coping mechanisms. Both tools were published on IRCA's social media platforms, making them widely accessible. The project successfully facilitated the management of at least 50 cases involving returnees and their families in the Municipality of Fier, ensuring access to social care services. Additionally, it provided psychosocial services and empowerment to at least 40 women and 60 children and youth from marginalized groups, contributing to their overall well-being and social inclusion.



### ***A project for mental health!***

The psychological process goes beyond diagnosing according to set criteria; psychological support is about helping individuals facing psychological difficulties 🧡 to discover and make sense of their experiences. People need to feel heard in a safe environment, characterized by empathy and non-judgment!



Today, I spoke more than any other day in my life, I spoke in silence! Today, I felt completely understood, I finally understood ❤️ myself too!" ✨ And at the same time, this is the power of silence!- Testimony from beneficiaries

Read the success stories of the initiative: [Success stories](#)



## The Western Balkans Forum on the Institutionalization of the Romani Language

IRCA has organized the *Western Balkans Forum on the Institutionalization of the Romani Language* in collaboration with the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERAC) in Berlin, the Municipality of Elbasan, and "Aleksandër Xhuvani" University. This forum brought together linguists, academics, representatives of local and central institutions, members of the diplomatic corps in Albania, Romani language teachers, activists, students, and other stakeholders from across the Western Balkans. The primary focus of the forum was to address the urgent need for documenting the language, traditions, and culture of the Romani minority, alongside concrete efforts to enhance their social inclusion. One of the forum's primary goals was to unify strategies aimed at documenting the Romani language, marking the first step toward creating written texts, studying the language, and developing appropriate educational materials. Romani has traditionally been passed down orally from generation to generation within the Romani community, but it lacks a documented, registered, or preserved written linguistic corpus. The forum also highlighted the importance of promoting the Romani language as a strategy to combat antigypsyism, fostering social inclusion and cultural recognition.

The forum's proceedings will culminate in a document containing key recommendations from the participants, which will be publicly available through the media and shared with relevant institutions to encourage solutions and implementation. IRCA remains committed to organizing inclusive activities and is confident that this first forum in Elbasan will become a tradition, serving as a platform to share best practices, progress, challenges, and the ongoing need for further interventions in the field of Romani language and culture.

### Moments...

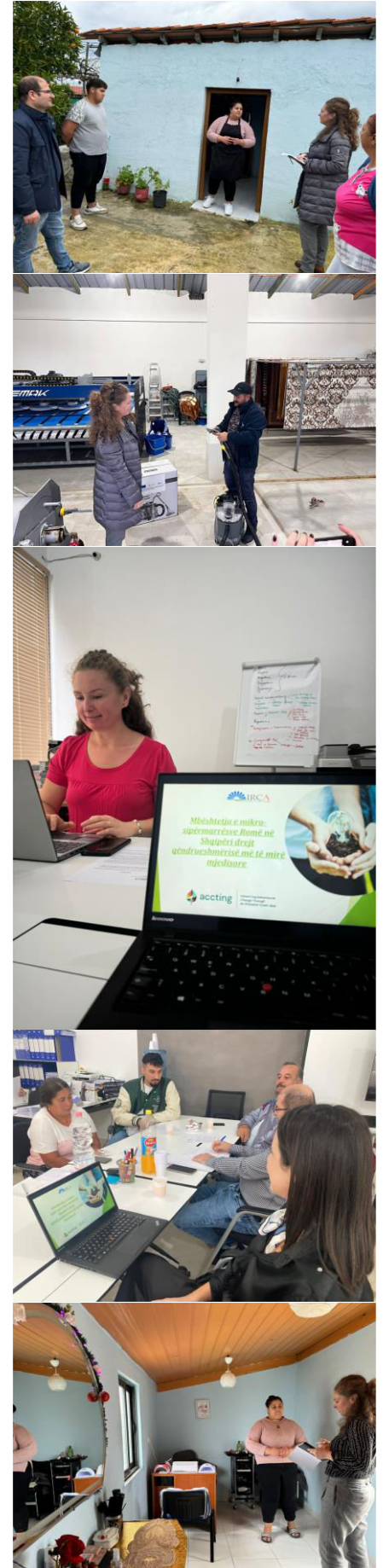




IRCA is implementing the project **"Support for Roma Micro-Entrepreneurs in Albania Towards Better Environmental Sustainability"**, funded by the ASSOCIATION FONDATION EUROPEENNE DE LA SCIENCE (ESF) under the ACCTING project. The initiative promotes environmental preservation by helping at least 60 Roma micro-entrepreneurs adopt eco-friendly practices, reducing pollution, protecting biodiversity, and mitigating climate change.

The project provides tailored professional training for at least 20 participants to build sustainable businesses, while 10 selected micro-entrepreneurs receive personalized expert advice and material support. A key outcome is the establishment of the **Coalition of Green Roma Micro-Entrepreneurs (CRGM)** and an online platform to facilitate networking and knowledge sharing among sustainability-oriented businesses. To inspire broader adoption of green practices, three outstanding Roma entrepreneurs will be awarded prizes. This project addresses the underexplored link between climate change and business in Albania, especially among marginalized groups, fostering environmental sustainability in micro-enterprises.

With the financial support of the **Albanian Helsinki Committee**, IRCA is implementing the project *"Roma Youth Ambassadors of a Corruption-free Society"*. The project aims to combat the prevailing culture of tolerance towards corruption in Albania by promoting an anti-corruption mindset among Roma youth and strengthening partnerships with local authorities to ensure equal services for all citizens. Project aims to build a corruption-free society where Roma communities can access equal opportunities and services.



## Human Histories Exhibition

With support from RYCO and in partnership with QHPSM, IRCA implemented the project **"The Exhibition of Human Histories."** This initiative addressed sensitive issues faced by young people, including gender inequality, civic engagement, human rights, minority concerns, violence, economic challenges, and migration, using art as a medium. Young participants were trained in storytelling to share their personal experiences and convey important societal messages. Twenty young individuals (10 from Albania and 10 from Kosovo) served as storytelling ambassadors, and their stories were showcased to the public through a curated exhibition. The project successfully enhanced the capacities of young people, established a network for collaboration, and identified common challenges and opportunities. By using art as a therapeutic tool, the initiative contributed to improving the lives of young participants while fostering dialogue and understanding across borders.

