

ERIANET



ERIANET NETWORK TO ADVANCE ROMA INCLUSION
BY COMBATING AND PREVENTING
ANTIGYPSYISM IN THE EU

POSITION PAPER WITH POLICY
RECOMMENDATIONS ON ROMA
REMEMBRANCE, COMMEMORATION AND
HISTORY TEACHING

by the
EUROPEAN ROMA INSTITUTE FOR ARTS AND
CULTURE (ERIANET)

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1. FOREWORD

The remembrance and commemoration of Roma history, as well as its inclusion in education, remain critical yet underexplored components of addressing historical injustices and promoting social cohesion in Europe. Despite growing acknowledgment of the importance of reflecting on the past, the stories and experiences of Roma communities often remain excluded or misrepresented in public narratives and educational systems. These omissions contribute to the marginalization of Roma and hinder the development of collective memory, which is essential for building more inclusive and equitable societies¹.

In recent years, discussions around history teaching and remembrance have focused on their role in fostering critical thinking, empathy, and mutual understanding among diverse groups. However, the integration of Roma history into these frameworks has often been fragmented or symbolic, lacking the systemic reforms necessary to ensure lasting impact. Commemoration practices, while vital for preserving memory and dignity, have often been limited to specific events or initiatives, leaving broader systemic change unaddressed².

This position paper aims to challenge these gaps by emphasizing the need for comprehensive policy approaches to Roma remembrance, commemoration, and history teaching. It highlights the critical role these practices play in promoting dignity, challenging stereotypes, and fostering a deeper understanding of the contributions and struggles of Roma communities throughout history.

At the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERiac), we recognize that remembrance and history education are not only tools for acknowledging the past but also vital for shaping a future rooted in justice and equity. The integration of Roma narratives into public consciousness and educational curricula is more than an act of inclusion—it is a necessary step toward ensuring that Roma communities are recognized as integral contributors to the fabric of European history and culture³.

This paper outlines actionable policy recommendations for governments, educators, and institutions, grounded in years of expertise and engagement with Roma communities. By focusing on the intersection of remembrance, commemoration, and history teaching, it calls for a shift from tokenistic gestures to meaningful systemic change. This includes fostering collaboration between Roma and non-Roma

¹ UN Human Rights Council report on the importance of historical memory for marginalized groups

² European Parliament resolution on the inclusion of Roma history in education, 2015

³ Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities

stakeholders to ensure the co-creation of narratives that reflect the diversity and resilience of Roma communities.

In a time of rising nationalism and renewed challenges to pluralism, there is an urgent need to anchor our societies in shared histories and mutual respect. By investing in remembrance and inclusive history education, we not only honor the legacy of Roma communities but also lay the foundation for a more just and cohesive Europe⁴.

It is our hope that this position paper serves as a catalyst for action, inspiring policymakers, educators, and civil society to advance a collective vision where Roma remembrance and history teaching are central to our understanding of European identity.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This position paper aims to address the critical importance of fostering Roma remembrance, commemoration, and the teaching of Roma history as essential tools for combating antigypsyism and promoting social inclusion. It explores the challenges and opportunities inherent in creating spaces of recognition, dignity, and understanding for Roma communities through a better representation of their history and cultural contributions.

Developed by the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC) as part of the ERIACNET4EU project, this paper is informed by the insights and expertise of ERIAC's History and Commemoration thematic section. The recommendations presented here are based on surveys, discussions, and contributions from ERIAC members and experts in the field.

Despite increasing awareness of Roma history and the Roma Holocaust, significant gaps remain in public knowledge and institutional acknowledgment of these events. Misrepresentations, distortions, and the absence of Roma voices in official narratives continue to perpetuate biases. For example, the inclusion of Roma history in educational curricula across Europe remains sporadic, often limited to highlighting victimization, while neglecting the resilience, contributions, and diversity of Roma communities. This narrow framing risks reinforcing stereotypes instead of dismantling them.

⁴ UNESCO report on the role of education in promoting societal resilience, 2020

At the policy level, international frameworks such as the European Commission's *EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion, and Participation 2020–2030* and the Council of Europe's Recommendation CM/Rec(2020)2 urge member states to revise textbooks, school curricula, and public commemorative practices to include Roma history and culture. However, the implementation of these measures has been uneven, and the lack of robust monitoring mechanisms impedes accountability. The absence of Roma experts and stakeholders in the design and delivery of history education, research, and commemorative initiatives exacerbates these gaps. This paper emphasizes the urgent need for Roma-led scholarship, ethical historical research, and inclusive policymaking processes. Integrating Roma voices into these discussions not only ensures accuracy but also empowers Roma communities to shape their narratives and reclaim their place in European history.

This paper deals with challenges related to public memory and commemoration. Institutional practices often exclude or marginalize Roma perspectives in Holocaust remembrance events, memorial designs, and public discourses on historical injustices.

Drawing on the expertise of its members, ERIAC advocates for a comprehensive approach to Roma remembrance, commemoration, and history teaching. Key recommendations include:

- The systematic integration of Roma history, including the Roma Holocaust and resistance, into national education systems and public memorials.
- The active involvement of Roma historians, and cultural leaders in shaping curricula, commemorative practices, and historical research.
- The development of innovative educational tools, such as digital resources, to enhance public understanding of Roma heritage and contemporary contributions.
- The establishment of robust monitoring mechanisms to ensure policy implementation and accountability at national and EU levels.

