

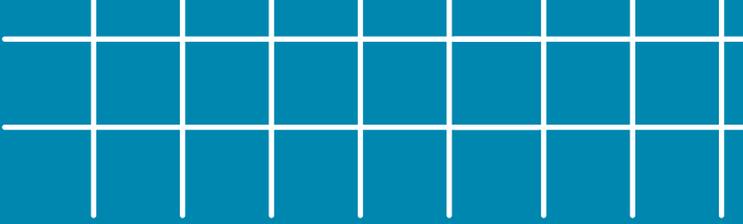
# Identity on the Line (I-ON) 2019 - 2023

## Public report



Co-funded by  
the European Union





Since September 2019, six museums and one university from seven European countries have collaborated to learn more about migration processes that still haunted members of the local societies but rarely were talked about, neither in private nor public. Seven migration processes were chosen, one in each country, and became subprojects within the overall project. They studied the long-term consequences of the German occupation of Norway during World War II (Norway), of the migration from Greenland to Denmark after 1945 (Denmark), of the forced migration of Sámi from the North to the South of Sweden (Sweden), of the population exchange in former German Pomerania after 1945, exemplified by Slupsk (Poland), of the Holocaust for Lithuanian women (Lithuania), of the migration from the former Yugoslav republics to Slovenia after World War II and the impact of the country's independence in 1991 on the migrants (Slovenia) and of the complex political history of the Istrian peninsula and its multi-ethnic population related to 200 000 emigrants after World War II (Croatia).

The impact of the project has exceeded all expectations. Informants and visitors confirmed that talking or receiving information about former events was helpful and educational on a deep, personal level. Partners and colleagues expressed that the work was personally and professionally demanding but very important and giving. New methods were developed and tested, and networks were exceeded. The total outreach includes more than 50.000 professionals who have learned about I-ON, 193.000 visitors to the joint and local exhibits, 2,7 million people who have seen posts on the social media channels, and 193 million who have read or heard our news in the seven countries.

Our work led to multiple spin-off projects, the receiving of the European Museum Academy prize 2022 and a high-level policy round table event in Brussels in 2023.



I-ON team in Slovenia, 2021\_ Author: National Museum of Contemporary History (Slovenia)



Final partner's meeting in Brussels at Norway House, 2023\_ Author Kathrin Pabst

# OVERALL APPROACHES AND GOALS

Between 2019 and 2023, six cultural history museums and one university from seven European countries collaborated to explore the long-term consequences of war and forced migration. The project was co-funded by the European Union's Creative Europe program and focused on the unfolding and transmitting common features of migration in European history from past to future generations. The actions included collecting stories that have not been told before, collaborating closely with former migrants and their families, safeguarding both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and working in an intercultural, international, and interprofessional manner. In addition, the project had many aspects related to audience development, capacity building (training and education), and transnational mobility.

The main objective was to understand how unaddressed, difficult experiences leave their mark not only on migrants themselves but also on their children and grandchildren. We wanted to develop new possibilities to increase the sense of belonging to a common European space for all migrants, former and contemporary.



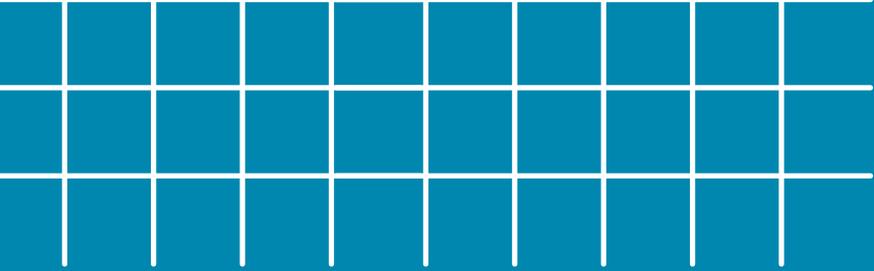
Partner's first meeting in Kristiansand, Norway in 2019



Photos from digital exhibition. [www.identityontheline.eu](http://www.identityontheline.eu)

