ICBSS Photo Competition

# Culture Through My Eyes. One Region, Infinite Stories.

On the occasion of the **10th Edition of the BSEC Month of Culture**, the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) is launching an **Open Call** for the **2026 ICBSS Photo Competition 'Culture Through My Eyes. One Region, Infinite Stories.'**, with the aim to inspire and connect people through the rich cultural heritage of the wider Black Sea region[1].

The ICBSS invites individuals of all backgrounds, either amateur or professional photographers, to submit their photo, showcasing how culture influences everyday life, highlights traditions, and preserves a living heritage across centuries.

The Photo Competition will result in the creation of the **ICBSS 2027 Calendar**, featuring **12 winning photos**. The 12 winning photos will be selected through public voting that will take place online, via the ICBSS Facebook page. Each month will feature one winning photo, accompanied by a brief description or story, including proper credit given to the photographer. The calendar will be published in both printed and digital formats.

Submitted photos, that meet the selection criteria but are not included in the winning ones, may be included in the **10th edition of the BSEC Month of Culture**, or other related non-commercial promotional activities. Proper credit will be given to the photographer, according to the Terms and Conditions.

The Photo Competition will run from 23 March to 13 July 2026, including the submission, public voting, and announcement phases.

**Important Dates**

- **23 March – 30 April 2026**: Open for Submissions
- **1 – 15 May 2026:** Pre-Selection Process
- **18 May – 26 June 2026:** Public Voting Period
- **13 July 2026:** Announcement of Winners
- **November – December 2026:** Postage of the ICBSS 2027 Calendar to the Winners

[1] Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Republic of Moldova, Republic of North Macedonia, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Türkiye, Ukraine

## Theme

The ICBSS Photo Competition focuses on the **rich and diverse cultural heritage of the thirteen countries of the BSEC region**: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Republic of Moldova, Republic of North Macedonia, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Türkiye, Ukraine.

Participants are invited to submit their photos, accompanied by a brief description or story, showcasing how culture influences everyday life, highlights traditions, and preserves a living legacy across centuries.

Photos may include landscapes, monuments, paintings, street art, architecture, murals, art, gastronomy, and cultural customs and traditions **from any of the thirteen countries of the BSEC region only**.

Photos must **depict real, specific elements** that highlight any of the following:

- aspects of culture that highlight its rich diversity.
- traditions, customs, and elements of intangible cultural heritage.
- local cuisine and collective hospitality practices that engage communities.
- architectural or natural landscapes that serve as landmarks.
- elements of everyday life that suggest connection and shared experience.

## How to enter the competition

To enter the Competition and submit a photo, participants **must register online** at https://form.jotform.com/panser/icbss-photo-competition

In order to register successfully, participants must upload their photo and complete the online registration form, including location of the photo, a short description and a title (up to 150 characters), only via the **JotForm**. Each entry must also include the photographer's name, contact details, and country. Any submissions via email or other communication channels will not be accepted.

Participants are free to share their Facebook usernames, if they wish to be tagged at the announcement of the winning results.

### Technical Specifications

- Orientation: Horizontal (landscape)
- File Format: JPG / JPEG
- File Size: 3 MB – 15 MB
- Accepted Aspect Ratios: 3:2, 4:3, 16:9
- No watermarks, copyright notices, logos, borders and embedded text on images are allowed.

**Important:** Images must not be upscaled or artificially enlarged.

## Selection and Voting Procedure

The 12 winning photos will be selected via public voting through the ICBSS Facebook page. All photos meeting the selection criteria will be uploaded and be available for public upvoting on the ICBSS Facebook page for a period of 40 days.

**Timeframe:**

1. **Submission & Pre-selection:** Submissions will be accepted from **23 March to 30 April 2026**. Late registrations and photos that do not meet the selection criteria will be rejected without further notice.
2. **Publication to launch Voting:** On 18 May 2026, the ICBSS will upload photos that meet the selection criteria to the ICBSS Facebook page. The competition's hashtag will be added as a watermark on the photo. This watermark will only be applied to versions published on Facebook for the purposes of the voting procedure and will not affect the artistic integrity of the photo. Posts will be made on the official ICBSS website, social media and newsletter channels to encourage audience engagement and voting for favourite photos.
3. **Public Voting:** Voting will take place **from 18 May to 26 June 2026.** The public will choose the winners based on public upvoting, namely positive Facebook reactions ("Like", "Heart", "Care" and "Wow") which will be reviewed by ICBSS. **The 12 most upvoted photos** (photos with the highest number of positive Facebook reactions), **will be the winners**. Negative reactions (Facebook "Ha-Ha", "Angry" and "Sad") will not be counted as votes. The decisions of the public voting are final. The ICBSS will review the results and announce the winners.
4. **Announcement of winning photos:** The results will be officially announced by ICBSS on Monday **13 July 2026**. The winning photos will be re-uploaded to Facebook with the relevant tags and hashtag, as well as on the ICBSS website. Winners will also be notified by email and will be requested to share their postal address to receive a hard copy of the ICBSS 2027 Calendar before the end of the year.

## Selection Criteria

Submissions are open to individuals of all backgrounds, either amateur or professional photographers, based on the following criteria:

1. Participants must be at least 18 years old.
2. Each participant may submit one (1) photo only.
3. Submitted photos must depict content from any of the following countries: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Republic of Moldova, Republic of North Macedonia, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Türkiye, Ukraine.
4. Submitted photos must be original, unpublished, and taken solely by the participant.
5. AI-generated or substantially AI-assisted images are strictly prohibited.
6. Photos must be respectful, relevant, and depict authentic elements that illustrate, but not limited to:

- Cultural identity and diversity.
- Customs and traditions.
- Collective experiences and everyday life.
- Landmarks and culturally significant locations.

