

ERiac XV BARVALIPE ACADEMY MEETING

June 4, 2026

Online

15:00 – 16:30 CET

MINUTES

Participants:

Barvalipe Academy:

Jake Bowers
Carol Silverman
Isaac Blake
Dezso Mate
Rafael Buhigas Jimenez
Raul Cârstocea
Vera Lacková
Sami Mustafa
Colin Clark
Pierre Chopinaud

ERiac Team:

Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, Executive Director
Claudiu Pamfil
Petro Rusanienko
Tetiana Malysheva

Minute-taker: Petro Rusanienko

1. ERIAC Transition, Strategic Direction, and Program Highlights

Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka welcomed the members of the Barvalipe Academy and provided an overview of the agenda. She introduced the ERIAC staff present at the meeting and informed participants that the session would be recorded to support the preparation of official minutes.

Anna presented an update on the institutional transition within ERIAC. She informed members that the leadership transition following her appointment as Executive Director had been successfully completed. The transition had been planned by the ERIAC Board and aligned with the adoption and implementation of the ERIAC Strategy 2026–2030. Members were informed that the process also involved coordination with ERIAC's branch structures, including ERIAC Serbia and the newly established ERIAC Romania.

The Academy was informed that the ERIAC Strategy 2026–2030 had entered the implementation phase. Anna highlighted that while the strategy builds on many existing ERIAC priorities, it also introduces several significant shifts in focus and methodology.

The most important strategic change concerns a stronger emphasis on direct engagement with Roma communities. While ERIAC has achieved considerable progress in positioning Roma arts, culture, and knowledge within major cultural institutions and international platforms, the organization recognizes the need to ensure that Roma communities themselves have greater access to these resources. Members were informed that ERIAC will increasingly develop formats for direct delivery in community settings, including mobile exhibitions, educational materials, community screenings, and local cultural events.

As part of this effort, ERIAC is planning a large-scale community event in Šuto Orizari, North Macedonia, which will serve as a pilot initiative for new community-based methodologies targeting children, youth, families, and local schools.

A second major strategic shift concerns monitoring, evaluation, and evidence-based decision-making. Anna informed the Academy that ERIAC is developing methodologies to assess the impact of its work more systematically, including the creation of a Roma Pride Index intended to measure identity development, belonging, resilience, and community impact. Members were informed that this work is currently in the piloting stage and that feedback from the Academy would be welcomed once draft methodologies become available.

Anna reiterated the three strategic pillars of the ERIAC Strategy 2026–2030:

- Pride and Identity
- History, Language, and Education
- Cultural Diplomacy

The Pride and Identity pillar focuses on strengthening Roma identity, commemorating Roma histories, increasing visibility of Roma contributions, and developing methodologies for measuring pride and belonging.

The History, Language, and Education pillar continues the development of educational initiatives, including the Barvalipe Online University, Romani language programs, educational materials, teacher training, and community-oriented learning resources.

The Cultural Diplomacy pillar focuses on supporting Roma cultural production, mentoring emerging talent, strengthening partnerships with major cultural institutions, developing the Roma PEN initiative, and expanding ERIAC's work in film, literature, and cultural representation.

During the discussion, Carol Silverman welcomed the increased focus on communities but expressed concern regarding the limited development of sustainable support mechanisms for music and performing arts. She noted that music remains one of the strongest forms of cultural expression within Roma communities and emphasized the need for long-term support structures rather than isolated competitions.

Anna acknowledged these concerns and explained that music remains one of the most resource-intensive artistic sectors. She noted that ERIAC intends to pursue stronger partnerships with cultural institutions and donors in order to create more sustainable pathways for musicians and performers. Members also discussed the role of talent

competitions as tools for visibility, audience-building, and talent identification, while recognizing the need for stronger follow-up support mechanisms.

2. Community Engagement, Impact Measurement, and Recognition

Isaac Blake welcomed the strategic direction toward grassroots engagement and raised several important considerations regarding safeguarding and community work.