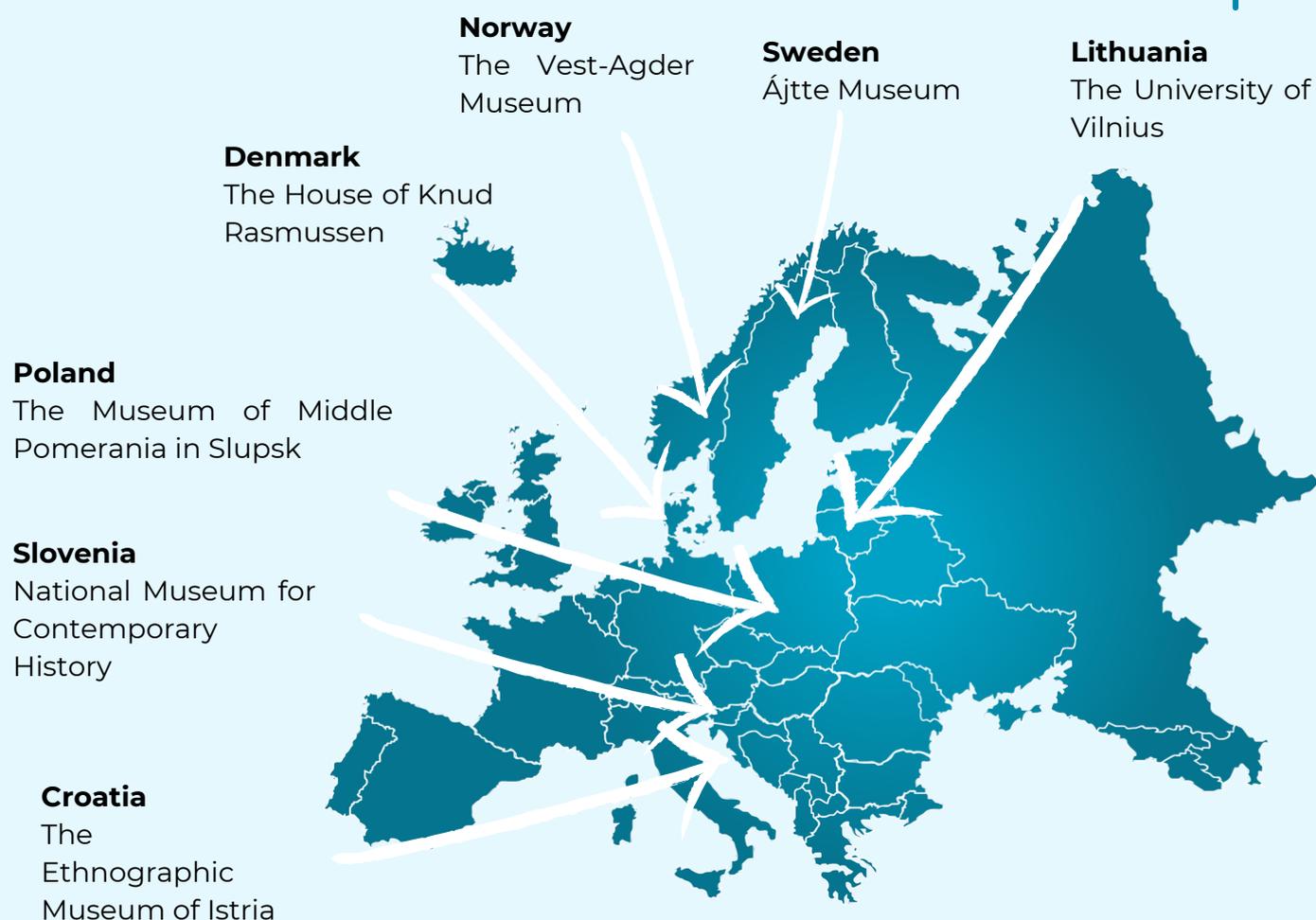
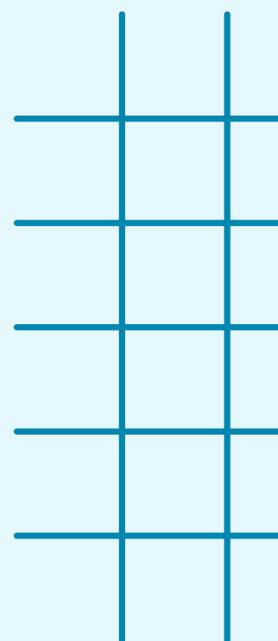
To do so, we have conducted in-depth interviews with 164 former migrants and their descendants in all seven countries, using the same interview guide and focusing on the events as well as the feelings they had led to. We compared the results, worked out similarities, and shared out findings with our target groups through seven local exhibitions, a joint travelling exhibition, nine movies, several publications, lectures, workshops, school packages and social media in eight different languages.

Our work shows clearly the long-term consequences of war and forced migration for up to three generations. The less the former events are addressed, the stronger the transfer and disturbance of relations within families and communities. Museums can play a crucial role in processes that lead to more openness and mutual understanding.



# ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

# SEVEN COUNTRIES



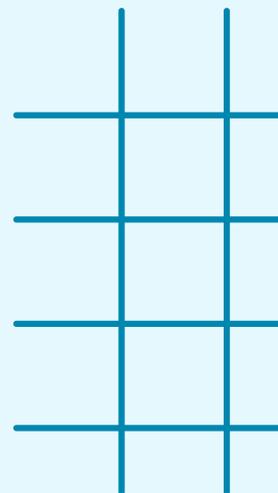
VESTAGDERMUSEET



**The Vest-Agder Museum** has studied the temporary migration of 500.000 German soldiers to Norway during WWII. Several short-term or long-term interactions with Norwegians and local societies have taken place, and many of the former events have affected not only the time witnesses but also their children and grandchildren.

