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A PRACTICAL TOOLKIT · RAHOVEC · 2026

TOOLKIT

THEATRE FOR CIVIC VOICE



Prepared by Iniciativa për Zgjidhje Inovative (IZI)
Rahovec, Kosovo · 2026

THE BIG PROJECT · NGO INTEGRA · NGO CASA

This manual has been drafted by Iniciativa për Zgjidhje Inovative (IZI) within The BIG Project – Barabar Initiative (going) Grassroot, funded by the European Union and implemented by NGO Integra and NGO CASA.

Start here

Young people do not lack ideas about their communities. They often lack a place where those ideas can be explored without judgment, shaped with others, and heard by someone able to respond.

Unbound Rahovec used theatre to create that place. The aim was not to train professional actors or rush a group toward a polished performance. It was to help young people aged 12–18 explore identity, diversity, belonging, exclusion, ambition and community life-then turn what mattered to them into a shared civic message.

This toolkit is for youth workers, theatre facilitators, teachers, youth centres and civil-society organisations. It gives you a six-session sequence, practical questions, safety boundaries, a public-sharing format and a light way to learn from participants as you go.

You can change the games, language, timetable and final creative form. Keep the essentials: dignity, voluntary participation, more than one way to contribute, no forced personal disclosure, youth ownership of the message, and a real next step after people listen.

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> **The promise is simple: young people should leave with more than an enjoyable workshop. They should know that their ideas shaped something, reached someone and can continue moving.**

The route

The work follows one clear route:

