ROOTS AND REELS

INTERNATIONAL HISTORY COMPETITION

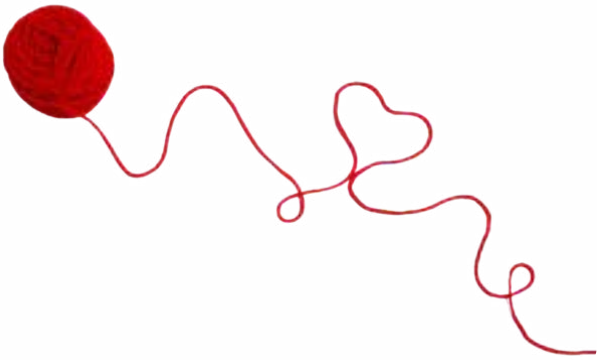
FOR YOUNG DIGITAL STORYTELLERS (13–27)

What story from the past still speaks to you today? With a camera or smartphone in your hand, you can turn family memories, local histories and hidden voices into short films (3min), and share them with other young people across Europe.

Organised by: IDMC – Institute for Democracy, Media & Culture

Initiated by: EUSTORY

Supported by: Körber-Stiftung



What is Roots & Reels?

Roots & Reels is an international short film competition for young people that brings together history & memory, storytelling and film.

The past is not just dates in a textbook. It lives in:

- family stories and everyday conversations,
- the streets, monuments and landscapes around us,
- the words we use, and in what is remembered or left out.

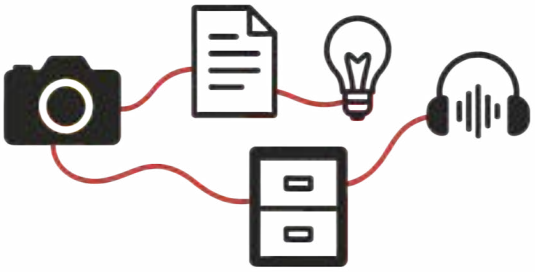
At the same time, our social media feeds are full of images and videos about history: sometimes inspiring, sometimes nostalgic, sometimes misleading or manipulative.

> **Roots & Reels was created to slow this flood down for a moment and to ask:**

1. **Where do our stories about the past come from?**
2. **Whose voices are we listening to and whose are missing?**
3. **How can we work with sources and still tell creative, emotional stories?**
4. **Why does it matter today?**

With a short film, you can **question, reframe and share** the histories that shape your life, not just consume them. Win jury and audience cash prizes.

Submission period: 16 January 2026 – 1 April 2026, 23:59 CET



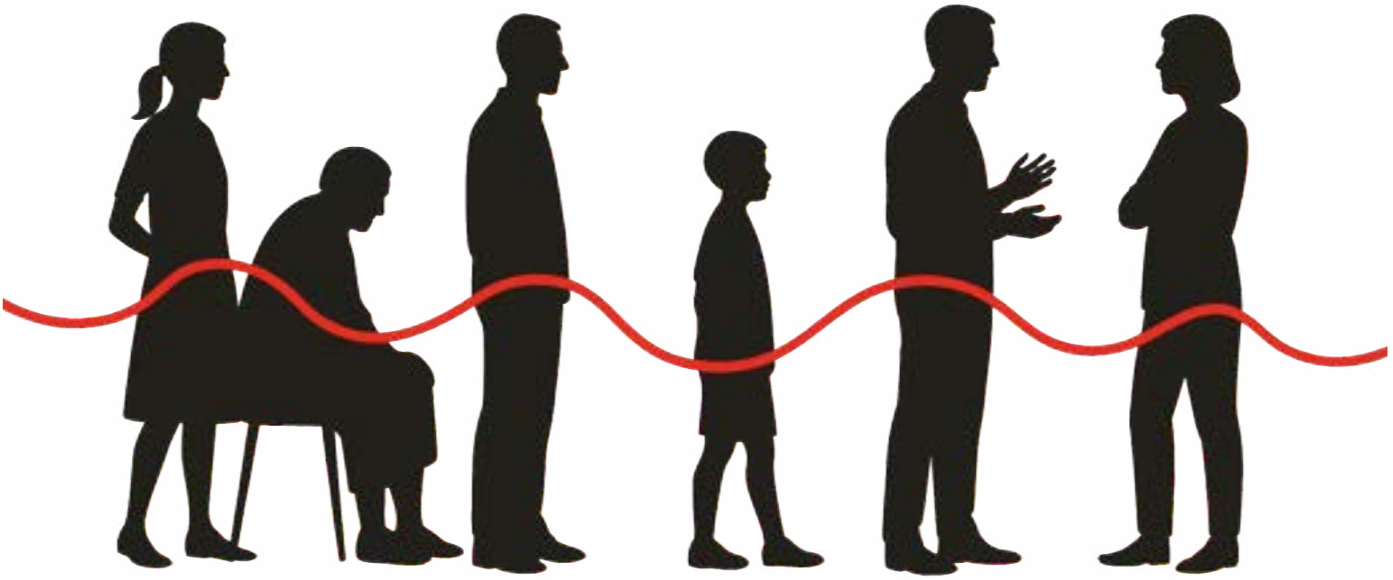
Who can participate?