### *Human Story: We are not what we show, we are what we hide!*

*...this is a story about the duality and complexity of human existence. The face, divided into two halves—one black and the other filled with vibrant colors—symbolizes the contrast between the inner darkness and the light that each person carries within themselves. ...*

As part of the project, we developed **Human Stories**, which convey emotions through words inspired by paintings. We invite you to explore these stories at the following link: [Human Stories](#)



## *We Empower the Roma Minority to Exercise Their Democratic Rights in the Central Elections*

IRCA is implementing the project "*We Empower the Roma Minority to Exercise Their Democratic Rights in the Central Elections*" with the financial support of the **U.S. Embassy's Democracy Commission Small Grants Program in Tirana**. This initiative is being carried out in 10 municipalities: Fier, Vlora, Tirana, Lushnje, Divjakë, Elbasan, Berat, Shkodër, Roskovec, and Cërrik. The project aims to empower Roma communities by increasing their awareness of their democratic rights and encouraging greater voter participation in the upcoming 2025 Parliamentary Elections in Albania. Through targeted outreach, education, and engagement activities, the initiative seeks to ensure that Roma individuals are fully informed and actively involved in the electoral process.





***Erasmus Plus project "Mitigating Migration Challenges in the Western Balkans: Bridging the Skills Gap for Social Care Providers via Curricula Enhancement and Micro-Credential Development" (WB-Edu4Migration)***

On November 1, 2024, IRCA joined the three-year Erasmus Plus project **"Mitigating Migration Challenges in the Western Balkans: Bridging the Skills Gap for Social Care Providers via Curricula Enhancement and Micro-Credential Development" (WB-Edu4Migration)**. This collaborative initiative involves universities and civil society organizations from Kosovo, Albania, Austria, Italy, and Denmark, working together to address the complex challenges posed by migration in the region.

The project focuses on empowering social workers and improving the academic framework in Albania and Kosovo by revising and updating relevant academic literature and curricula. By incorporating modern methodologies and creating micro-credential opportunities, the project aims to equip social care providers with the necessary skills and knowledge to respond effectively to migration-related issues.

A key objective is to bridge the existing skills gap in the social care sector, ensuring service providers are well-prepared to support migrants and their families. This effort includes capacity-building initiatives, cross-border collaboration, and the development of innovative training modules that reflect the evolving needs of migration-affected communities. Through these measures, the project seeks to contribute to sustainable solutions for migration challenges in the Western Balkans.

For more information about the project, visit the website: [Wbedu4mig](https://wbedu4mig.org)



## *Other significant achievements throughout 2024:*

In addition to the successful implementation of projects and signing of long-term contracts, IRCA actively participated in a series of important initiatives both domestically and internationally.

### **Enhancing Youth Capacities for Online Safety**

As part of a broader initiative to promote cybersecurity awareness, IRCA, in collaboration with the National Cybersecurity Authority, organized a series of interactive sessions targeting young people. These sessions aimed to equip participants with the knowledge and tools necessary to navigate the digital environment safely and responsibly. The discussions focused on critical issues, including the identification and mitigation of risks associated with the digital world, practical steps for safeguarding personal data, and strategies to prevent and address cyberbullying. Recognizing that cyberbullying disproportionately affects young people, the sessions emphasized the importance of fostering a culture of respect and awareness in online spaces. Participants were introduced to real-life scenarios and practical techniques to recognize potential threats, respond effectively to incidents, and adopt proactive measures to protect themselves and others. The campaign underlined the need for continuous education and vigilance in the face of evolving cyber risks, highlighting the role of young people as key actors in creating a safer digital community.



## *Strategic Meeting with Local Structures in Vlorë*

IRCA held a strategic meeting with the Mayor of Vlorë and representatives from local structures to discuss potential joint efforts for the implementation of projects focusing on infrastructure, housing, socio-economic empowerment, and social inclusion. The goal of the meeting was to explore collaborative approaches between IRCA, local government authorities, and community stakeholders to address the pressing challenges faced by vulnerable communities in Vlorë. Key discussions revolved around improving infrastructure in marginalized neighborhoods, enhancing access to basic services like water and sanitation, and identifying opportunities to improve housing conditions for Roma families and other vulnerable groups. Additionally, the meeting focused on developing strategies for socio-economic empowerment, such as providing job training, skills development, and fostering local businesses. The importance of social inclusion was emphasized, with a focus on ensuring equal access to resources and opportunities for all members of society. The Mayor of Vlorë and local representatives showed a strong commitment to these initiatives, recognizing the need for collaboration between local government, civil society, and international partners. This meeting was a significant step in advancing Vlorë's vision for inclusive urban development and the empowerment of marginalized groups. The joint projects discussed aim to create lasting positive impacts on the lives of vulnerable populations in Vlorë, contributing to a more equitable and sustainable future for the community.





## *Gratitude for Promoting Gender Equality*

The Executive Director of IRCA has been honored with the "Men and Boys Who Inspire for Gender Equality 2024 Award" 🏆🏆🏆 for his significant contributions to advancing gender equality through the Youth Voice Network of Organizations. Just as there are countless inspiring women and girls fighting for their rights, this award serves as recognition for all the brave men and boys who stand alongside them in this shared battle for equality.



## *Piloting the Community Work Initiative*

As part of employment programs, IRCA is piloting the Community Work Project, which takes cultural factors into account to integrate individuals into the labor market.



## *IRCA's Participation in the Final Regional Conference of the ROMACTED Programme*

IRCA proudly participated in the Final Regional Conference of the joint Council of Europe and European Union Programme, **#ROMACTED: Promoting Good Governance and Roma Empowerment at Local Level**, held in Turkey. This significant event marked the culmination of an impactful 8-year initiative aimed at fostering inclusive governance and empowering Roma communities across the region.

As the supporting organization for the ROMACTED Programme in Albania, IRCA played a pivotal role in advancing the program's objectives. Over the years, IRCA has worked closely with 10 municipalities in Albania to develop and implement inclusive policies that address the needs of Roma communities. These efforts have focused on creating diverse physical and social environments that promote equality, access to services, and active community participation. Key achievements of the program include enhancing the capacities of local authorities to engage in participatory decision-making, fostering dialogue between Roma communities and municipal leaders, and implementing concrete actions to improve living conditions and opportunities for Roma individuals.

IRCA's involvement underscores its commitment to promoting good governance, social inclusion, and empowerment for marginalized groups. The conference provided an opportunity to reflect on the progress made, share best practices, and discuss pathways for sustaining the positive impacts achieved through this transformative program.