He emphasized the need for clear safeguarding procedures when working directly with communities, particularly with children and young people. He encouraged ERIAC to consider developing safeguarding standards and protocols that could be applied consistently across community-based initiatives.

Isaac also stressed the importance of strengthening impact measurement methodologies and encouraged ERIAC to draw on established approaches such as theory-of-change models and evidence-based evaluation frameworks. Members discussed the need to balance qualitative experiences with measurable indicators that can demonstrate the impact of ERIAC's interventions to communities, stakeholders, and funders.

Anna welcomed these recommendations and informed members that ERIAC is already reviewing its monitoring and evaluation framework and exploring methodologies that can support more rigorous impact assessment.

Dezso Mate further developed the discussion by focusing on recognition, historical memory, and intergenerational continuity. He reiterated his proposal to establish a Lifetime Achievement Award dedicated to Roma elders and pioneers whose work has shaped the Roma movement over several decades.

Anna informed the Academy that this proposal had already been positively received and discussed at Board level. Members were informed that ERIAC intends to introduce a Lifetime Achievement Award alongside the Tajsa Prize, potentially as part of the celebrations marking ERIAC's tenth anniversary in 2027.

Dezso also emphasized the importance of grounding discussions about pride, resilience, and identity in robust social-scientific methodologies. He offered to share relevant academic resources and international frameworks that could support ERIAC's work on developing indicators and measurement tools.

Members additionally discussed the importance of documenting lived experiences and oral histories. Support was expressed for collecting testimonies from Roma elders and preserving community memory through interviews, archives, educational materials, and creative outputs.

3. Education, Historical Memory, and Curriculum Reform

Members discussed the role of education and curriculum reform within the broader strategic framework.

Raul Cârstocea encouraged ERIAC not to abandon efforts aimed at influencing national curricula and educational systems. Drawing on his work with the Observatory on History

Teaching in Europe, he noted that numerous European countries are currently revising their history curricula and that recent Council of Europe recommendations provide opportunities to advocate for the inclusion of Roma history and Roma Holocaust education.

Members agreed that direct community-based educational work and advocacy for institutional educational reform should be pursued simultaneously. Anna welcomed the information shared by Raul and expressed interest in exploring future collaboration and information exchange regarding curriculum reform processes across Europe.

4. ERIACNET4EU Project Update

Claudiu Pamfil presented an update on the ERIACNET4EU project, funded by the European Commission under the CERV programme.

Members were informed that ERIACNET4EU entered a new implementation cycle covering 2026–2028. Claudiu outlined the main activities planned for 2026, including:

- Membership Call 2026
- Open Call for Project Applications
- Thematic Section Meetings
- WomNet 2026
- Capacity Building Activities
- Training Course on Roma Identity, History, and Culture
- Position Paper on Safeguarding and Protecting the Romani Language
- ERIAC General Assembly

Members were informed that 31 project applications had been received under the current grant scheme and that the jury process was nearing completion.

Particular attention was given to the planned capacity-building activities. Claudiu invited Academy members to contribute ideas for topics, trainers, and formats. Suggested themes included artificial intelligence, fundraising, project writing, digital communication, intercultural understanding, youth development, ethics, and collaborative project development.

Carol Silverman highlighted the need for stronger support in grant writing and project development. She noted that many organizations conduct excellent work but struggle to communicate their activities effectively within funding applications. Members expressed broad support for expanding grant-writing support and mentoring opportunities.

Carol and Dezso also highlighted the strong interest generated by previous trainings on ethics in research and cultural work. Members agreed that ethics, research methodologies, and responsible knowledge production remain important areas for future capacity-building initiatives.

Colin Clark offered to share existing ethics guidance and also expressed willingness to support future grant development processes, drawing on his extensive experience in research funding and proposal development.

Claudiu additionally informed members that ERIACNET4EU has introduced Impact Assessment Forms and plans to complement them with participant surveys in order to improve evidence gathering and impact evaluation at community level.

5. Membership Outcomes 2026

Petro Rusanienko presented the results of the 2026 membership cycle.

