



## VAHA II: Common Ground Through Culture in Times of Crises

### VAHA Round II - Open Call for Turkey

Application deadline: **September 3, 2023 - Sunday (until 23:59 UTC+3)**

We are excited to welcome applications for the second round of the VAHA programme that will take place between September 2023 and December 2024. For VAHA round II, we first invite cultural organisations in Turkey to form local hubs with partners within Turkey in order to support their local cultural programming activities. At a later stage in the programme, partners from outside of Turkey will be invited for forming transnational collaborations.

For more information about the VAHA programme and application requirements, please refer to the call text below as well as our [website](#) and [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQ\)](#) section in Turkish. If you cannot find the information you are looking for, feel free to leave us a message ([contact@vahahubs.org](mailto:contact@vahahubs.org)).

To apply, please fill out the [online application form](#) with your hub partners and upload the [Budget and Activity Plan](#) document. We will notify the applicants of the results via email starting from September 20, 2023.

In solidarity,  
VAHA Team

## Ordinary Crises

VAHA (meaning “oasis” in Turkish) is a programme for amplifying the voices of independent arts and culture spaces that advocate for public discussion and dialogue in cities across Turkey, Europe, and neighbouring regions. Our aim is to bring together initiatives that create public discussions through cultural and artistic activities in oppressive circumstances to multiply the spaces of encounter and critical thinking, and to support transnational solidarity. The period from the launch of the VAHA in 2020 to the present day, where we welcome the new round, has been marked by overlapping crises. Each crisis has generated unique and multifaceted consequences while further exposing the ongoing and deepening economic, social, and ecological devastation. In addition to the global “public health crises” of the COVID19 pandemic that engulfed the world and the following “economic crisis”, various crises have erupted in geographies where VAHA hubs have been actively working. During the peak of the pandemic, cultural and artistic venues were closed for longer periods, exacerbating the precarious conditions of cultural workers. We all worked under extraordinary circumstances due to unprecedented travel, meeting, and event restrictions. Hence, the VAHA network that we started weaving gained a new dimension in parallel to the increasing difficulties.

While we were still dealing with the effects of the pandemic in its aftermath, VAHA Chernihiv hub found itself in the midst of the war due to the invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022. We continued our collaboration and adapted our work to their needs. As the war continued, we experienced a large-scale earthquake disaster that shook both Turkey and Syria in February 2023. We supported the relief work of our hubs in the region and mobilised our network. In fact, the crisis was everywhere and had become the new normal. The resurging war in neighbouring Nagorno-Karabakh, the “regime crisis” in Iran and escalating state violence against uprisings, the “humanitarian crisis” experienced in Syria, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Palestine, and many other regions due to protracted conflicts, the “democracy crises” consolidated by populist right-wing autocratic leaders holding on to power in many countries, growing anti-immigrant sentiment everywhere against spreading forced migrations and the “refugee crisis”, and last but not least, the “ecological crisis” that manifest in devastating floods, droughts, wild fires and other environmental disasters that threaten all living beings... In reality, no crisis has a clear beginning or end; they all continue their effects by piling up and infiltrating one another. While shaping the new round of VAHA, we set out with the questions brought to us by these experiences: How do we live with disasters? How do we move on through interconnected crises?

We can question the concept of “crisis”, how the discourse of crisis is shaped, by whom, and for what purpose, and how it relates to our personal experiences and approach. However, regardless of what we name it and wherever our coordinates may be, we are living in a time where, in Judith Butler’s term “Precarious Life”, are increasingly characterised by dispossession, displacement, forced migration, censorship, self-censorship, violations of rights and freedoms, insecurity, discrimination, and various forms of deepening violence. Certainly, the forms of domination which do not manifest in the same way everywhere also give rise to forms of resistance with their own nuances. In the face of destruction, plunder, mourning, and horror, we seek ways to sustain resistance, reconstruction, dignity, and joy simultaneously and in synchrony. We envision the strengthening of contexts, communities, and their actions by preserving their heterogeneity, not by melting in a single pot or erasing their differences, but by learning from one another, relating to one another, contradicting one another, and exchanging with each other. Independent art spaces and cultural workers, who already operate in a vulnerable and precarious field even “under normal conditions”, now face crises that have become the new normal. Supporting their resilience against these “ordinary crises” and encouraging transnational collective struggle through widening our VAHA network is an urgent and vital necessity than ever.

Our call and invitation go out to actors in culture, art, academia, activism, and civil society: In our diverse fragile conditions, drawing strength from our relationships with one another and the communities we work with, we open the second round of VAHA to collectively resist impositions and oppression, not just to survive but to reach towards alternative futures we envision, to mourn our losses and keep our collective memory, and to sustain our faith, joy, and efforts together against all odds.

## Mycelial Networks

In the past three years, VAHA has positioned itself as a platform of solidarity where we lean on each other and get encouragement amidst multiplying uncertainties. We have contributed with both tangible and abstract resources to sustain the valuable works of cultural operators on a local and transnational scale as well as to sustain communication, critical analyses, and the sharing of various experiences and the development of creative practices within the VAHA programme. The connections we have established within VAHA continue to facilitate communication and alliances among cultural and art organisations, much like the underground mycelial network of fungi. *Mycelium* spreads underground, connecting trees and other plants, and through this network, plants and trees work with fungi in a symbiotic relationship. The “mycelial network” enables plants to sustain their lives by sharing nutrients, water,

messages, and warnings with each other functioning as an extensive support system for plants. Similarly, solidarity networks among cultural and artistic organisations serve as a support system by facilitating the sharing of methods, resources, and ideas. Just as mycelium provides resilience and stability to plants against environmental pressures, cultural and artistic venues can rely on solidarity networks to access necessary resources and expand their impact in times of crises.