[www.i-on.museum/norway](http://www.i-on.museum/norway)

# SEVEN COUNTRIES



**Ájtte museum** focused on the migration within Sámi communities that started around 100 years ago. Due to Swedish-Norwegian border politics reindeer herder families had to leave their traditional grazing areas and were forcibly relocated to new areas, already occupied by other reindeers and herders. In interviews Ájtte has spoken to descendants from the groups who were already on the land, to widen the perspective and look at the conflicts from both sides.

[www.i-on.museum/sweden](http://www.i-on.museum/sweden)

**Muzej  
novejše in  
sodobne  
zgodovine  
Slovenije**

**National Museum for Contemporary History**, focused on the stories of immigrants from Yugoslavian republics to Slovenia and their descendants in the period after World War II. The research and exhibitions offered an intimate view into the complex personal stories of three generations, their relationships and family dynamics, their transition into a new home, and the impact of Slovenia's independence and wars in Yugoslavia on their lives.

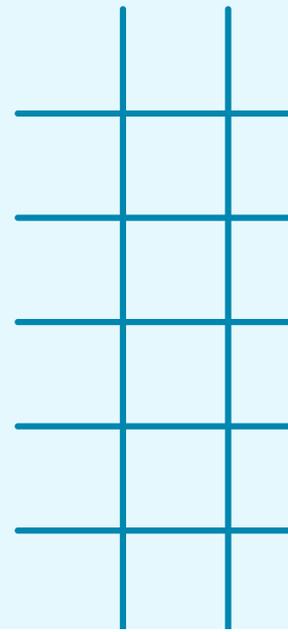
[www.i-on.museum/slovenia](http://www.i-on.museum/slovenia)



**The Ethnographic Museum of Istria** focuses on the search for their roots and identities of the second and third generation of Istrians that migrated After World war II and onwards. The political history of the Istrian peninsula and its inhabitants involves a complex multi-ethnic population and history of 200 000 emigrants after World War II.

[www.i-on.museum/croatia](http://www.i-on.museum/croatia)

# SEVEN COUNTRIES



**KNUD RASMUSSENS  
HUS**

**The House of Knud Rasmussen** focuses on the Greenlanders migration and all the situations they have lived and experience in their day-to-day life in Denmark. The period of study takes place after 1945 and aftermath, and subsequent generations.

[www.i-on.museum /denmark](http://www.i-on.museum/denmark)



**Faculty of  
Communication**

**The University of Vilnius** studied the migration process related to the Lithuanian Jews and Poles forced to leave the country. Totalitarian regime and anti-Semitic policy of the Soviet Union after the war, persecutions, public intolerance especially towards Jewish who remained alive in Vilnius, Kaunas, Šiauliai, and a number of smaller towns. Many of them herded into the ghettos in the second half of 1941 and endured terrible conditions of imprisonment.

[www.i-on.museum/lithuania](http://www.i-on.museum/lithuania)



**Muzeum  
Pomorza Środkowego  
w Słupsku**



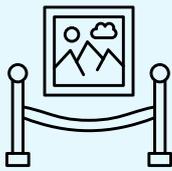
**Instytucja Kultury Samorządu  
Województwa Pomorskiego**

**The Museum of Middle Pomerania in Słupsk** studied the demographic structure of Pomerania due to the changing frontiers in the aftermath of World War II. Some of the Polish settlers came from the depths of the Soviet Union, where they had been exiled after the annexation of the eastern territories by the Red Army. Some of them came from the regions of Poland that were Polish before the war and remained Polish after 1945, but were derelict after Nazi occupation.

[www.i-on.museum /poland](http://www.i-on.museum/poland)

# JOINT ACTIVITIES

## General public



**1** Joint exhibition shown in 9 EU countries

**7** Local exhibition shown in each partner's country [↗](#)



**10** Guided tours to Places of Remembrance [↗](#)



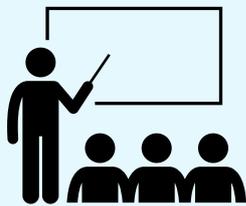
**1** Joint movie of 45 minutes length

**8** Short movies about each partner's migration process of 7 minutes length [↗](#)

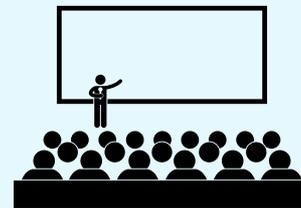


**1** Comprehensive school package kit with long and short teaching alternatives translated into 8 EU languages [↗](#)

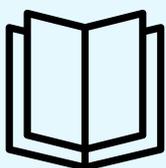
## Museum professionals



**16** Webinars and workshops with invited speakers [↗](#)



**330** Lectures, masterclasses, and keynotes about I-ON [↗](#)



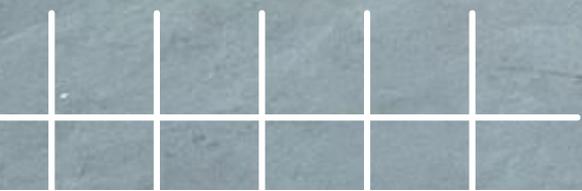
**29** Publications [↗](#)



**5** Scientific articles [↗](#)



Joint Exhibition in Aarhus, Denmark 2022\_Author Knud Rasmussen Hus (Denmark)



# JOINT ACTIVITIES

## Spin-off projects have been started in the countries

New research projects

New concepts of collaboration with informants

New methods to reaching out to children and students

A collaboration with a Ukrainian film producer

A set of policy recommendations for Members of the European Parliament.