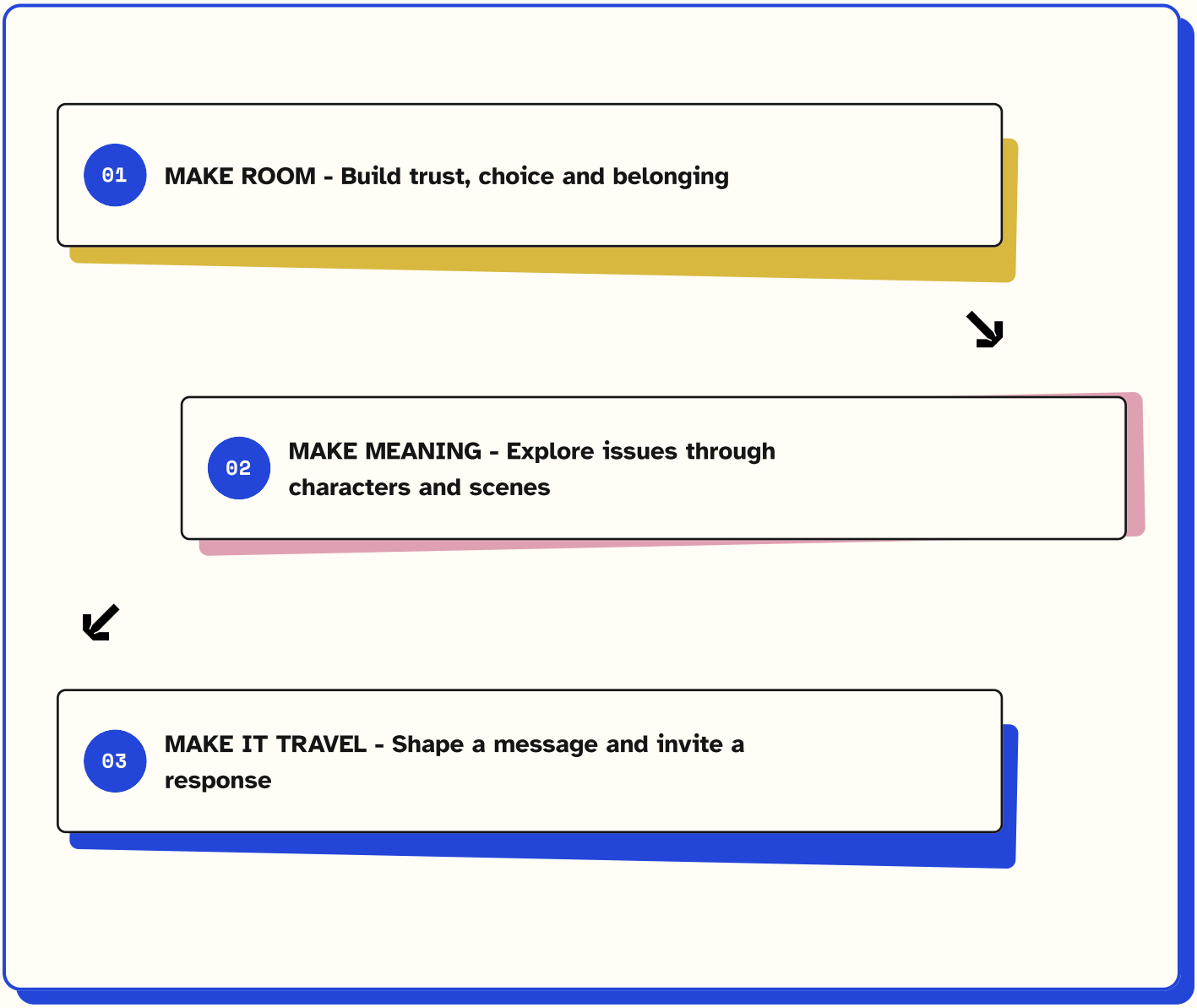

Figure 1. The route through the toolkit. Each step prepares the next. Public voice comes last because trust, shared meaning and informed choice must come first.

What inclusion should feel like

Inclusion is not achieved by putting different people on an attendance list. It is visible in what participants can actually do.