## Initiative to Increase Roma Community Participation in the 2025 Parliamentary Elections

In preparation for the 2025 parliamentary elections, **#CEC\_Albania**, in collaboration with the **OSCE Presence in Albania** and the **Institute of Romani Culture in Albania (IRCA)**, organized an event aimed at educating, informing, and raising awareness within the Roma community about Albania's electoral processes.

The event served as a platform to engage Roma citizens and ensure their active participation in the upcoming elections. Participants were briefed on the critical steps being undertaken by the Central Election Commission (CEC) to ensure transparent and inclusive electoral processes.

Key discussions focused on essential topics such as the importance of voter participation, verifying names on voter lists, and understanding voting procedures. The event also emphasized legal provisions concerning electoral crimes, aiming to empower community members to make informed and confident decisions on election day.

This initiative highlights a collaborative effort to promote civic engagement and uphold democratic values, ensuring that the Roma community has both the knowledge and resources to exercise their electoral rights fully in the 2025 elections.



## *Contribution to the NECE Festival 2024 Activities in Tirana*

As part of the European Festival of Civic Education held in Tirana, **IRCA** successfully organized one of the planned activities, the cultural event **"Ngjyrat Rome" (The Colors of Roma)**. Representatives from **NECE Festival 2024** participated in this event, enriching it with their perspectives and contributions to cultural exchange and the promotion of an open, inclusive society.

During the event, attendees had the opportunity to learn about IRCA's extensive work, particularly in preserving and promoting Roma culture as an integral part of Albania's broader cultural heritage. The exchange fostered stronger intercultural ties and opened pathways for future collaborations, emphasizing the shared values of cultural diversity and mutual understanding.

This collaboration not only celebrated Roma culture but also reinforced the importance of civic education in advancing a society free from barriers and rich in diversity.





## Participation in the Regional Conference on Youth Cultural Cooperation

IRCA proudly participated in the **Regional Conference on Youth Cultural Cooperation**, held in Belgrade, as part of the broader efforts of the **Western Balkans Youth Lab 2** project, funded by the European Union EU and implemented by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). This conference aimed to unite young artists, cultural practitioners, and policymakers from across the Western Balkans to foster collaboration, nurture creative talents, and inspire regional partnerships.

IRCA's delegation included talented youth who showcased their artistic works 🎨, highlighting sensitive societal issues such as inequality, human rights, and cultural identity. Through paintings and other forms of artistic expression, they provided a powerful platform to address these topics and spark meaningful dialogue. The youth participants used their art not only as a means of self-expression but also as a tool to inspire and educate communities on the importance of inclusion and mutual understanding.

The conference also served as an invaluable opportunity for young artists to connect with peers and cultural policymakers across the region. These interactions facilitated discussions about shared challenges and opportunities, fostering a collective vision for building a more inclusive society. The event emphasized the role of culture and art as bridges that transcend barriers, enabling dialogue and collaboration that promote social cohesion and regional unity.

Through its participation, IRCA reaffirmed its commitment to empowering youth and using art as a medium for societal transformation and regional cooperation. The experience also strengthened partnerships and paved the way for future initiatives aimed at advancing cultural exchange and shared values in the Western Balkans.

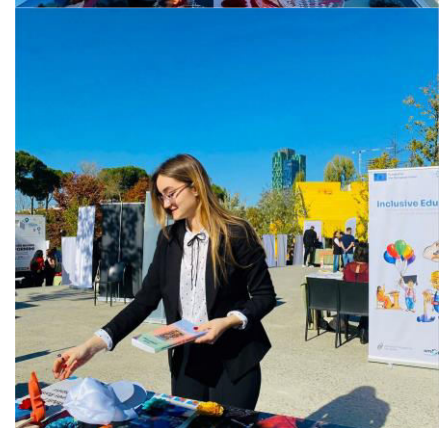
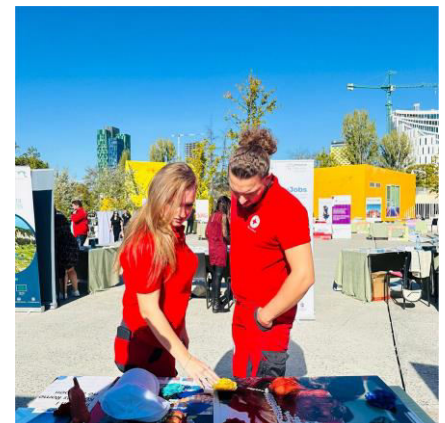


## IRCA Joins the 2024 Day of Activism Under the Slogan “Voices of Inclusion”

IRCA proudly participated in the **2024 Day of Activism**, an inspiring event centered around the theme “**Voices of Inclusion.**” This meaningful day brought together civil society organizations, activists, and community members to celebrate and advocate for diversity, equality, and social justice. IRCA’s team of dedicated staff and volunteers took the opportunity to showcase the organization’s impactful work, mission, and achievements over the years. Through interactive presentations, exhibitions, and discussions, IRCA highlighted its efforts in empowering marginalized communities, promoting digital inclusion, and fostering an open society that embraces diversity.

A central focus of IRCA’s participation was to amplify the voices of those often left unheard, ensuring their stories and perspectives are included in broader societal narratives. By engaging attendees in conversations about inclusion and equity, IRCA emphasized the importance of collective action in creating a society where everyone, regardless of background, can thrive. The Day of Activism also provided a platform for networking and collaboration. IRCA connected with like-minded organizations and individuals, fostering partnerships to further strengthen the shared mission of building an inclusive future.

Under the powerful slogan “**Voices of Inclusion,**” IRCA reaffirmed its commitment to advocacy and its role as a driving force for positive change. The event served as both a celebration of past achievements and a call to action for continued efforts to break down barriers and promote a society that values and uplifts all voices.



## ✚ IRCA part of ARGATIA!

IRCA had the honor of being part of the significant gathering **“Empowering Social Cohesion and Shared Ideals,”** organized by **Trans Europe Halles (TEH)** in collaboration with the European Union. Held in the vibrant city of Thessaloniki, Greece, this event brought together organizations and changemakers dedicated to fostering social cohesion 🌱 and exchanging transformative ideas 💡 for a more inclusive and united future.

As a participant, IRCA proudly presented its organizational mission 📌, ongoing initiatives, and key achievements over the years 🏆. This platform offered the opportunity to highlight the impactful work IRCA has accomplished, particularly in supporting vulnerable communities, promoting cultural heritage, and advocating for human rights and equality.

The event also served as a space for meaningful connections 🤝, as IRCA engaged with other organizations sharing similar missions and values. These interactions facilitated discussions on best practices, innovative approaches, and opportunities for future collaboration. By exchanging ideas and experiences, the collective aim was to amplify efforts that bring about long-term, sustainable change 🌍.