The approach in each country has been described in **online articles**, and scientific results have been shared through peer reviewed articles.

More information about activities and results  
[www.i-on.museum](http://www.i-on.museum) & [www.identityontheline.eu](http://www.identityontheline.eu)



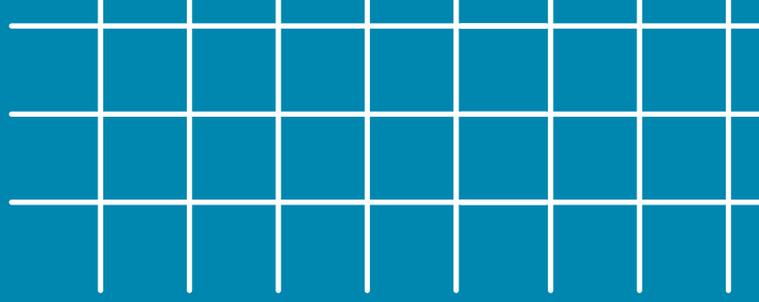


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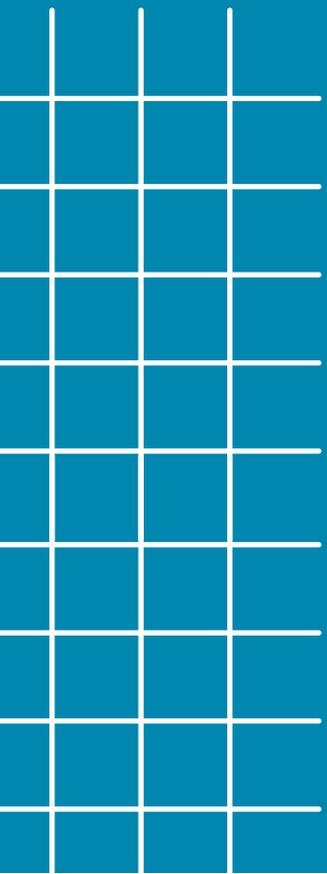
Magdalena Adamowicz  
Member of the European Parliament

Dr Kathrin Pabst  
Project Leader  
Industry on the Line

Delivering Policy recommendations to the Polish MEP Magdalena Adamowicz at the EU Parliament\_Author Maria Paula Arenas G.



# 3 INNOVATIVE APPROACHES



# PERSONAL STORIES AND EMOTIONS AS STARTING POINT

Identity in the Line worked with personal experiences and emotions at all stages of the project. The partner institutions collaborated with the informants in different ways, but all used the same interview guides and, accordingly, asked the same questions—emotions and how the experiences felt were at the center of our attention. We talked about difficult emotions and painful feelings one usually was not asked about nor would share naturally. An honest and intimate conversation opened up a new and deeper connection between the informants and interviewers, and when displaying the personal stories with the related feelings, between the informants and the visitors.

All outputs of the project centered around emotions as well, emotions that everyone could identify with across countries, nationalities, or generations, even without having had similar experiences. Facts about historical events were combined with the emotions of the time witnesses, leading to recognition of another human's feelings and empathy with them. Again, this led to a deeper understanding of events and their consequences for those involved.



**Inuit tattoos – dots from under the chin to between the breasts are called Putu, which is a way out for evil spirits. 2020, Greenland.**

Photo by Josepha Lauth Thomsen, edited by Naja Motzfeldt, private collection.

# INVOLVING YOURSELF ENTIRELY

This aspect relates to the professionals involved, who conducted the interviews and collaborated to find and present the common threads in all the 164 personal stories collected through the project. Shortly summarized, involving yourself entirely means daring to open up for your own personal story, exposing yourself to painful feelings in the encounter with the informants, and taking full responsibility for your feelings and actions.

As it turned out, all of the professionals in the project, except for one, had personal experiences like those we wanted to study, and we soon decided to be open about our own stories and the feelings the project awakened in us. Conducting the interviews was, at times, so complex that we needed counseling to cope with what we heard. The information also triggered our personal feelings that demanded attention and led to illness and sleeplessness among some of us.

We took the responsibility that followed all interactions with our informants very seriously. We were opening up deep wounds, and we wanted to return the trust sharing the stories with us showed by taking care of the informant. In some countries, this meant protecting the informants from political or public reactions, and in others, inviting informants to co-create the exhibit.

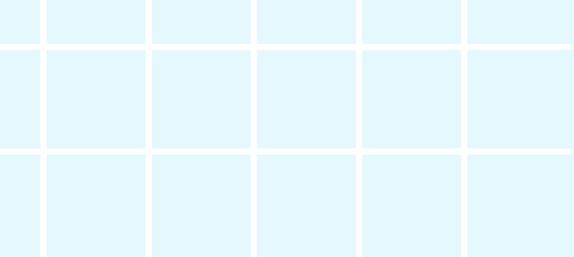
Each partner has summarized the process in their country in an article, and the overall approach has been described in an online publication.