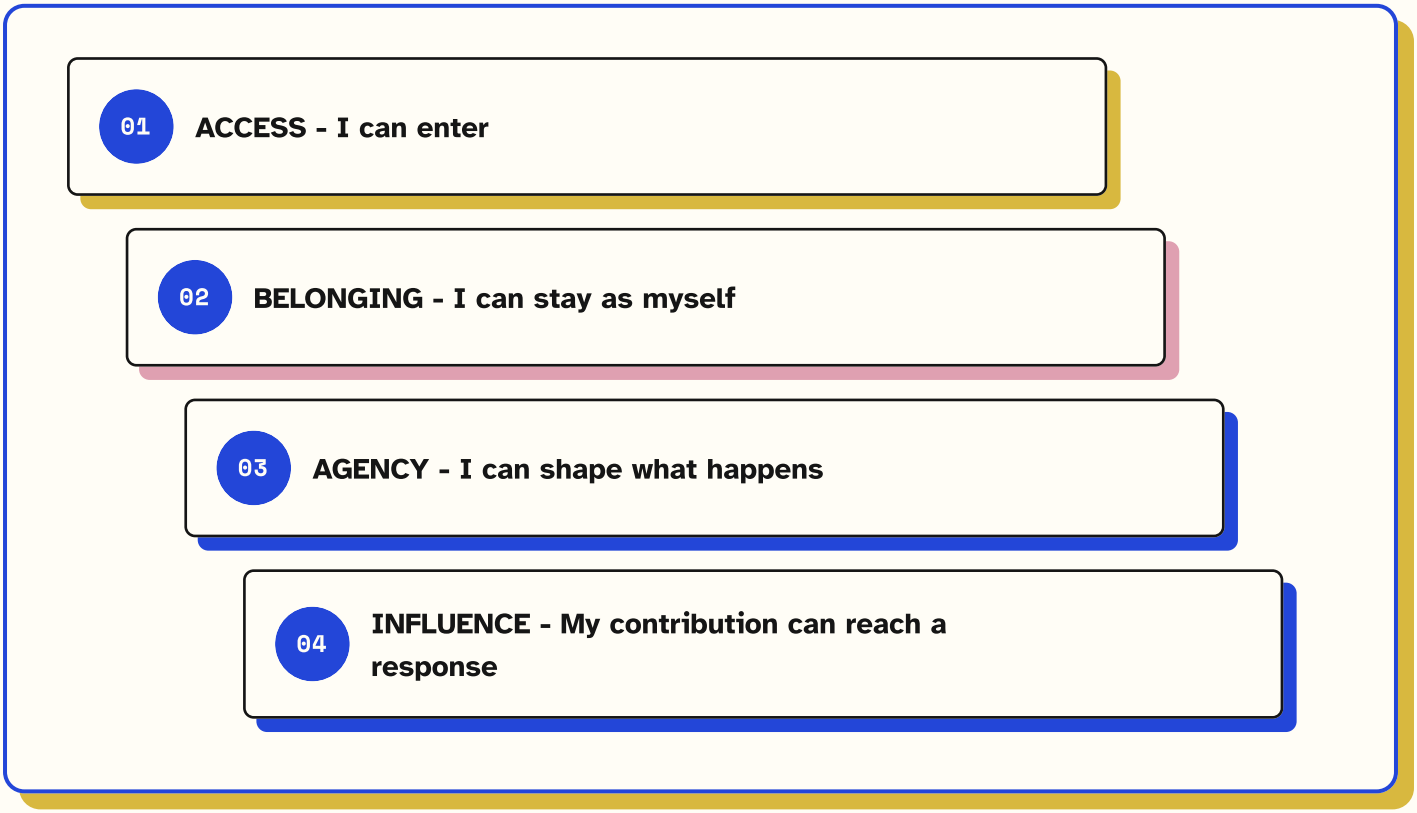

Figure 2. Inclusion in practice. If one layer is missing, participation weakens. A person who can enter but cannot influence the process is present, not meaningfully included.

Before the first session, make sure:

- the invitation says clearly that no theatre experience is needed;
- outreach goes beyond young people already active in schools, NGOs or cultural events;
- the venue, timing and transport do not quietly exclude rural or under-served participants;
- participants and caregivers receive clear information about the full process;
- workshop participation is separated from consent to perform, be photographed, filmed, quoted or named;
- a creative facilitator and a designated safeguarding adult know their roles;
- at least one realistic follow-up opportunity or contact can be offered after the project.

The one boundary to remember throughout

Never make personal disclosure the price of participation. A young person can explore a real issue through an invented character, a changed setting, a composite story, movement, sound or image. Fictional distance may protect privacy and often helps the whole group examine an issue more honestly.

Build the conditions for participation



The first workshop is not an icebreaker before the “real work.” It is where the real work begins. Participants learn whether the room is predictable, whether adults listen, whether passing is genuinely allowed, and whether quieter forms of contribution count.

The goal is not instant confidence. The goal is enough trust and clarity for different young people to begin participating in their own way.

From strangers to a group

Aim: Make the process understandable and let participants shape how the group will work.
Suggested length: 90–120 minutes

OPEN THE ROOM

Welcome participants in plain language. Explain the whole journey: six sessions, creative exploration, an optional form of public sharing, and a youth message. Introduce the adults and say who participants can approach if something worries them.

Use a low-pressure name-and-gesture or object-passing game. Let people watch one round before joining. Say aloud that anyone may pass and rejoin later.

SHOW THAT CONTRIBUTION HAS MANY FORMS

Name the roles available from the beginning: acting, writing, directing, observing, movement, music, props, documenting ideas and checking whether a scene communicates clearly. These are not backup roles. They are different forms of authorship.

BUILD THE GROUP AGREEMENT

Ask participants what they need in order to speak, make mistakes, disagree and stay respected. Turn their answers into a short agreement everyone can understand. Include what the group will do when a boundary is crossed; rules without a response plan are only decoration.

Useful questions:
- What does respect look and sound like here?
- How can someone take part without speaking in front of everyone?
- What should happen if a joke makes someone feel smaller?
- What should stay inside the room?

CLOSE AND NOTICE

Collect a short private check-in on safety, clarity and comfort. End calmly with one word, image or gesture. After participants leave, note who found a role, who remained uncertain and what needs changing before the next session.