7. Photos **must not**:
    - Contain recognisable faces.
    - Include logos, trademarks, or promotional material.
    - Infringe upon any third-party rights.

## Awards

The 12 winning photos will be included in the **ICBSS 2027 Calendar**, along with references to their entrants (either their real names or their chosen nicknames). Winners of the competition will receive a printed copy of the calendar.

## Important Notes

1. Participants retain full copyright of their submitted photos. By submitting, they grant ICBSS a non-exclusive, royalty-free license to use the material for communication, publication, and promotional purposes related to the competition and the BSEC Month of Culture.
2. ICBSS reserves the right to modify, suspend or cancel the competition in case of unforeseen circumstances beyond its control.

## Terms & Conditions

1. The competition is open to professional and amateur photographers.
2. Registrations will only be accepted between 23 March and 30 April 2026. Late registrations and photos that do not meet the selection criteria will be rejected without further notice.
3. By registering and entering the Photo Competition, participants hereby accept these **Terms and Conditions.**
4. By entering the competition, participants agree and acknowledge that the ICBSS is permitted to receive and review their registration data*. Participants agree that personal data including, but not limited to, name and email address may be collected, processed, stored and otherwise used for the purposes of conducting and administering this photo competition. At any time, participants have the right to access, review, rectify or cancel any personal data held by ICBSS by sending an email to the following address: events@icbss.org.
5. Participants retain copyright of their images, and proper credit lines will be attributed to each photographer when exhibited or screened anywhere by ICBSS.
6. All entrants agree that all photos submitted to the competition may be reproduced (with photographer copyright credit) and used for promotional purposes related to the ICBSS activities, such as but not limited to calendars, videos, presentations, and websites. They hereby grant ICBSS a non-exclusive, royalty-free license to use the

material for communication, publication, and non-commercial promotional purposes related to the competition and the BSEC Month of Culture.

7. Entrants acknowledge that the ICBSS and its partners assume no responsibility and are not liable for any image misuse.
8. All entries will be reviewed and pre-screened by ICBSS.
9. Participation does not guarantee selection or publication.
10. The selected entries will be uploaded publicly on the ICBSS Facebook page. The public will choose the winners based on public upvoting (positive Facebook reactions: "Like", "Heart", "Care" and "Wow") which will be reviewed by ICBSS. The 12 most upvoted photos (photos with the highest number of positive Facebook reactions), will be the winners. Negative reactions (Facebook "Ha-Ha", "Angry" and "Sad") will not be counted as votes. The decisions of the public voting are final.
11. The full name of each entrant whose work is selected as a winner will also be published online.
12. Participants may only submit one entry. If more than one entry is submitted, only the first submission will be taken into consideration.
13. The photo competition is FREE to enter. No fees will be requested by ICBSS at any stage of the competition.
14. By submitting their entry, participants warrant, in respect of the photos submitted by them, as follows:
    - They are the sole copyright owner and creator of the photos.
    - They have the right to enter their photo in this competition.
    - The photo does not infringe upon the copyrights, trademarks, contract rights, or any other intellectual property rights of any third person or entity or violate any person's rights of privacy or publicity.
15. Each photo must:
    - Be relevant to the competition's specific theme.
    - Be clear, preferably without digital enhancements or filters.
    - Be accompanied by a title and a description, as requested in the registration form.
    - Be an original and unpublished creation of the participant.
16. Ethics Specifications:
    a) Participants must be over 18.
    b) Participants must submit their registration form and photo exclusively via JotForm. Any submissions via other channels will not be accepted.
    c) Digitally altered images, pre-published photos, and AI-generated or substantially AI-assisted content will not be considered.
    d) Photos must not include logos, trademarks, promotional material, or recognisable faces.
    e) Photos must be relevant to the theme.
    f) The photographic material must be compliant with the Terms and Conditions, the Ethics Specifications and Meta's Terms of Service.
    g) Recognisable faces are not permitted.
    h) Participants may withdraw their entries at any time during the competition. Their participation will be cancelled completely, their contact information deleted, and their photos will not be used by ICBSS.

i) In the event of a tie, the final decision will be made the ICBSS on the relevance of the entry to the theme and its representation of the cultural heritage of the target countries.
j) Entries using artificial techniques, such as bots, fake accounts or engagement pods to inflate reactions, will be disqualified. The ICBSS reserves the right to remove reactions deemed suspicious or non-organic.
k) The metadata and location specifics for each entry will be checked. Any photo concerning a location different from the referred countries will be excluded.
l) The ICBSS reserves the right to review all submissions for compliance with ethical and content standards and may reject any submission at its sole discretion, without prior notice and without obligation to provide any justification.

**The collection of your details for this competition and related uses will strictly respect the terms of the EU-GDPR. Personal data will be processed by the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) in accordance with Data Protection applicable laws. You have the right to access, correct, cancel, and object regarding your personal data*.

For more information, please visit www.icbss.org or send an email at events@icbss.org.

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The **2026 ICBSS Photo Competition** aligns with the ICBSS objectives to further promote the cultural identity of the wider Black Sea region, enhance its visibility to the wider public and contribute to the preservation of the region's cultural legacy, within the framework of the ICBSS' public outreach activities.

**About the BSEC Month of Culture**

Being aware of the rich, diverse, cultural heritage of the BSEC region, the ICBSS established the "BSEC Month of Culture (MoC)" in 2017, with the aim to promote the cultural identity of the region and enhance its visibility to the wider public.

The MoC is an online, month-long programme of cultural highlights of performing arts, cinema, literature, painting, architecture, and gastronomy from the 13 BSEC Member States.

Each "BSEC Month of Culture" is launched annually, from 1 to 30 November.

**Visit the previous editions:** https://icbss.org/bsec-month-of-culture/