**More information about the partner's process.**



**ONLINE PUBLICATION**





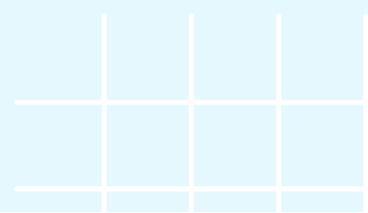
# AIMING AT IMPROVED WELL-BEING AND RELATIONS

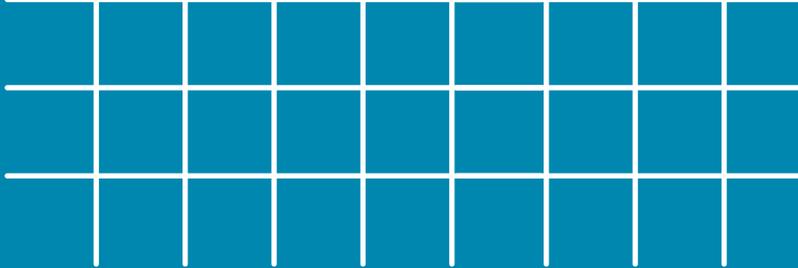
It is well known that art and culture can play a role in improving the health and well-being of individuals. However, the possibilities of cultural history museums to address the Untold, the silence that often follows collective trauma for decades, for example, after war and forced migration, have not been studied properly yet. This silence can have a large number of negative consequences for the traumatized themselves, their descendants, family relations, and local societies – societies characterized by conflicts among different groups that often have caused the trauma in the first place.

Identity on the Line wanted to explore the potential role museums can play further. By collecting personal stories from individuals who haven't told their experiences before and by placing them in a historical context and displaying them to a larger audience, we wanted to function as connecting links between those who are willing to share but do not know how and those who need to know. The feedback of informants and visitors suggests that museums can provide an arena where feelings of mutual understanding and connectedness can develop and increase.

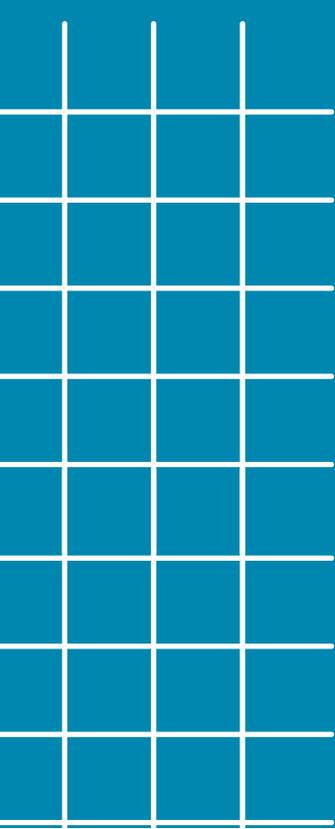
There are several ways to do so, among others, to co-create exhibits with the informants or meet across generations struggling to talk or ask about traumatizing events. Our research suggests that this work has the potential to contribute to a higher degree of well-being for individuals, improved family relations, and more peaceful societies.

[More information about the research findings](#)





# REFLECTIONS ON EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVES



I-@N

# DEMOCRACY, THE POSSIBILITY TO PARTICIPATION, FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND ACCESSIBILITY OF INFORMATION PROVIDE A SAFE FRAME FOR WORKING WITH PAINFUL HISTORY

Countries in Europe interpret and value parts of European perspectives differently, and we see a clear development towards a focus on national matters rather than European ones. Nevertheless, European values provide a crucial frame for making a large variety of voices heard, thereby making people feel connected across borders.



Local exhibition at the Vilnius University 2022\_Author Vilnius University

## EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVES AS AN OVERALL CONCEPT DO OFTEN NOT FUNCTION FOR MINORITIES IN EUROPE

Many people who belong to national minorities do not naturally identify as Europeans but as members of their minority. People from these minority groups often have been exposed to disrespect for their culture and way of living, leading to an overall feeling of distance and rejection of the idea of a joint European identity. Europe is no safe place. Harassment of those who, in some way or another, belong to a minority is still common and, in many countries, increasing.



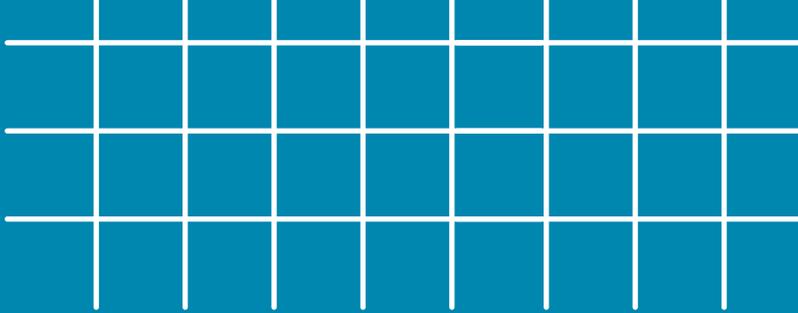
Local exhibition in Croatian exhibition 2022\_Author: Tamara Nikolic Djeric

## FORMER WARS AND MIGRATIONS PROCESSES STILL MARK YOUNGER EUROPEANS

Not only former migrants are marked by the migration processes, but also their descendants. This means that former wars and forced migrations still characterize more extensive parts of today's population in Europe and might struggle to feel at home where they live. The feelings that outsidership and forced migration lead to are the same, no matter where you come from.