The discussions during the event emphasized the importance of inclusive strategies that support every group and individual 🦊, ensuring that no one is left behind. IRCA’s participation underscored its commitment to creating impactful programs that address pressing societal challenges while contributing to a stronger sense of community.

By being part of **“Empowering Social Cohesion and Shared Ideals,”** IRCA reaffirmed its role as a key actor in driving positive change, sharing its vision, and learning from others to continue making a lasting difference in the communities it serves.





## IRCA's collaboration with local and national structures

IRCA has extensive local experience and a deep understanding of the social, economic, and cultural dynamics in Albania, particularly within Roma and marginalized communities. Since its establishment in 2011, IRCA has built a strong presence through a diverse range of projects and initiatives tailored to these communities. The organization operates throughout Albania, reflecting its extensive geographic reach and community engagement.

IRCA's work includes providing expertise to local and central government authorities in preparing Social Plans and Local and Central Action Plans for Roma Integration. Under the ROMACTED program, supported by the Council of Europe and the European Union, IRCA has contributed to creating Local Action Plans for Roma Integration in various municipalities, including Fier, Vlora, Lushnje, Korça, Elbasan, Pogradec, Përmet, Roskovec, Cërrik, Gjirokastra, and others. These efforts underscore IRCA's commitment to fostering inclusive development and addressing the specific needs of the Roma community at both local and national levels.

IRCA has also been part of the working group for drafting the National Strategy for Social Protection 2024-2030, bringing its expertise to this field. Furthermore, IRCA is actively engaged in various commissions within the Ministry of Health and Social Protection and has established strong relationships with all local governance structures. Through these collaborations, IRCA promotes transparency and accountability, ensuring that its initiatives align with the needs of the communities it serves.



### Study and experience exchange visits

Throughout 2024, IRCA staff has actively participated in a series of study visits and experience-sharing programs aimed at enhancing expertise and fostering cross-border collaboration. These initiatives included visits to Slovakia, Finland, and Romania, each offering valuable insights and practical solutions to address community challenges.

The study visits to Slovakia were part of the "Albania Regional Exchange" initiative, organized by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in collaboration with IRCA in Košice. This 4-day program focused on several key areas: strengthening systematic development in education and healthcare, addressing the pervasive issue of early marriage within marginalized communities, and building effective municipal partnerships to promote social inclusion and sustainable development. Participants had the opportunity to engage with local authorities, educational institutions, and healthcare providers to explore best practices and innovative approaches that can be adapted to the Albanian context.

Additionally, visits to Finland and Romania have focused on exchanging experiences and exploring opportunities for international collaborations.

These visits not only enriched the professional capacity of IRCA's staff but also laid the groundwork for fostering long-term partnerships and exchanging effective strategies for addressing social challenges.



### ***IRCA - The Newest Partner of EUcalls***

In 2024, the Institute of Romani Culture in Albania (IRCA), a prominent advocate for social and economic inclusion of marginalized communities in Albania, proudly became the newest partner of **EUcalls**. EUcalls is a powerful platform designed to help organizations across Europe achieve their EU funding and partnership goals. It provides access to the latest European Union funding opportunities and supports organizations in building strong consortiums to collaborate on innovative, impactful projects. IRCA's inclusion in the EUcalls network marks a significant milestone in its mission to broaden its reach and amplify its impact. Recognized both nationally and internationally, IRCA has received prestigious awards from the European Commission, celebrating its exceptional efforts in Roma integration and its commitment to fostering inclusive development.



With over a decade of expertise, IRCA has successfully implemented more than 57 regional projects focusing on critical areas such as youth empowerment, education, employment, and cultural preservation. The organization is renowned for its comprehensive approach, which includes employment coaching, startup support, advocacy for marginalized communities, and the design of integration programs tailored to local needs.

As part of the EUcalls network, IRCA will gain enhanced access to EU funding opportunities, enabling it to further expand its programs and forge strong partnerships with European stakeholders. This collaboration not only reinforces IRCA's capacity to deliver sustainable and innovative solutions but also underscores its role as a key player in promoting equity, social inclusion, and economic growth in Albania and beyond.



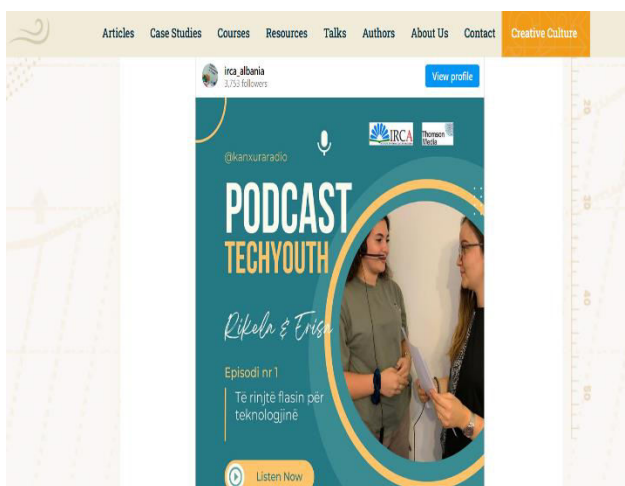
## *IRCA Celebrates Europe Day in Gjirokastra*

On Europe Day, IRCA proudly organized a special celebration in Gjirokastra, bringing together representatives from the **European Union in Albania** and the **Council of Europe Office in Tirana** to honor this important occasion. The event highlighted the values of unity, cooperation, and shared progress that Europe Day represents, fostering dialogue and connection among local communities, institutional representatives, and stakeholders. The celebration featured a dynamic program that included cultural performances, panel discussions, and interactive activities showcasing the contributions of European Union programs in Albania. IRCA emphasized its commitment to strengthening ties between Albania and the European Union through its various initiatives, particularly in promoting social inclusion, youth empowerment, and the integration of marginalized communities. The event in Gjirokastra served as a platform to reflect on the shared aspirations of European integration and the importance of collective efforts in building a sustainable future. IRCA's collaboration with key European institutions further underscored the organization's role in driving impactful projects that align with European values and priorities.