YOU ARE READY FOR SESSION 2 WHEN:

participants can explain the group agreement, know the right to pass is real and know whom to approach for support.

Belonging without exposure

Aim: Explore how belonging and exclusion are created through relationships and choices.

BEGIN WITH LISTENING

Reconnect with a short check-in and return to the group agreement. In pairs, invite participants to tell a real or invented story about entering a group, being heard or being left out. The listener's task is to listen, not advise. Nobody has to retell their partner's story publicly.

TURN IDEAS INTO IMAGES

In small groups, ask participants to visualize in their preferred method the concept of belonging and exclusion. View each image before asking for an explanation. Then invite the group to change one element of the visualization, like: distance, posture, gaze or placement-to make the image more inclusive.

Theatre is a way to make the issue visible: who is central, who is at the edge, who has power, and which small action changes the relationship.

CREATE THE SHARED THEME MAP

Collect the issues and values that appear: trust, judgment, friendship, bullying, family expectations, dreams, opportunity, gender barriers or school life. Record themes without names or identifying details. Let the group choose which themes deserve more attention in the next workshop.

USEFUL QUESTIONS

- What tells us that a person belongs, even when nobody speaks?
- Who has space in this image, and who is pushed to the edge?
- What changed when one person moved?
- How can we discuss the issue without asking who lived it?

WHAT THIS WORKSHOP CAN LEAVE BEHIND:
A group agreement, a menu of participation roles, a shared theme map and early evidence about what the group needs.

> **"An important rule is listening to one another."**
>
> - Anonymous participant reflection, Unbound Rahovec

TURN CONCERNS INTO CHARACTERS, CHOICES AND SHARED UNDERSTANDING

By the second workshop, participants should know the room and have some influence over it. Now the work moves from naming issues to examining how they operate.

Theatre is useful here because a group can show a difficult moment, pause it, view it from another position and test what might change. The scene becomes a shared question rather than one person's testimony.



From issue to character

Aim: Turn participant-chosen themes into fictional characters and short situations.

THEATRE AS A TOOL, NOT A TALENT TEST

Warm up with mirroring, group shapes or freeze-and-unfreeze. Introduce image theatre, short role-play and narration as ways to investigate an issue. Technical skill is welcome but not required.

Return to the theme map from Workshop 1. Let participants select issues according to relevance, interest and safety-not according to what adults think will impress an audience.

WATCH FOR:
Stories that closely reproduce a participant's private experience, roles that mock a community or identity, and scenes that place all responsibility on the excluded person. Change the setting, combine ideas or rebuild the character.

BUILD CHARACTERS WITH AGENCY

Give each character four things:

1. something they want;
2. something or someone in the way;
3. a pressure, fear or expectation shaping their choice;
4. at least one possible friend.

This prevents characters from becoming stereotypes or passive symbols of suffering. The character should be more than the barrier they face.

Play a short situation with a beginning, a difficult moment and a choice. Keep the first version simple. Ask what the character can see, what the audience can see and whose perspective is still missing.

YOU ARE READY FOR SESSION 4 WHEN:

The group has two or three relevant scene ideas that can be explored without identifying anyone.

Change perspective, share authorship

Aim: Develop the strongest situations by redistributing perspective and creative power.

REPLAY FROM ANOTHER POSITION

Show the same moment from the viewpoint of a friend, bystander, caregiver, teacher or community actor. Pause at a key choice and invite a different response. Test it. Ask what changes and which larger barrier remains.

Avoid easy endings where one brave speech solves discrimination, exclusion or unequal power. Some barriers are personal; others sit in rules, norms, access, resources or adult decisions. A useful scene makes that difference visible.

MAKE AUTHORSHIP VISIBLE

Share writing, acting, directing, movement, sound and observation. Rotate decision points. Ask privately or in a short round whether each participant can recognise a contribution of their own in the developing work.

Invite another group to explain what it understood from the scene. The creators can then clarify the storyline, remove stereotypes and strengthen the moment where another response becomes possible.