Roots & Reels is open to:

- young people aged 13–27 until 1 April 2026
- from Europe (defined as a EUSTORY or Council of Europe Member State)

You can join:

- as an individual, or
- as a group (for example friends, classmates or a youth group – small teams recommended).



Teachers and youth workers can support you, but the creative lead and main work should stay with the young participants.

What kind of film can I make?

We are looking for **short films up to 3 minutes** that:

01

explore a history, memory or heritage topic;

02

use at least two historical sources

03

make clear why this story matters today.

Historical sources can include:

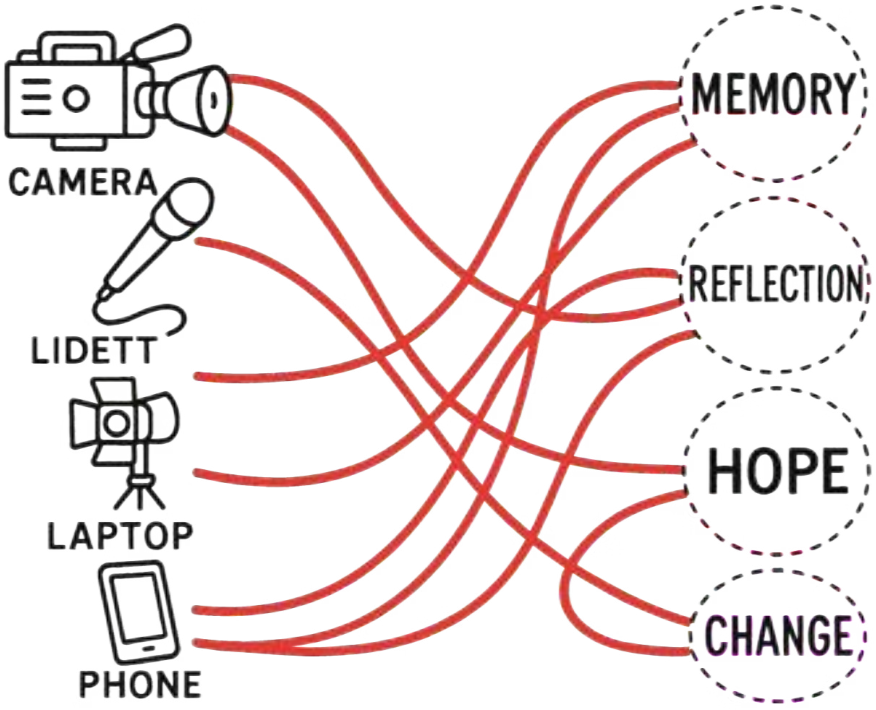
- archival documents, photos, newspapers, recordings
- oral history interviews and testimonies
- family albums, letters, diaries
- places, monuments, objects

Any style is welcome:

- documentary or video essay
- animation, collage, stop motion
- creative re-enactment
- experimental or hybrid formats

You can work in any language, but your film must have **English subtitles** so the international jury and audience can follow.