## IRCA Promoted as a Success Story on Journalift

The Institute of Romani Culture in Albania (IRCA) has been celebrated as a success story on **Journalift**, an innovative online platform providing hands-on practices, tools, and knowledge for individuals and organizations invested in media development, business innovation, and emerging trends in the media industry. Designed as a knowledge hub, Journalift caters specifically to the evolving needs of media outlets, offering a range of resources that empower organizations to adapt and thrive in a dynamic media landscape. In the feature titled **"Rejuvenating Voices: IRCA's Youth-Centric Media Evolution,"** Journalift sheds light on IRCA's transformative journey in engaging youth through media innovation. This case study highlights how IRCA has strategically embraced a youth-driven approach, fostering the active participation of young people in media creation and storytelling. By providing platforms such as **Radio Kanxura**, an online radio station established in 2015, IRCA has successfully amplified the voices of marginalized groups, particularly Roma youth, creating spaces for them to express their ideas, share their experiences, and address pressing social issues.



This recognition on Journalift underscores IRCA's role as a pioneer in combining media development with social advocacy. It reflects the organization's commitment to leveraging innovative tools and approaches to promote equity, celebrate diversity, and encourage community engagement. This acknowledgment also solidifies IRCA's position as a leader in media-driven social impact, showcasing its efforts as a replicable model for other organizations in Albania and beyond.

Read the article on the website: [Journalift case studies](#)



## ***IRCA Leads Roma Week with a Series of Inspiring Activities Across Albania***

### **Roma Week in Vlora**

In April, the Institute of Romani Culture in Albania (IRCA) took the lead in organizing **Roma Week**, a vibrant celebration marked by a variety of activities held in different cities to honor the culture, history, and contributions of the Roma community. Among the highlights was a special event in Vlora, dedicated to the **International Roma Day** on April 8th, which showcased the creativity and talents of young individuals. As part of the celebrations in Vlora, IRCA organized an **art exhibition featuring paintings created by students**, centered on the theme “**My Community.**” This initiative provided young participants with an opportunity to express their perspectives and reflect on the values of inclusion, diversity, and unity within their communities. The artworks captured the essence of the Roma community’s vibrant culture, emphasizing themes of identity and belonging. The event was graced by the presence of **Ermal Dredha, Mayor of Vlora**, who commended the organizers for their dedication and praised the students for their remarkable talent and creativity. In his remarks, the Mayor underscored the importance of celebrating Roma culture and fostering mutual understanding and respect among all communities. The art exhibition in Vlora was just one of the many impactful activities carried out during Roma Week. These initiatives not only celebrated the rich heritage of the Roma community but also aimed to raise awareness about their contributions to society and the challenges they face. Through engaging events like exhibitions, cultural performances, and community dialogues, IRCA continues to promote inclusivity and advocate for the rights and empowerment of Roma people in Albania.



## **Roma Week in Lushnje: Celebrating International Roma Day on April 8th**

As part of the nationwide celebrations of **International Roma Day**, the Municipality of Lushnje hosted a vibrant event that brought together community members, local leaders, and advocates to honor the culture and contributions of the Roma community. The celebration was graced by the presence of **Mayor Eriselda Sefa**, who emphasized the importance of fostering inclusivity and addressing the challenges faced by Roma individuals in Albania. During the event, participants highlighted the need for greater attention to the issues affecting the Roma community, advocating for policies and initiatives that promote their development and integration. The gathering resonated with a powerful call to action, as the Roma attendees collectively voiced the message: **“Together for the development and integration of the Roma community, for a society free from discrimination and racism.”**



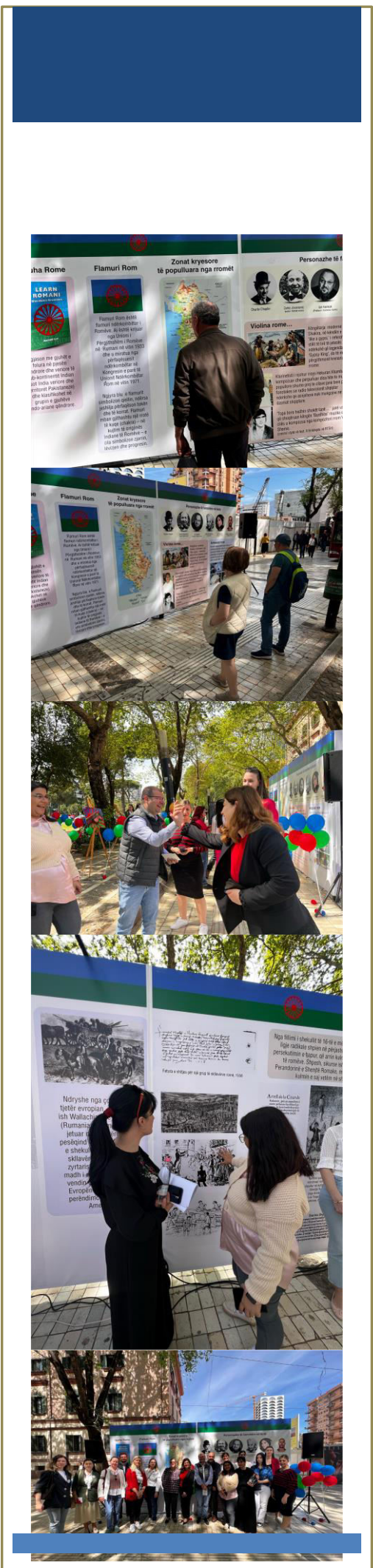
The event in Lushnje was marked by an atmosphere of unity and hope, reflecting the shared aspirations for a more inclusive and equitable society. Through speeches, cultural performances, and community discussions, participants underscored the value of diversity and the necessity of eliminating discrimination and prejudice. This celebration was part of a broader initiative led by the **Institute of Romani Culture in Albania (IRCA)** to mark Roma Week with activities across the country. By fostering dialogue and showcasing the rich heritage of the Roma community, these events aim to inspire positive change and strengthen societal cohesion.

## **Roma Week in Tirana: CHACHIPE – 'The Truth'** **Installation Highlights Roma Culture**

As part of **Roma Week 2024**, the Institute of Romani Culture in Albania (IRCA), in collaboration with the **European Union**, the **Council of Europe**, and the **Municipality of Tirana**, organized a powerful cultural installation titled **CHACHIPE – 'The Truth.'** This unique installation provided visitors with a profound insight into the rich heritage, history, and resilience of the Roma community. The installation was designed to go beyond mere representation, offering a dynamic platform for storytelling and education about Roma traditions, achievements, and the community's ongoing struggle for equal rights. Through visual displays, interactive elements, and informative panels, CHACHIPE aimed to dispel stereotypes and foster a deeper understanding of Roma identity.