USEFUL QUESTIONS

- What changes when we see this through another person's eyes?
- Who benefits when the situation stays the same?
- Which response is realistic, and which asks the young person to carry all the risk?
- Who has not yet shaped this scene?

WHAT THIS WORKSHOP LEAVES BEHIND:
Two or three fictional storylines, a wider understanding of perspective and a clear record of how participants shaped the creative work.

> **"I came to understand other people's worlds."**
>
> - Anonymous participant reflection, Unbound Rahovec

TURN CREATIVE WORK INTO CIVIC VOICE

The final workshop asks what should leave the room, in whose words, at what level of visibility and toward which possible response.

Public sharing is not *automatically* empowering. It becomes meaningful when young people understand and approve the message and know what happens afterward.



FIGURE 03 · HOW A CREATIVE IDEA BECOMES CIVIC VOICE

01 **A youth-built scene**

02 **A shared message**

03 **Chosen showcase form**

04 **A relevant response**

05 **A next opportunity**

Figure 3. How a creative idea becomes civic voice. The route is incomplete if the message is shared but nobody is prepared to respond or follow up.

Say what the work means

Aim: Clarify the message, review representation and let each participant choose their visibility.

REHEARSE FOR MEANING

Work at a pace in which the participants are comfortable, do not pressure them into creating polished art pieces. Pause at important choices.

Then complete one sentence in several different ways:

After this, we want people to understand...

Let the group compare versions and choose language that still sounds like them. Adult facilitators may help make the wording clear, but should not replace youth language.

CHECK DIGNITY AND REPRESENTATION

Remove humiliating language, stereotypes and details that could identify a real person or conflict. Ask whether someone from the represented group would feel reduced, blamed or exposed by the portrayal.

ASK FOR CONSENT AGAIN

Speak to participants separately about performing, photographs, video, quotations and naming. A person may say yes to one and no to another. Changing one's mind should lead to another meaningful role, not pressure or guilt.

YOU ARE READY FOR SESSION 6 WHEN:

The group can state its message, private identities are protected and every participant has a role they accept.

Prepare the room beyond the room

Aim: Rehearse calmly, gather final reflections and prepare participants for the audience and next step.

Practice entries, transitions, exits and technical cues. Agree how the group can pause if anyone needs support. Have a conversation on how the debate is expected to go.

Collect private final feedback before the full-group reflection. This gives quieter or less positive experiences a chance to appear before a shared narrative takes over.

END BY ASKING

- What should remain exactly in young people's words?
- What do we want adults or institutions to understand?
- Who could realistically respond?
- What should happen after the event?

Share the next contact, activity or opportunity before participants leave. Close the fictional work deliberately so the group does not carry difficult roles out of the room without reflection.

WHAT THIS WORKSHOP LEAVES BEHIND:
Participants engaged in creative development, agreed youth messages, final feedback and a map of possible next steps.

> **"So that they are not afraid to present themselves."**
>
> - Anonymous participant reflection, Unbound Rahovec

Have a culture night to discuss youth

Culture Night is not an exam for young performers. It is a meeting between creative expression and community response.

A SIMPLE EVENT CAN INCLUDE:

1. A short welcome: explain what was created by young people.

2. Sharing: share what creative activities were done in a format discussed with the workshop participants - this may be digital or physical.

3. A pause: give participants time to think.

4. A moderated dialogue: discuss issues that concern youth, in our case that is the issues rural youth face.

5. A next-step moment: invite specific, proportionate responses from schools, the youth centre, civil society, cultural institutions or the municipality.

USEFUL QUESTIONS FOR THE AUDIENCE:

- Which barriers can young people influence, and which require adults or institutions to act?
- What would regular, inclusive cultural participation look like?
- What is one realistic step that could begin within three months?



THE MODERATOR'S BOUNDARY

The moderator should stop discriminatory, humiliating, partisan or intrusive comments; protect the time reserved for youth voices; and turn broad promises into a named next step. A closed sharing for peers or caregivers is a valid result when public exposure would undermine safety or consent.