Norwegian exhibition Sjølingstad 2022\_Author: Vest-Agder-museet



# OVERALL RESULTS



**164**

Informants shared their personal story.



**193,000**

Visitors to local and joint exhibitions



**2,6 million +**

General public reached with SoMe



**193 million**

People reached by news on TV, radio, or newspaper about I-ON



**70,300+**

Culture & creative professionals learned about I-ON



**807**

Educational institutions will receive the school packages



**420**

Individuals from local, national and international authorities informed.

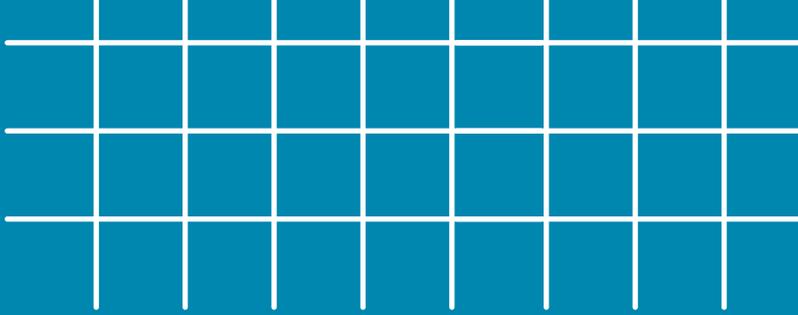


Winners of the unique

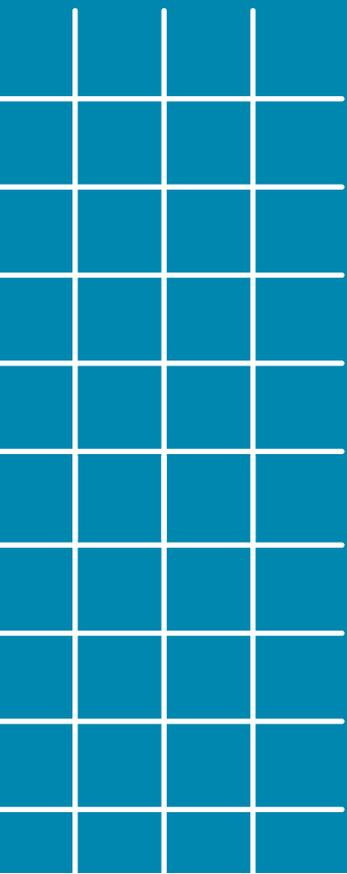
**EMA AWARD 2022**



EMA Award 2022 in Luxembourg\_Author European Museum Academy.