The event also carried a strong **message of unity and resilience**, serving as a testament to the enduring strength of the Roma people. It highlighted their continued efforts to achieve equality and dignity in a society that often overlooks their contributions and challenges. By working together, the European Union, the Council of Europe, the Municipality of Tirana, and IRCA demonstrated the power of partnerships in advancing human rights and inclusion. The installation provided a space for dialogue and reflection, encouraging visitors to recognize the value of diversity and the need for a society free from discrimination.

Roma Week in Tirana and initiatives like CHACHIPE reaffirm IRCA's commitment to advocacy and cultural promotion, showcasing the importance of visibility and empowerment for the Roma community. The event served as both a celebration of Roma heritage and a call to action for continued support and solidarity in the pursuit of equal rights for all.





## **Roma Week in Berat: Celebrating the International Roma Day**

Together with the **European Union in Albania**, the **Municipality of Berat**, and the **State Committee for National Minorities**, IRCA commemorated **International Roma Day** in Berat with a series of impactful activities aimed at raising awareness about Roma social inclusion and the critical support needed to ensure the reintegration of returned Roma migrants.

The event featured inspiring life stories from Roma youth, women, and men from Berat, Fier, and Devoll. These narratives highlighted the resilience and determination of the Roma community in overcoming challenges and achieving success. Positive role models from the Roma community shared their journeys, offering insights into the historical, social, and cultural dimensions of Roma identity, as well as their integration into Albanian society.

A highlight of the event was the presentation of **journalistic research materials** by young Roma participants, who used photography and storytelling to shed light on Roma culture and issues. Through their work, these young advocates emphasized the importance of preserving cultural heritage while promoting societal understanding and inclusivity.

An inspiring example of empowerment was showcased with the **creation of a care and cleaning service business in Berat**, led by Roma and Egyptian women. This initiative, launched through a series of soft skills training sessions, financial management workshops, and business development programs, demonstrated the transformative impact of investing in community-driven economic initiatives.

Additionally, the event included an **exhibition of three stands** featuring products and outcomes from social cohesion programs implemented in the municipalities of Fier, Berat, and Devoll. These displays served as a testament to the success of ongoing efforts to foster economic empowerment and social inclusion within the Roma community.

The celebration in Berat was a powerful reminder of the need for continued support and solidarity in advancing the rights, opportunities, and inclusion of the Roma people in Albania. Through shared stories, advocacy, and tangible initiatives, the event underscored the importance of collective action in building a society free from discrimination and inequality.



## Roma Week in Elbasan: Honoring International Roma Day

April 8 marks a significant day for the Roma community worldwide as **International Roma Day**, a celebration of their history, culture, and contributions. As part of Roma Week in Elbasan, an event was organized that brought together Roma youth, activists, and representatives from civil society. A special guest at the gathering was **Mr. Enver Mustafaj**, a Roma artisan who has been practicing his craft for over 50 years. During the event, Mr. Mustafaj shared his inspiring journey, revealing that he began learning the art of basket weaving at the age of 13, a skill passed down from his grandfather. His handcrafted baskets and woven goods, created using traditional techniques, are widely recognized and can be found along the Elbasan-Librazhd national road.



The gathering served as an important platform to discuss key elements of Roma culture, highlighting its richness and resilience. It also addressed the challenges the Roma community faces today, emphasizing the steps needed to improve their social and economic conditions. In his closing message, Mr. Mustafaj underscored the importance of preserving artisanal crafts as a means of keeping the Roma identity alive: *"Artisanal craftsmanship is vital because it sustains the culture of a people. If we want to preserve our identity as Roma, we must embrace traditional crafts and pass down our cultural values from generation to generation."*

This heartfelt message resonated deeply, serving as a call to action for Roma youth and the wider community to preserve their heritage and promote the values that define their identity. The event not only celebrated Roma culture but also inspired conversations about empowerment and inclusion, strengthening the collective voice of the Roma people in Albania.

### ***IRCA Participates in the Dialogue on Roma Minority Integration***

IRCA was actively involved in the **Dialogue for the Integration of the Roma Minority**, an initiative implemented by the **European Union in Albania**, the **Council of Europe**, and the **Ministry of Health and Social Protection**.

This dialogue served as a platform to address pressing issues faced by the Roma community, focusing on strategies to enhance their integration into Albanian society. Key stakeholders, including government representatives, civil society organizations, and community leaders, came together to discuss solutions for improving access to education, healthcare, employment, and social services for Roma individuals.

IRCA contributed to the discussions by sharing its extensive experience in implementing projects that promote Roma empowerment, inclusion, and advocacy. Through concrete examples and success stories, IRCA highlighted the importance of tailored programs and policies to address the unique challenges of the Roma community.

One of the central outcomes of the dialogue was a renewed commitment from all stakeholders to strengthen inter-institutional collaboration and develop inclusive strategies that align with European standards. These efforts aim to ensure that Roma integration remains a priority on Albania's path toward EU accession.

IRCA's active participation underscores its role as a key advocate for the Roma minority, continually working to bridge gaps and foster sustainable development for marginalized communities.





### ***IRCA - A Key Participant in Preparatory Work for the 2025 Parliamentary Elections***

In anticipation of the 2025 parliamentary elections in Albania, **IRCA** has been actively involved in preparatory efforts aimed at enhancing voter education and engagement. A significant step in this process was a **technical workshop organized by the OSCE Presence in Albania and the Central Election Commission (CEC)**, which took place today. The workshop focused on **findings and recommendations regarding voter education** and served as a vital platform for discussion and collaboration. The activity brought together a wide range of participants, including **representatives and experts from the CEC**, other **state institutions, civil society organizations**, and **political parties**. The central aim of the workshop was to share insights and strategies on how to improve **informational, educational, and awareness-raising campaigns** aimed at voters, especially those from marginalized communities, including the Roma population.



**IRCA**, through its extensive experience in **civic engagement** and **advocacy**, played a crucial role in offering expertise on how to tailor voter education campaigns to reach vulnerable groups, ensuring that their right to vote is exercised effectively and without barriers. The discussions emphasized the need for **inclusive approaches** to voter education that cater to different demographic groups, including **youth, women, and marginalized minorities** such as the Roma community.

