

EUROPEAN ROMA INSTITUTE FOR ARTS AND CULTURE (ERiac)

AN EXPLAINER

WHAT IS EUROPEAN ROMA INSTITUTE FOR ARTS AND CULTURE?

The European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture e.V. (ERiac) is a joint initiative of the Council of Europe, the Open Society Foundations, and the Roma Leaders' initiative – the Alliance for the European Roma Institute. ERiac is an independent association registered under German law on June 7, 2017 in Berlin, Germany.

ERiac exists to increase the self-esteem of Roma and to decrease negative prejudice of the majority population towards the Roma by means of arts, culture, history, and media.

ERiac acts as an international creative hub to support the exchange of creative ideas across borders, cultural domains and Romani identities. ERiac aims to be the promoter of Romani contributions to European culture and talent, success and achievement, as well as to document the historical experience of Romani people in Europe. ERiac exists to be a communicator and public educator, to disseminate a positive image and knowledge about Romani people for dialogue and building mutual respect and understanding.

WHAT DOES THE ERiac DO?

The ERiac's office in Berlin serves as the headquarters to support the large network of Roma individuals and organizations working in the fields of arts and culture.

ERiac as an international hub strives to promote activities of hundreds of Roma organisations, intellectuals and artists to form multilateral initiatives and regional alliances, and to connect them with the policy makers and leaders of the different national and European levels.

The front office in Berlin gives space to a contemporary art gallery and an educational program which is open to the public and welcomes individual visitors and visitor groups.

ERiac has three core functions:

- As a *creative hub*, ERiac supports the exchange of existing and creative new ideas and materials across cultural borders, cultural domains and Romani identities, in order to document the historical experience of Romani people in Europe. ERiac is the promoter of Romani contributions to European culture and talent, success and achievement.
- As a *communicator* and *public educator*, ERiac disseminates a positive image and knowledge about Romani people, and uses public spaces for dialogue, such as schools, mainstream cultural institutions and media.
- As a *policy advisor* ERiac provides expert advice in its areas of competence, when required by the Council of Europe, its member States and other partners.

WHAT ARE THE PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING ERIAC?

ERiac's vision is grounded in six founding principles, which define the Institute's establishment, core functions, governance, structure and membership:

- Respect of the dignity of Romani people and Romani identity
- Diversity and plurality of Romani identities and cultures
- Romani leadership with the support and co-operation of non-Roma
- Engagement and contribution of Romani organizations and individuals in the establishment and ongoing activities of the Institute
- Political autonomy and non-partisanship, openness for collaboration with public authorities and political institutions as partners
- Highest quality standards in the domains of arts and culture, as well in as its own operational performance.

WHY IS THE INSTITUTE ESTABLISHED IN BERLIN?

The German government has offered to host the Institute, showing in this way its support for Roma cultural inclusion. The location of the headquarters of the Institute in Berlin places Roma arts and culture in the center of Europe, in one of the most culturally vibrant European capitals. Berlin symbolically represents a place where cultures and identities of Eastern and Western Europe converge. Germany is also a place which counts with a diverse Romani population – both that of historically present Sinti national minority as well as immigrant Roma originating from the Balkans or from countries of the CEE. Finally, Germany has played a leading role in the recognition of the Roma Holocaust during the Second World War. The German government is a great partner in rebuilding the Roma cultural legacy in Europe.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT THAT THE INSTITUTE IS LED BY ROMA?

Roma representing themselves, and being able to define who they are (and who they are not), is the best way to break prejudice and stereotypes. It would therefore be inappropriate to establish an institute on Roma culture, history, language and art without Roma leadership. If Roma intellectuals and artists are not allowed to lead the Institute, the result would be that Roma would be denied ownership of the Institute — and they would distance themselves from similar initiatives even further in the future. This does not mean the Institute is open to Roma only. The Institute invites the participation of non-Roma; everyone supporting the basic principles will be able to join the ERIAC as staff, partner, associate member or contributor. Within the Institute, Roma leadership translates into a governance structure that gives Roma a strong role in decision-making and management processes.

In fact, Roma leadership is one of the core founding principles. Beyond securing the Roma ownership of the Institute it is also about a paradigmatic shift. Roma participation has become one of the buzz words of all Roma inclusion policies and initiatives over the years, however, Roma were rarely given the power to lead.

HOW IS THE ROMA COMMUNITY AND OTHER ROMA ORGANIZATIONS CONNECTED WITH THE WORK OF THE INSTITUTE?

ERIANC is envisioned as a membership-based organization, bringing together Roma and non-Roma individuals and organizations, with relevant and demonstrated competencies and experience in the field of arts and culture and who are committed to ERIAC's founding values.

Associate members have key roles in building the resources of ERIAC's, engaging in creative exchange and co-production, taking ownership of ERIAC's initiatives and engaging in its decision-making. Associate members have full access to ERIAC's information and knowledge resources, collections, archives and database. All associate members have the right to vote during the General Assemblies and can nominate members to the *Barvalipe Academy*.

ERIANC is open to all formal or informal groups, organizations and individuals who support ERIAC's mission and are ready to contribute to implementing ERIAC's empowering vision. In accordance with ERIAC's founding principles, the associate membership is based on contribution in terms of financial, intellectual, material and creative resources, in order to strengthen ERIAC's impact. The annual associate membership fee is regulated through internal rules.

ERIANC's associate membership are organized in four thematic sections, to which associate members should commit:

- Arts and Culture
- History and Commemoration
- Research and Publication in the Fields of Arts and Culture
- Media and Information in the fields of Arts and Culture

What is the structure of ERIAC?

The Pakiv Board is the highest-organ of ERIAC. The Board oversees the work of ERIAC, safeguards its values and approves the financial and activity plans. It is composed of 5 members, 3 permanent and 2 elected by barvalipe.

The Barvalipe Academy is the agenda-setting and strategic body of the Institute which has an advisory and inspirational role, in order to fulfill ERIAC's objectives. The academy is composed of 15 members with 7 members nominated by Pakiv and 8 members elected by associate members through thematic sections.

Associate Members can be both Roma and non-Roma. They register and are categorized according to their thematic interests. Associate members are invited to participate in the general assembly and are offered to voice their opinions and vote for 8 members in the Barvalipe Academy.

ERIANC Secretariat leads the ERIAC headquarters in Berlin. The day-to-day operations as well as ERIAC's office in Berlin are run by the executive director and an international team of experienced, professional and dedicated staff members.