Keep the process safe

This toolkit is a facilitation guide, not a safeguarding policy or legal manual. Use your organisation's approved child-protection, consent, data-protection and referral procedures.

THE PRACTICAL RULE IS: PAUSE FIRST, PROTECT DIGNITY, THEN FOLLOW PROCEDURE.

FIGURE 04 · A FACILITATOR'S FIRST RESPONSE

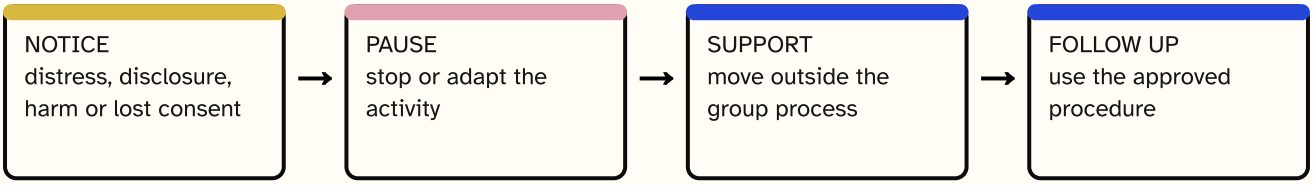

Figure 4. A facilitator's first response. The creative timetable never takes priority over a participant's safety or choice.

If a participant discloses possible harm, listen calmly without investigating in the group or promising absolute confidentiality. Explain what must happen next and involve the designated safeguarding adult. If someone becomes distressed, offer a quieter space and decide with them whether and how to return.

If harmful language appears, stop the harm without humiliating the speaker. Name its effect, return to the agreement and find a safer way to explore the conflict. "Realism" is not a reason to leave discrimination unchallenged.

Keep safeguarding records separate from attendance, creative material and evaluation data. Use anonymous quotations only with appropriate consent. In a small community, age, village, role or other details can identify someone even when a name is removed.

PAUSE IS A VALID FACILITATION ACTION
Creative momentum never overrides consent, privacy, dignity or the approved safeguarding procedure.

Learn while the work is happening

Evaluation should help the next session, not merely fill the final report. Keep it brief, private and repeated.

FIGURE 05 · THE FEEDBACK LOOP

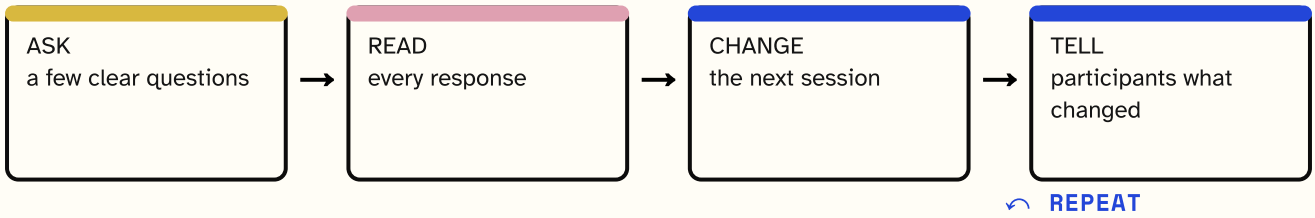

Figure 5. The feedback loop. Feedback becomes participation when participants can see that it affected the process.

Ask about feeling heard, respectful and non-discriminatory participation, opportunities to contribute creatively, relevance of the themes, confidence in the group message and what should improve. Facilitator notes should record participation breadth, outputs, adjustments and follow-up-not private speculation about individual participants.

WHAT THE RAHOVEC PILOT SUGGESTS

The pilot feedback was small but useful. After the first workshop, 12 of 16 respondents reported feeling safe and respected, while 13 of 16 said the belonging and exclusion theme was clear. In the final rating set, 11 understood the group's public message and 11 said the process helped them listen to and understand others.