You can film with a smartphone and use free editing tools, the focus is on your ideas and how you work with sources, not on perfect equipment.



THEMES & INSPIRATION

What can your film be about?

Roots & Reels is about history, memory and heritage – from big political events to very small, personal stories. You don't have to choose a formal category, but these themes can inspire you:

1. Family memories & everyday life

- Stories from your family history (migration, work, war, education, traditions).
- Old photos, letters, diaries and objects at home.
- How memories are told – or kept silent – between generations.

2. Places, borders & movement

- How borders, migration and mobility shaped people's lives.
- Cities, villages or neighbourhoods "then and now".
- Train stations, ports, border crossings and transit spaces.

3. Democracy, conflict & human rights

- Protests, resistance and social movements.
- Everyday life under dictatorship, censorship or surveillance.
- Experiences of exclusion, discrimination, activism and solidarity.

4. Memory in public space & media

- Monuments, memorials, street names – who is remembered, who is missing?
- How films, series, games or social media talk about the past.
- Museums, archives, schoolbooks and the stories they tell.

5. Environment, work & the future

- Factories, farms, mines and industrial sites and how they changed.
- Environmental damage and repair, loss of landscapes.
- How people in the past imagined the future – and how we see it today.

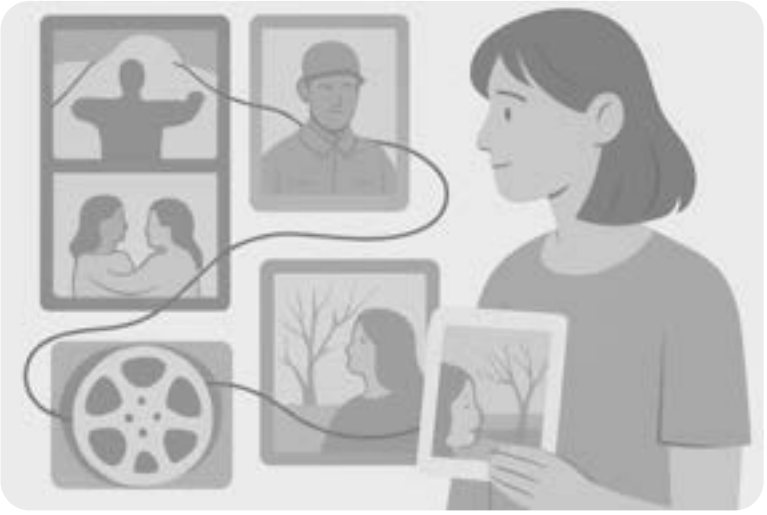
> **Key message:** Show which past you chose, which sources you used, and why this story matters to you now.

YOUR ROOTS & REELS JOURNEY (TIMELINE)

Your Roots & Reels Journey

1. **16 January 2026**
   Call opens & online opening event
2. **February 2026**
   Online Helpdesk
3. **March 2026**
   Online Helpdesk
4. **1 April 2026, 23:59 CET**
   Submission deadline
5. **Spring 2026**
   Jury viewing & selection of Top 30 films
6. **Summer 2026**
   Instagram Audience Awards (public vote on EUSTORY account)
7. **Autumn 2026**
   Announcement of winners & presentation of films, invitations to ceremony events in the EUSTORY framework (Hamburg, Germany)

Create → Submit → Jury → Top 30 → Instagram Awards → Ceremony in Hamburg



How to apply

Applying to Roots & Reels is simple.