# OVERALL OUTPUTS





**42**

Pages on the project's website



**1**

Dedicated website for digital exhibition



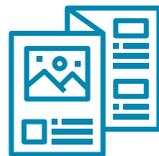
**168**

Media articles published in local, national and international media



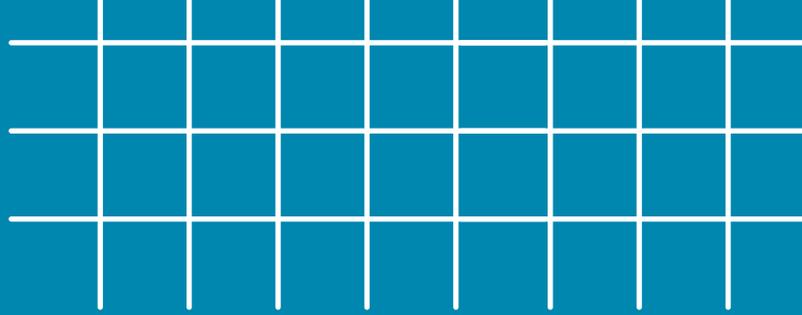
**4**

Social media platforms

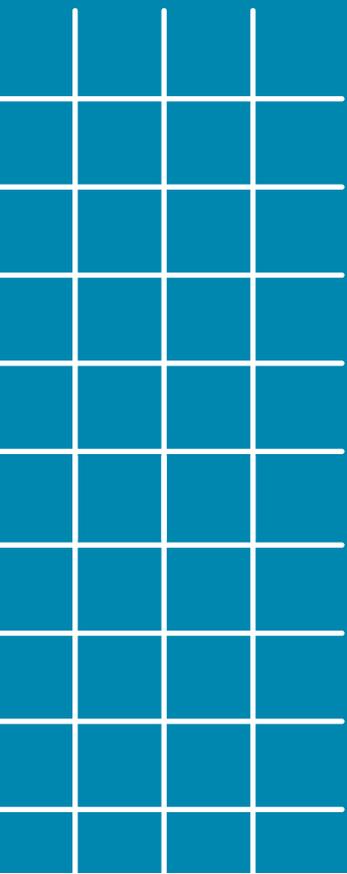


**3550**

Copies of brochure, online publication and policy recommendations booklet



# **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**



# OVERALL FINDINGS

- 1** Painful memories and trauma resulting from war and forced migration can be passed down from one generation to the next, particularly when they are not openly addressed and kept a secret. They continue to impact identity formation, family relations, and societal cohesion.
- 2** The transgenerational trauma transfer has been observed within families of both victims of injustice and abuse, as well as those who have committed actions that are condemned by society or law. This challenges the stereotypical victim-perpetrator dichotomy.
- 3** The stereotyping and Othering that is prevalent in public discourse, contribute to continuous marginalization and disenfranchisement of migrants and their descendants.
- 4** Governing bodies and local hosting communities play a crucial role in either mitigating or perpetuating the negative consequences of traumatic experiences, for example by implementing, maintaining, or terminating practices and policies that lead marginalised groups and individuals to feel lonely and excluded.
- 5** Facilitating access to information through cultural heritage initiatives can play a crucial role in supporting collective healing. With public attention and a balanced display of historical events, we can contribute to the wellbeing of former migrants and their descendants, as well as promote the social integration of contemporary ones.



*"From my early childhood I was instructed not to tell anyone that I came from Germany. In the aftermath [of the war], I understood that these cover stories were good for me. I had friends who didn't have such cover stories, and who ended their lives as adults, shooting themselves because they couldn't cope with it anymore."*

*Bjørn, age 77 (Norway).  
Son of a German soldier.*



*"After the war, Dita shut her mouth and nobody ever heard about the war –nobody. Neither my second husband Volodia, nor my son. Maybe now he reads something. But my granddaughter asked! The son never. At home nobody. [...] Did mother talk about the war? No. We both never spoke about the war. Then we were together and we never spoke about the war. [...] My granddaughter used to push me: 'Tell, tell.' No, I didn't say anything terrible, I only used to tell just a little bit. [...] I wanted to forget, just to delete everything."*

*Yehudit (Dita) Sperling-Zupovitz,  
age 99 (Lithuania).  
Survivor of the Kaunas ghetto and  
the Stutthof Concentration Camp*



*" [One day at school] the teacher said, 'Now I want to check your knowledge of Italian!' She gave us a sheet of paper, one to me, one to my brother – of course the others had a notebook [...] At the next lesson another woman came, [...] she got up from the desk and showed everyone [our assignments] saying: 'These refugees have written on these two sheets [of paper] – you can see that they were born in a stable!' I couldn't take it anymore; I took the inkwell and threw it at her."*

*Luigi Donorà, age 86 (Italy).  
Refugee from Istria in Italy*

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## **RAISE AWARENESS** ABOUT THE LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES OF WAR AND FORCED MIGRATION BY ALWAYS APPLYING A **THREE-GENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

This shift in perspective is necessary in all public discourse, political work, media communication, and professional approaches when dealing with individuals and societies marked by traumatic events. War and forced migration impact not only the current generation, but also future generations, interfamilial relationships, and interactions within affected societies.

## INTENSIFY EFFORTS TO PROVIDE **MULTIDISCIPLINARY SUPPORT** AFTER COLLECTIVE TRAUMA; SUPPORT BY CULTURAL MEDIATORS, ETHNOLOGISTS, ANTHROPOLOGISTS, HISTORIANS, SOCIOLOGIST, IDEALLY **IN COLLABORATION** WITH PSYCHOLOGISTS AND PSYCHIATRISTS.

The possibilities of cultural history museums and related professions to address the silence that often follows collective trauma for decades are neither properly explored nor taken advantage of. Museums can initiate discussions based on an objective display of historical events, provide safe spaces to share personal narratives, as well as places for dialogue.

In a world where millions of people are affected by war and forced migration, all professions that can support many individuals at the same time must be set in motion.

SUPPORT AND ENABLE PROFESSIONALS AND INSTITUTIONS WORKING WITH **CULTURAL HERITAGE** TO RAISE PUBLIC ATTENTION TOWARDS SENSITIVE AND CONTESTED HISTORICAL EVENTS AND APPLY **A MULTIVOCAL PERSPECTIVE**.

Museums and related professions have unique possibilities to collect and display personal narratives about controversial or sensitive parts of history and provide new approaches to learning and understanding. To achieve this, adequate working conditions, proper training, and project funding are necessary.

Capacity-building initiatives and multidisciplinary university programs for cultural professionals should focus on sensitive narrative facilitation and participatory research approaches, and intensify efforts. Additionally, more effective financial mechanisms should be implemented to better support cultural institutions working with migration and sensitive heritage.

INTENSIFY INITIATIVES ON SOCIETAL AND POLITICAL LEVELS TO **DIMINISH** ALL FORMS OF **STEREOTYPING OF MIGRANTS**.