The “common ground” we stubbornly cling to is actually a phantasm; it may be an impossibility to stand on the same ground given the different geographies and contexts we come from. However, the desire to meet on a shared ground that we can build from our commons is equally real. While the tension in our conditions of existence and actions increases, maintaining contact with the Other, creating space for different voices, new encounters, and the tensions they might bring becomes even more challenging. Yet, we believe in the empowering effects of coming together, engaging in discussions, critical thinking, and creative and collective action, even though it is much more demanding now. We believe in the importance of simply bearing witness sometimes to the processes each other is going through. Despite all the potential risks, contradictions, and conflicts, we believe in the nourishing and multiplying aspect of togetherness.

In VAHA round II, our aim is to expand the solidarity network we began weaving in the first round by actively supporting and connecting independent cultural and art organisations working at the local level on burning issues such as freedom of expression, cultural rights, and artistic freedom. While focusing on initiatives that open up public spaces for critical discussion and dialogue through cultural and artistic activities, we invite cultural and art workers to learn from one another and resist together in order to overcome the crises that have become the new normal. By bringing together cultural and art workers, academia, and civil society actors within the VAHA network and beyond, we invite them to develop transnational alliances through the exploration of the complex cultural, social, political, and ecological issues of our time and the development of methods of struggle through interaction of different contexts and translation of various experiences. In the midst of crises becoming ordinary and conditions pushing us to our limits, we need each other for hope and resilience to sprout like mushrooms. As one of the VAHA round I participants expressed:

*“VAHA is exchange, is space for possibilities, is enthusiasm, is inspiration, is getting involved, is demanding, challenging, and learning at the same time, is thinking about one’s own privileges in one’s own bubble and the challenges and impressive work elsewhere, is getting in action under a common roof.”*

## Who can apply & how?

The first open call of VAHA II is open for applications from teams operating in Turkey that organise public culture and art programs. Two or three different organisations come together to form a “hub” to apply the programme. Hub partners can consist of cultural venues, art initiatives, and civil society organisations with different structures, profiles, and fields of interest, with the condition that at least one of them is an officially registered non-profit organisation. The partners can include collectives and art spaces, cultural houses, literary houses, bookshops, cultural venues of municipalities, public libraries, civil society organisations, social enterprises, etc.

You can either form a geographic hub with partners from the same city and neighbouring cities, or a thematic hub with partners who share the same interest and field of work. We would like to encourage particularly the activities that will be carried out in the earthquake affected region and/or with the affected communities.

For application requirements and other questions, you can refer to the FAQ: [https://vahahubs.org/content/editor/VAHA%20II\\_SSS.pdf](https://vahahubs.org/content/editor/VAHA%20II_SSS.pdf)

For the application form: <https://form.jotform.com/231993908897378>

Once the hubs in Turkey are selected and start their local activities, a second open call will be launched for applications from cultural venues and organisations in [Council of Europe member states](#). The selected organisations will be invited to the Networking Meeting to encourage transnational exchanges. After this kick-off meeting, they can apply for the Transnational Exchange Grant for their joint activities with the Turkey hubs. For more detailed information on this process, please consult the FAQ section.

## What awaits the participants during VAHA II?

In its second round VAHA aims to support public cultural programming organised by up to 10 VAHA hubs formed by independent cultural and artistic organisations in Turkey.

The hubs will initially start their local cultural and artistic activities. In parallel, participants will have the opportunity to benefit from various individual supports such as psychosocial support and travel support for study visits abroad. Later on, they will have the chance to establish partnerships with selected institutions through another open call for Europe and neighbouring regions, enabling them to visit each other, participate in each other's activities, or collaborate on joint cultural programming.

Here is an overview of the planned flow and timeline for VAHA II:



Visuals by Julia, [www.mosaics-circles.de](http://www.mosaics-circles.de)

For each hub that will be selected from Turkey, the following supports will be offered within the scope of VAHA II:

- **Activity grant:** A grant of 5,000 EUR per partner within the hub for organising local activities and events; totalling 10,000 EUR for two-partner hubs and 15,000 EUR for three-partner hubs.
- **Learning and mobility grants:** A grant of 2,000 EUR per person that could be applied for training and networking trips that can contribute to participants' knowledge and experiences, for visiting their transnational partners, or for short

residency trips aimed at taking breaks and recovering for individuals working in challenging conditions.

- **Online thematic workshops:** Online sessions that will be organised parallel to the working areas of the hubs, providing new content and methods to nourish their work and support peer-to-peer learning and experience sharing among the participants.
- **Psychosocial support grants:** An online meeting will be held with participants from Turkey, providing general information on mental health and trauma, psychosocial support through cultural and artistic work, and supporting the psychological well-being of cultural workers in crisis situations. In addition, participants working in challenging conditions (e.g., those affected by the earthquake or those working with traumatised groups) can apply for individual grants of 500 EUR for their own well-being such as psychotherapy sessions.
- **Transnational networking meeting:** Participation in the networking meeting to be held in Berlin, which will provide an opportunity to develop transnational exchanges.
- **Transnational exchange grant:** A grant of 7,500 EUR for activities and events to be carried out with transnational partners that will be selected from a broader geography.
- In addition to being part of the **VAHA Network**, participants also gain access to other transnational networks such as **iac Berlin - Bosch Alumni Network** and **Stiftung Mercator Alumni Network**, which offer extensive opportunities even after the VAHA programme ends.

The second round of VAHA programme, which starts with an open call to Turkey in July 2023, and all the activities within its scope will conclude in December 2024.

*VAHA is an initiative of [Anadolu Kültür](#) and [zusa](#), funded by [Stiftung Mercator](#) and [European Cultural Foundation](#). VAHA partner consortium is in collaboration with [iac Berlin](#).*