Before you start, have ready:

- Your finished film (max. 3 minutes, with English subtitles)
- A working film link (accessible without login)
- Two short texts:
  - 1. About your film (max. 300 words)
  - 2. Sources used (at least 2) + credits

- Consent forms (only if applicable):
  - Parent/Guardian Consent (if you are under 18)
  - Interview/Appearance Consent (if your film includes interviews or identifiable people)

Upload your film

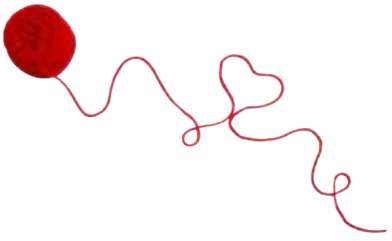
Upload to Google Drive / WeTransfer / unlisted YouTube or Vimeo / OneDrive / Dropbox / school cloud. Make sure "anyone with the link can view" and test the link in incognito.

Submit (from 16 January 2026)

Complete the online submission form with your contact details, participant names, film title, film link, "About your film", and "Sources + credits". Upload consent forms if required.

Deadline: 1 April 2026, 23:59 CET

Contact: rootsandreels@idmc.al



JURY, INSTAGRAM AWARDS & PRIZES

How are films selected – and what can you win?

Jury process

After the deadline, a jury of historians, educators, youth representatives and media/film practitioners watches all eligible films.

Each film is scored on:

- historical reflection
- storytelling & creativity
- media literacy & ethics
- technical execution (age-sensitive)

From all entries, the jury selects the **Top 30** as the official Roots & Reels shortlist. From this shortlist, they award:

- 1st prize
- 2nd prize
- 3rd prize

The jury may also give special mentions. The jury's decision is final.

Instagram Audience Awards

The Top 30 films also compete in an Instagram public vote on the official EUSTORY account. For each Reel, we track:

- number of likes
- number of comments
- number of shares

At the end, three Audience Awards are given:

1. Most Liked **1st Prize**
2. Most Commented **2nd Prize**
3. Most Shared **3rd Prize**

Fair play: if we see clear signs of fake likes, spam or manipulation, we may adjust results or disqualify the film to keep the competition fair.

Prizes

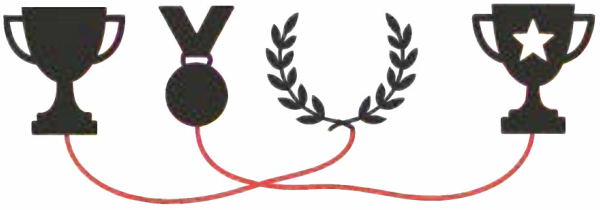
Jury prizes

- 1st prize – 750 €
- 2nd prize – 500 €
- 3rd prize – 250 €

Instagram Audience Awards

- 1st prize – 750 € **Most Liked**
- 2nd prize – 500 € **Most Commented**
- 3rd prize – 250 € **Most Shared**

In the case of group entries, usually 1 or 2 people will be invited to represent the group at Roots & Reels / EUSTORY ceremony events in Hamburg, Germany.



Please note that the Roots & Reels prize money may be subject to national tax legislation.*

WORKING WITH SOURCES & ETHICS

Working with sources – and with care

Roots & Reels is not just about beautiful images. It is about how we work with the past.

Look closely at sources

Don't just repeat what you see online. Check where your information comes from – archives, family stories, newspapers, social media posts – and ask who created it and why.