The significant role that local hosting societies and governing bodies can play in contributing to the well-being of individuals and successful integration of all members cannot be overstated. Efforts to end the marginalization and disenfranchisement of migrants and their descendants should be intensified and included in political strategies and programs.

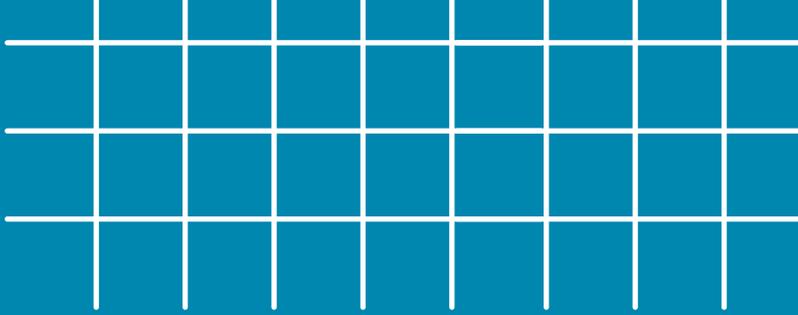
Minorities must be systematically included in discussions, co-created projects, and participatory approaches to ensure that a diverse range of opinions and perspectives are represented

**INITIATE FURTHER RESEARCH** ON HOW PUBLIC INTERPRETATION AND DISPLAY OF CONTESTED HISTORY CAN POSITIVELY IMPACT INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETAL PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL **WELLBEING**.

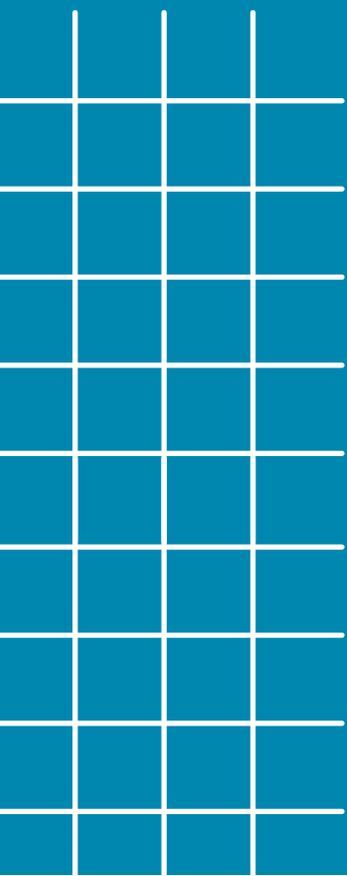
There is a growing awareness of the crucial role art and culture can play in improving health and wellbeing for individuals and societies. However, the specific health effects of addressing the silence that follows collective trauma, for individuals and societies, have yet to be adequately examined. This work should start as soon as possible, and should be measured in light of the SDGs of Agenda 2030, especially SDG 16, but also 10, 11 and 17.



**The project ended officially on the 31st of August, 2023.  
The webpage will be available, though not updated, until 2028.**



# FEEDBACK



# QUOTES FROM MUSEUM PROFESSIONALS WORKING IN THE PROJECT

*"I learned very much and will take meetings with colleagues and informants with me for the rest of my life."*

*"Involving people, connecting experiences, sharing good practice and discussing sensitive topics project that improved me professionally and personally."*

*"Every one of us is affected differently by the circumstances of life and we cannot assume someone's values, beliefs, experiences solely on their backgrounds, common history, nationality. Every story is individual and every story counts."*

*"It has been a good experience to work with other cultures. I feel connected to the content of the project as I am a migrant myself and I have experienced everything that is described in it."*

*"Complete professional and emotional experience."*

*"It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience of the place and it's people and an extraordinary opportunity to feel the challenges they are still dealing with. I am extremely grateful for that experience."*

# SOME IMPRESSIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS OF THE GUIDED TOURS AND VISITORS OF THE EXHIBIT

*"It was as if you could walk in their shoes, the victims of the Holocaust were not an anonymous crowd, but people like you and me."*

*"I feel sad after seeing the exhibition. Many people have carried such heavy burdens as no human should do. We tend to think that it is better to forget than to tell." (Norway)*

*"It was painful to see how many negative attitudes towards migration and how stereotyped attitudes we still have in the 20th and 21st centuries in the "developed world." (Slovenia)*

*"It is possible to survive! with all these consequences, it is possible to survive, that's what I managed to understand from the exhibition and that family support and a close circle of people you grow up with that can help you surviving that trauma and moving on." (Croatia)*

*"This exhibition is very emotional for me because it concerns me personally. (Croatia)*

**We thank all our informants, visitors,  
colleagues, lecturers, artists,  
stakeholders and supporters for their  
contributions.**

**The project would not have been  
possible without you.**



**KNUD RASMUSSENS  
HUS**

**Muzej  
novejše in  
sodobne  
zgodovine  
Slovenije**



**Faculty of  
Communication**



**Co-funded by  
the European Union**