Members were informed that ERIAC received 332 applications, representing the largest membership cycle in the organization's history. Of these, 155 applications came from new applicants.

Following eligibility reviews, interviews, Board assessments, and the collection of membership contributions, ERIAC recorded **280 active members**, making this the largest membership community ever established within ERIAC.

Petro highlighted several positive developments:

- Membership increased significantly compared to the previous year.
- Women now constitute the majority of members.
- Representation of non-binary members increased.
- Members originate from 39 countries worldwide.
- Art and Culture remains the largest thematic section.
- Financial membership contributions increased.
- In-kind contributions continue to represent a substantial component of membership engagement.

Members congratulated the ERIAC team on the successful completion of a highly demanding membership cycle.

6. Membership Engagement and Communication Tools

Petro informed members about the introduction of a new communication structure based on WhatsApp Communities.

The new communication model includes:

- Announcement channels for opportunities, events, grants, and updates;
- A Community Hub designed for networking and exchange among members;
- Thematic section groups dedicated to professional discussions and collaboration.

Members were informed that access is restricted to verified ERIAC members and that participation is monitored through membership records.

The new communication model is currently being tested and will continue to evolve based on user feedback and participation levels.

7. Membership Reform Process

Anna introduced the Board-mandated Membership Reform Process.

Members were informed that the rapid growth of the membership community has exposed several structural challenges, including:

- Limited participation and engagement by some members;
- Difficulties in communication and responsiveness;
- Questions regarding rights, responsibilities, and benefits of membership;
- Challenges related to annual reapplication procedures;
- Code of Conduct implementation and accountability mechanisms;
- Sustainability of existing administrative procedures.

The Board has therefore requested a comprehensive review of the membership framework.

Anna presented the proposed roadmap, which includes consultations, surveys, benchmarking exercises, policy review, drafting processes, and Board approval procedures between June and December 2026.

The Academy was informed that a dedicated Membership Reform Task Force will be established, consisting of:

- Executive Director
- Community Coordinator
- Five Section Coordinators
- One Board Representative
- Three representatives from the Barvalipe Academy

Members discussed various aspects of the current membership system.

Carol Silverman questioned whether membership interviews remain necessary, noting the significant time commitment required from section coordinators. Members acknowledged that the current process places considerable pressure on volunteers and staff.

The Academy generally agreed that membership procedures should be reviewed to ensure greater efficiency while preserving quality and accountability.

Dezso Mate, Rafael Buhigas Jimenez, and Sami Mustafa expressed their willingness to support the Membership Reform Task Force. Carol Silverman, Isaac Blake, and Colin Clark informed the Academy that they would be unable to participate due to prior commitments. It was agreed that a follow-up invitation would also be extended to members who were not present at the meeting.

8. Additional Reflections and Future Considerations

Members discussed the broader question of volunteer contributions and professional expertise within ERIAC structures.

Isaac Blake and Jake Bowers highlighted the increasing pressure placed on community leaders, activists, and self-employed professionals who regularly contribute expertise on a voluntary basis. Members emphasized the importance of recognising professional labour and ensuring that expectations remain realistic and sustainable.

Anna acknowledged these concerns and emphasized the need to find an appropriate balance between volunteer engagement, collective responsibility, and fair recognition of professional expertise.

Members agreed that these questions should remain part of broader discussions concerning governance, participation, and community engagement.

9. Conclusions and Closing

Before concluding the meeting, members suggested that future Barvalipe Academy meetings include an opportunity for participants to propose agenda items in advance. The suggestion was welcomed and will be considered for future meetings.

The Academy congratulated the ERIAC team on the successful completion of the membership cycle and thanked staff for their extensive work during the application and review process.

ERiac Management thanked all present members of the Barvalipe Academy for their participation, contributions, feedback, and continued support.

The meeting was closed at 16:30 CET.

Appointed Minute-taker: Petro Rusanienko

Signed by:

Petro Rusanienko

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Chair of the Barvalipe Academy: Jake Bowers

Signed by:

Jake Bowers

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