Respect people's stories

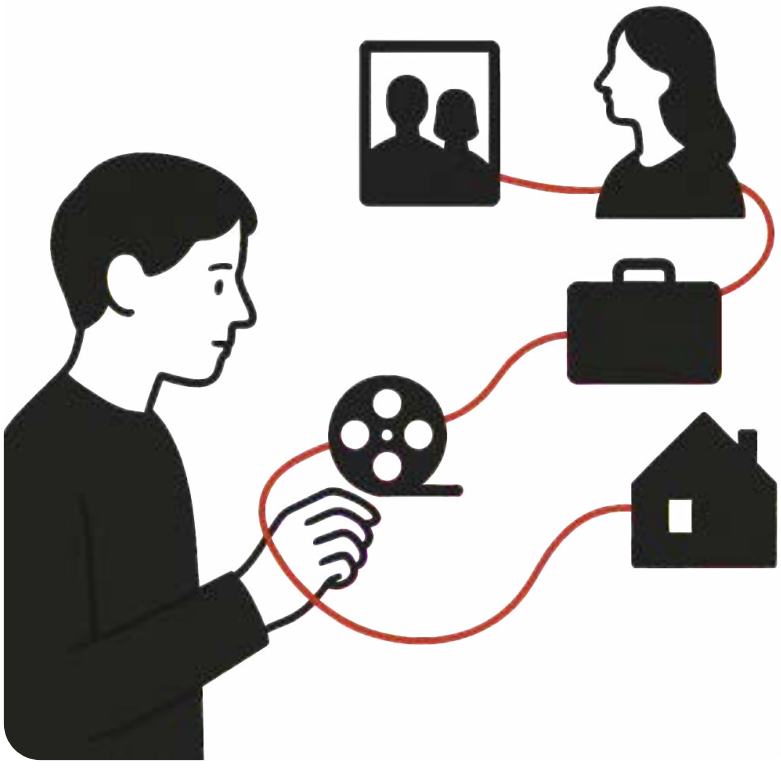
When you use interviews, testimonies or family memories, think about consent, privacy and how your film might affect the people involved – now and in the future.

Be honest about what is real and what is staged

Creative re-enactments and mixed formats are welcome – but make sure viewers can understand what is documentary and what is fiction.

Credits & licences

- Use music and images that you created yourself or that are clearly allowed (public domain, Creative Commons, or with explicit permission).
- Always credit your sources in the submission form.



FOR TEACHERS & YOUTH WORKERS

How educators can support Roots & Reels

Roots & Reels can easily be integrated into school or non-formal education as a project about history, media literacy and creativity.

How you can help

Introduce the competition

Present the idea in class or your group, using this magazine and the website.

Support research & source work

Help young people access archives, local institutions, libraries or community resources.

Provide a safe discussion space

Some topics (war, discrimination, migration, family trauma) can be sensitive. Offer space for reflection and debriefing.

Guide, don't direct

Encourage, give feedback and help with logistics, but leave creative decisions and authorship to the young participants.

You can also use selected films (after the competition) as a starting point for discussing:

- different perspectives on history
- how media shapes our view of the past
- the role of young people in public debates about memory and heritage

PRACTICAL INFO, LINKS & CONTACT

Practical information

- **Who**: Young people aged 13–27 from Europe (defined as a EUSTORY or Council of Europe Member State)
- **What:** Short film competition (max. 3 minutes) on history, memory or heritage
- **When:** Submission period – 16 January 2026 to 1 April 2026, 23:59 CET
- **How:** Upload your film online and submit the link via the Roots & Reels form
- **Language:** Any language, with English subtitles

Organisers

- **Organised by:** IDMC – Institute for Democracy, Media & Culture (Tirana, Albania)
- **Initiated by:** EUSTORY
- **Supported by:** Körber-Stiftung