**IRCA's** involvement in this workshop highlights its commitment to strengthening **democratic processes** in Albania and ensuring that marginalized communities, including the Roma, have a voice in the **2025 parliamentary elections**. By contributing to these efforts, **IRCA** continues to play a critical role in fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

## **IRCA Welcomes the German Ambassador to Albania**

The German Ambassador to Albania, **Ambassador Bergner**, held a meeting with **IRCA** as part of the ongoing support from the **German Embassy** for IRCA's educational and empowerment program targeting **100 Roma women and girls** in **Berat, Elbasan, Gjirokastër, and Grabian-Divjakë**. The program aims to empower Roma women and girls through education and skill development, fostering their integration into the broader society and improving their social and economic status. The Ambassador's visit was a testament to the strong partnership between **IRCA** and the **German Embassy** in addressing the systemic challenges faced by marginalized Roma communities in Albania. Unfortunately, Roma people in Albania continue to be among the most marginalized and deprived communities in the country, facing challenges in accessing basic services, education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. The project aims to bridge these gaps, providing Roma women and girls with essential skills and opportunities to empower them to be active participants in their communities. During the meeting, both **IRCA** and **Ambassador Bergner** discussed future steps for improving the situation of Roma communities in Albania, including strengthening educational programs, enhancing vocational training opportunities, and promoting **gender equality** within these vulnerable groups. The collaboration is seen as a crucial step towards achieving long-term, sustainable development for the Roma community and ensuring their **social inclusion** and **empowerment** in Albanian society. This partnership continues to demonstrate a commitment to **Roma rights**, particularly the right to **equal access to education, empowerment, and integration**, which are key for a **more inclusive and equitable future** for all Albanians



**IRCA** expressed its gratitude for the ongoing support, emphasizing the importance of such initiatives in breaking the cycle of marginalization. The involvement of the German Embassy has been critical in ensuring the success of the program, which provides Roma women and girls with the tools they need to enhance their life chances and contribute to the development of their communities.



## IRCA Joins EASSW: A Significant Milestone in 2024

In 2024, IRCA became a member of the European Association of Schools of Social Work (EASSW), marking a major achievement for the organization. EASSW is a prestigious platform that brings together over 300 schools, organizations, and individual members committed to advancing social work education across Europe and globally.



As the first organization or institution from Albania to join EASSW, IRCA's membership reflects its growing capacity and recognition in the field of international collaboration and academia. This partnership opens up new opportunities for IRCA to engage with a broader network of professionals and institutions, share best practices, and contribute to the development of social work education on an international scale.

**Find more: [EASSW](#)**

## Our Team

IRCA extends heartfelt gratitude to its dedicated staff, experts, and volunteers who work tirelessly every day to advance our shared causes. Their unwavering commitment, passion, and expertise are the driving forces behind our success in creating meaningful change for Roma and vulnerable communities across Albania.

*We invite you to get to know our core team,  
whose efforts make a significant impact:*

*Executive Director- Bledar Taho*

*Program Manager- Marsela Isaku*

*Program Manager- Sulltana Aliaj*

*Project Coordinator- Egida Delibashi*

*Project Coordinator- Brisilda Taço*

*Finance Officer- Klaudja Hamiti*





## Strategic Focus Areas for 2025

Looking ahead, IRCA has outlined several strategic focus areas that will guide its work throughout 2025. A central priority is scaling initiatives that promote **social and economic empowerment**, including expanding support for women entrepreneurs and offering more tailored vocational training programs. Through these initiatives, IRCA seeks to foster economic independence and resilience among Roma and **vulnerable communities**.

**Digital literacy** will also be a major focus, with IRCA aiming to increase digital skills among community members of all ages. This effort will include structured digital training workshops, which will be available to young people, adults, and elders alike. By enhancing digital literacy, IRCA intends to reduce the digital divide, opening up new opportunities for employment, education, and civic engagement.

Additionally, advancing **cultural heritage** projects remains a priority for IRCA in 2025. The organization will be supporting initiatives that celebrate Roma culture and identity through various forms of art, language standardization, and cultural preservation projects. These efforts will include public art installations, language workshops, and youth-led cultural events, fostering a sense of pride and connection within the Roma community.

In 2025, IRCA will also focus on emerging critical issues that affect vulnerable communities, expanding its scope of work to include combating **human trafficking**. IRCA will intensify its efforts to raise awareness about human trafficking and support initiatives aimed at preventing it, offering rehabilitation services for survivors, and collaborating with law enforcement and other organizations to address this issue.

**Mental health awareness** and support will be another key area. Recognizing the importance of mental well-being, IRCA will work on initiatives to raise awareness about mental health challenges, reduce stigma, and provide necessary psychological support to vulnerable groups, especially the Roma community.

In response to global environmental challenges, IRCA will integrate **climate change** awareness into its programs, promoting sustainable practices, environmental education, and adaptation strategies in vulnerable communities. This effort will include projects that empower local communities to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change.

Furthermore, IRCA will continue to prioritize **youth empowerment** by offering leadership training, mentoring programs, and opportunities for young people to actively contribute to their communities. The goal is to foster resilience, critical thinking, and social responsibility among the younger generation.

**Gender equality and human rights** will be embedded throughout all initiatives, ensuring that women, youth, and marginalized groups are provided equal opportunities to thrive. IRCA will actively work to reduce gender disparities and promote policies that protect human rights, focusing on inclusive development and empowerment for all.

Another key area will be **employment**, as IRCA seeks to increase job opportunities, particularly for vulnerable groups. This includes creating employment pathways, offering skill development, and supporting inclusive employment policies to ensure that no one is left behind. IRCA will also focus on integrating social services to improve the quality of life for vulnerable individuals, providing comprehensive support through the integration of health, education, and employment services.

Lastly, IRCA will expand its collaborations at the **regional and international levels**, partnering with organizations, governments, and stakeholders in the Balkans and beyond to advocate for Roma rights, share best practices, and engage in joint initiatives that contribute to the broader regional development agenda.

IRCA's planned initiatives and strategic focus areas for 2025 demonstrate a holistic approach to community empowerment, combining targeted support services, capacity-building programs, and advocacy work.

These efforts align with IRCA's mission to promote social justice, inclusivity, and sustainable development for Roma communities and vulnerable groups across Albania. Through these initiatives, IRCA will continue to create pathways to a better future for the communities it serves, ensuring they are equipped to thrive in an evolving social and economic landscape.

In conclusion, IRCA would like to extend heartfelt thanks to every donor, partner, and collaborator who has contributed to our initiatives and supported us in making impactful changes throughout this year.