Participants repeatedly mentioned free expression, respect, being listened to, group work, confidence, new ways of seeing art, bullying, judgment, trust, dreams and the wish for more youth activities.

> “
>
> **“I am freer to express myself in front of others.”**
>
> **“Art is another way of seeing.”**
>
> - Anonymous participant reflections, Unbound Rahovec

Read these findings honestly. The response sets were not matched person by person and do not represent all young people in Rahovec or rural Kosovo. They show how participants experienced our intervention; they do not prove long-term behaviour change or institutional impact. The strongest use of this evidence is practical: protect what worked, improve what did not and build continuity. As an organization we use these findings to support further action in empowering youth.

Carry the message forward

The creative work should lead to a short Youth Note or another public summary. It does not need to retell every activity. It should make four things easy to see:

01 WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE RAISED.

Use plain language and authorised anonymous quotations.

02 WHAT PARTICIPANTS SAID CHANGED.

Report feedback carefully and show the number of responses.

03 WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE RECOMMEND.

Keep their wording recognisable.

04 WHO COULD RESPOND.

Link each proposal to a realistic actor and next step.

Keep youth voice, facilitator interpretation and proposed action distinct. “We need more activities,” for example, can be clarified as a request for regular and accessible theatre, arts and youth opportunities. It should not be transformed into a large institutional promise the group never made.

Where possible, return the draft message to participants and ask one question:

DOES THIS STILL SOUND LIKE WHAT YOU MEANT?

Adapt the form, protect the logic

Another group may prefer film, spoken word, puppetry, music, photography or staged reading. Sessions may run on different days or in another language. Adaptation is expected.

WHAT REALLY MATTERS IS:

- repeated contact rather than a single performance day;
- outreach beyond the easiest participants to reach;
- multiple meaningful roles;
- the right to pass or change roles;
- fictional distance and no forced disclosure;
- reflection after creative activity;
- youth ownership of themes, messages and visibility;
- separate consent choices;
- a prepared audience and a realistic route to response;
- a clear follow-up after the final event.

AT MINIMUM, PLAN FOR

A competent facilitator, a safeguarding lead, an accessible room, basic creative materials, transport or access support where needed, refreshments appropriate to the session length, consent and feedback tools, and time between workshops to read what participants said and adjust.

Before you begin, ask

- **Who is least likely to hear about or trust this opportunity?**
- **What could prevent them from reaching or staying in the room?**
- **How can someone contribute without acting or appearing publicly?**
- **Which local tensions require additional facilitator preparation?**
- **What response pathway exists if a participant needs support?**
- **Who should hear the final message-and what can they realistically do?**
- **What will participants be invited to next?**

If those questions have credible answers, the work is ready to begin.

FINAL THOUGHT

Theatre did not give young people in Rahovec a voice; they already had one. It gave the group time, creative distance and shared authorship-and gave the community a better chance to listen.

That is the heart of the work:

Make room. Make meaning. Make it travel.
Then make sure something comes back.

Publication information

Project: Unbound Rahovec: Theatre for Inclusion and Civic Voice
Place and period: Rahovec, Kosovo · May-August 2026
Format: Three workshop blocks / six facilitated sessions
Participants: Young people aged 12–18, with priority outreach to those facing barriers to participation
Prepared by: Glauk Haxhiaj, Arsa Mustafa - Iniciativa për Zgjidhje Inovative (IZI)

TO THE READER

IZI is an organization that believes in cooperation, without it no real change happens. If there are any questions, comments, or just simple conversations that may be of interest, feel free to reach out. We are devoted to our work and are always searching for opportunities to make impact in youth communities.

SOURCES INFORMING THE TOOLKIT

- Approved Project Narrative - Unbound Rahovec: Theatre for Inclusion and Civic Voice.
- Anonymous participant feedback forms and facilitator observation records.
- The BIG Project communication, visibility and disclaimer guidance for subgrantees.
- European Commission, EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027 and Youth Action Plan in EU External Action 2022–2027.
- UNESCO, Framework for Culture and Arts Education (2024).

COLOPHON

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