Contact & support

General & submission questions

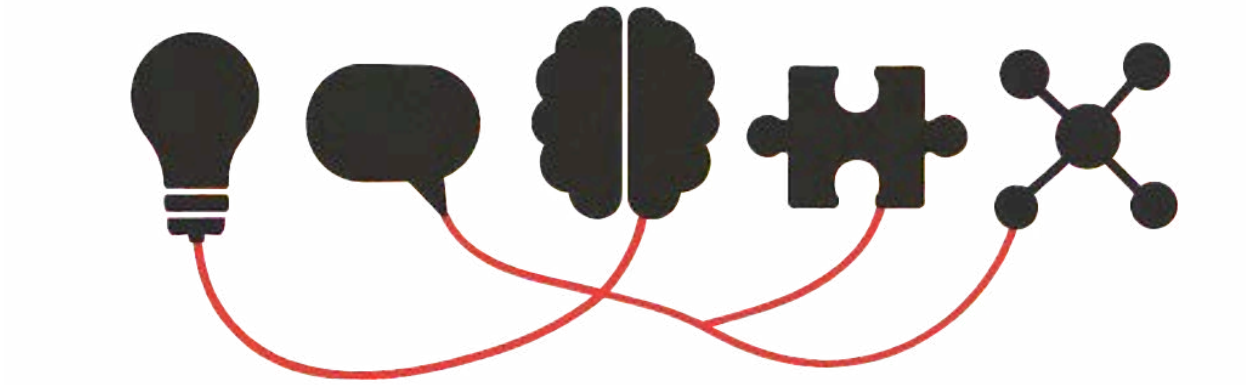
rootsandreels@idmc.al

Online Q&A sessions (Zoom)

two "Ask us anything" events (February & March 2026)

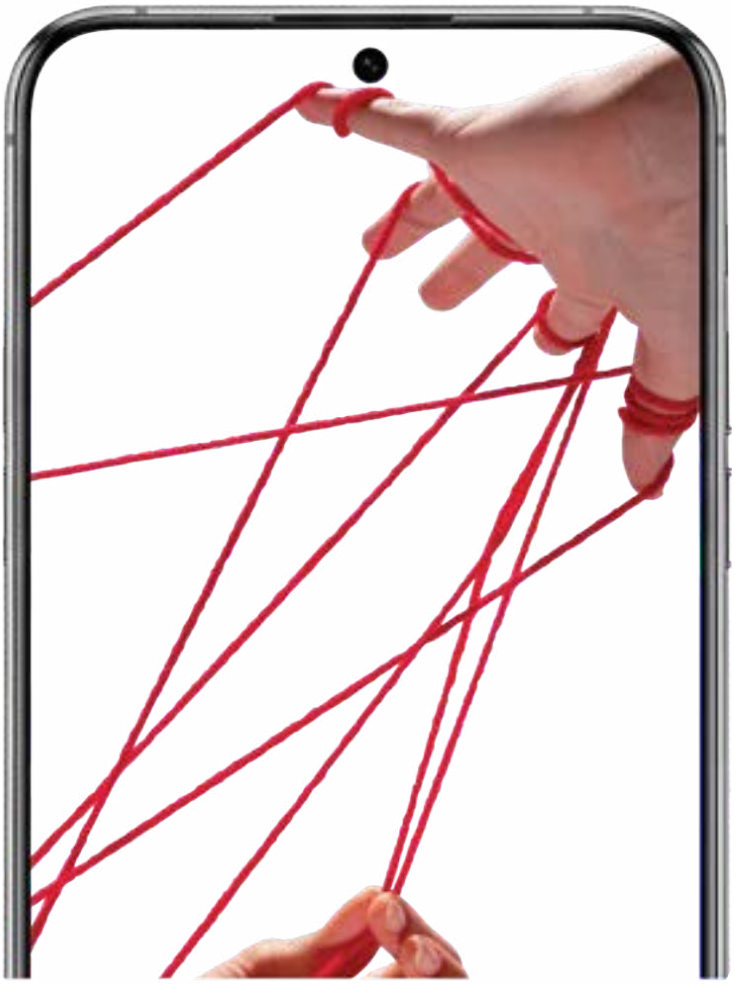
WhatsApp help desk

link available from 16 January 2026



Find out more

Full guidelines, Terms & Conditions, Data Protection & Privacy Notice and Rights of Use are available on the Roots & Reels competition page on the IDMC website and via EUSTORY channels.



Roots & Reels invites you to bring history and memory to life on screen – and to share your perspective on the past with others across borders.

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