Your commitment and engagement have been invaluable in enabling IRCA to serve Roma and marginalized communities more effectively, fostering resilience, inclusion, and opportunity. As we look forward, we invite you to continue supporting our mission and to join us in our activities aimed at building an equitable and inclusive society where all individuals can thrive. We encourage you to follow our social media channels to stay updated on our latest projects, stories, and events. Additionally, we warmly welcome any ideas or suggestions for furthering our work and making an even greater impact together. Thank you for being part of this journey and helping us bring positive change to those who need it most.



## ***Success Story: Finding Oneself Through Passion - Ana's Story and the Importance of Psychological Support***

🌸 What's the first word that comes to mind when you hear about childhood? What emotions do you experience when recalling events from your childhood? In fact, when we talk about childhood, we should all have colourful memories 🌈 and positive feelings! Childhood should be an idyllic garden 🌷 and the place of our dreams 🌙, where we could return without a second thought whenever we needed security and reflection!

But experience has shown us that childhood can resemble a faint ❤️ shadow, sometimes even a dark one! For many people, childhood is a period filled with challenges, difficulties, tears, and pain! And this picture describes Ana, a 14-year-old girl living in a remote area of Fier.

The IRCA team met Ana near her home... if it can even be called a home! The house where the girl lived with her two younger brothers 🧒🧒 and mother was in miserable conditions! Their life resembled more of a survival than actual living!

The mother introduced us to Ana, a 14-year-old girl full of dreams and fears. Ana had been unable to attend school for several reasons. Her school was very far 🚶 from her home, and Ana was afraid to go alone! The surrounding area was uninhabited, and they had often encountered people who harassed them. Besides the distance, Ana's family could not afford to buy books 📚, clothes 👗, or the necessary tools to enable her proper education. The mother was unemployed, while the father lived far away, and their contacts were minimal.

💬 Ana told us that these years had been a difficult journey for her, filled with challenges and limitations. She often felt lonely and hopeless. While her peers went to school and played, Ana spent her days thinking about the uncertain future that awaited her. Ana confided to the psychologists that she spent her days locked in a room, constantly feeling deep anxiety and 😞 sadness. The psychologists communicated with Ana for a 🕒 long time. They guided her on self-calming techniques 🧘, emotional management, ❤️ and self-esteem building.


As time passed, Ana began to see life differently. She began to understand that even though she couldn't



attend school for a certain period of time, she had skills and talents that she could develop. The psychological staff helped her discover a passion for art and photography 📷, a hobby that allowed her to express herself and find solace.


Ana's story highlights the importance of psychological support for children and youth who face significant challenges and barriers. 🛑 On the other hand, her case is a call for the importance of mobilizing and integrating all services, beyond economic assistance!




📷 The accompanying photo to this story is a meaningful one! In this photo, not just images are captured, but also feelings, emotions, 💙 resilience, and a call for the importance of psychological support across all age groups.



### ***Success Story: The Power of Language, the Power of Silence!***



 Language is undoubtedly the primary instrument of communication throughout psychotherapy! Through speaking and narration, we address problems or try to make sense of our dilemmas and questions.

But, language barriers  can also undermine the psychological process. There are so many ways in which individuals engaged in psychological sessions communicate: sometimes by saying things they don't want to say out loud , but express through non-verbal language, sometimes by sharing things they don't yet understand, and often by sending mixed messages that need to be clarified in the context of a safe environment.

The experience with the Roma community and other individuals from marginalized groups gave a whole new meaning to the psychological support provided by the IRCA team. This experience is something we want to share more widely , as a necessary approach to apply with vulnerable communities, who are a continuous call for one of the greatest human needs: Understand me!

The psychological process goes beyond diagnosing according to set criteria; psychological support is about helping individuals facing psychological difficulties  to discover and make sense of their experiences. People need to feel heard in a safe environment, characterized by empathy and non-judgment . But what happens when we encounter individuals from different cultural, educational , or social backgrounds? How do we assess whether the therapeutic process has been successful and that what we've heard and conveyed has been understood accurately?

 First, it is important to match the language level of the people engaged in psychological sessions, and to inform them about the shared journey through a culturally sensitive approach. Psychological sessions should provide opportunities to clarify goals and uncertainties, creating a rhythm of open and non-judgmental communication. And since the language of therapy is about giving meaning , it is crucial to demonstrate adaptation and sensitivity during psychological sessions, conveying beyond words the message and feeling of being understood and heard!

Throughout the implementation of the project, the IRCA psychology staff, during their work with the Roma community and/or returnees, paid great attention to the non-verbal aspects that allow them to capture nuances of communication that go beyond words... a forced smile , avoidance of eye contact , a change in body posture... We realized that some of the individuals communicate more clearly through art



🧠 and play rather than words. Some of them chose to use metaphors to describe how they felt, others chose folk stories 📖, and some chose play 🎲, art, or writing 🖋️.

When we recognize and understand the preferred ways of communication, the therapeutic bond is stronger, as the individual feels heard and understood.

Let's compare the verbal and non-verbal communication of an individual we are offering psychological support to with a foreign language. When we learn that language, there is less loss in translation. Speaking the same language enriches communication, increases trust, and strengthens the psychological relationship. ✨ This is the power of language!

Often, psychological sessions may be characterized by long pauses and very little narration. In one of the recent activities, a group of young girls 👧👧 sat in silence for several minutes, just looking into each other's eyes. They were using the safe environment to reflect on themselves, to feel the emotions, and to create a connection 🤝 between them, which perhaps goes beyond some cliché words. At the end of the session, one of the girls stood up 👤, perhaps on behalf of all the other girls who had the same story 📖, and said: "Today, I spoke more than any other day in my life, I spoke in silence! Today, I felt completely understood, I finally understood ❤️ myself too!" ✨ And at the same time, this is the power of silence!

In conclusion, IRCA extends its heartfelt thanks for being part of this journey. Your support and collaboration have been invaluable in driving positive change and empowering Roma and vulnerable communities.

We are honored to share with you the ways you can reach us:

- **Website:** Stay updated on our initiatives, projects, and events by visiting our official website: [Web](#)
- **Email:** For inquiries, partnerships, or feedback, feel free to contact us at [institute.irca@gmail.com](mailto:institute.irca@gmail.com)
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- **Office:** Visit us at our office in Tirana, where our team is always ready to welcome you and discuss ways we can work together.

*We warmly invite you to connect with us, share your ideas, and join us in building an inclusive and equitable future for all. Thank you for being an essential part of IRCA's mission and vision!*

*Supporting vulnerable groups and fostering inclusivity is not just an act of compassion—it is the foundation of a just and equitable society where everyone has the opportunity to thrive!*

*IRCA's mission continues to inspire change, empower communities, and advocate for inclusivity!*