The promotion of Roma remembrance, commemoration and teaching is not just an issue of cultural representation; it is a moral and political imperative. By confronting historical injustices, dismantling harmful stereotypes, and fostering inclusive narratives, Europe can build a more equitable and cohesive society. This paper calls upon governments, civil society, and international organizations to embrace these recommendations and work collectively toward a future in which Roma history and heritage are fully recognized and celebrated.

3. INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

About ERIAC

The European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture e.V. (ERIAC) is a joint initiative of the Council of Europe, the Open Society Foundations (now Roma Foundation for Europe), and the Roma Leaders' initiative – the Alliance for the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture. ERIAC was registered under German law on 7 June 2017, in Berlin, Germany.

ERIAC exists to increase the self-esteem of Roma and to decrease negative prejudice of the majority population towards the Roma by means of arts, culture, history, and media. ERIAC functions as an international network that upscales the voices and promotes the activities of Roma organizations, intellectuals, and artists to form multilateral initiatives and regional alliances, and to connect them with the policymakers and leaders of the different national and European levels.

ERIAC is an international membership-based network, currently bringing together 141 associate members: Roma and non-Roma individuals and organizations, with relevant and demonstrated competencies and experience in the field of arts and culture and who are committed to ERIAC's values. ERIAC's associate members are organized in four thematic sections: Arts and Culture; History and Commemoration; Research and Publication in the fields of arts and culture; Media and Information in the fields of arts and culture. The Romani language is a transversal thematic section. Associate Members have key roles in building the resources of ERIAC, engaging in creative exchange and co-production, taking ownership of ERIAC's initiatives and engaging in its decision-making. The entire ERIAC programming is built with the participation of and relying on knowledge and expertise of its members. Additionally, ERIAC relies on a large network of community members who provide input, expertise, and advice, and at the same time contribute as multipliers to our work.

ERIAC's work towards making an impact in the academic field

In 2024, the ERIAC History and Commemoration Thematic Section fostered a vibrant community of associate members, comprising both Roma and non-Roma scholars, researchers, and Roma-led organizations dedicated to education. These efforts include collaborations with renowned experts such as Raul Cârstocea, Maria Bogdan, and Hristo Kyuchukov, who have significantly enriched the discourse on Roma remembrance and history teaching.

Since its inception, ERIAC has prioritized generating meaningful impact in the academic and educational fields by promoting critical scholarship and inclusive

narratives about Roma history and identity. This commitment is driven by the overarching goal of positioning ERIAC as a referential source of knowledge for higher education institutions, policymakers, and Roma communities alike.

One of ERIAC's strategic objectives for 2021-2025 is closely aligned with the groundbreaking Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2020)2, advocating for the inclusion of Roma and Traveller history in school curricula and teaching materials. ERIAC has worked to establish itself as a key institutional partner providing policy input to the Council of Europe and its member states. This includes facilitating the development of educational resources that emphasize the diverse experiences of Roma communities, including the Roma Holocaust, resistance, and cultural contributions.

Flagship Projects and Institutional Partnerships

To further these goals, ERIAC has initiated and supported several key projects, such as:

- The Barvalipe Roma Online University, financed by the Federal Foreign Office of Germany, serves as an innovative platform for Roma and non-Roma students to engage with critical perspectives on Roma history, culture, and resistance.
- The "Re-thinking Roma Resistance" project, funded by the EVZ Foundation, explores narratives of resilience and agency during the Roma Holocaust and beyond.

These initiatives are complemented by ERIAC's enduring partnerships with academic institutions, including universities, and its efforts in organizing training programs, high-level international academic conferences, and the publication of numerous articles and reports.

About ERIACNET4EU

This paper is published in the frame of the ERIACNET4EU: ERIAC NETWORK TO ADVANCE ROMA INCLUSION BY COMBATTING AND PREVENTING ANTIGYPSYISM IN THE EU project. ERIACNET4EU, initiated in 2022, is a multi-year initiative developed through a framework partnership agreement (FPA) under the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV) of the European Union.

With the adoption of the new EU Roma Framework, the EU and its member states are transitioning towards implementation, requiring expert advice and reliable partners at all levels of policy making and implementation (local, regional, national, European). ERIACNET4EU aims to leverage the knowledge and expertise of the ERIAC community members in collaboration with an alliance of donors and partner

organizations. This collaboration is intended to provide expertise, specific know-how, and reliable methodologies to support the implementation of the new framework.

The radical, progressive and professional quality of this initiative is rooted in the responsibility and leadership undertaken by Roma, aiming to offer informed, reliable, consolidated, and high-quality input to European and national policymakers and public institutions. This is intended to enhance the effective implementation of strategies and laws that impact the lives of Roma in the EU.

ERIACNET4EU serves the following objectives:

- Ensure quality input to policymaking and policy-implementation at local, regional, national and EU levels through mutual learning and exchange of good practices among/between ERIAC members as well as with other public and private stakeholders;
- Awareness raising, information and dissemination activities;
- Increasing capacities and knowledge base of members and other stakeholders through training activities;
- Growing the network and community outreach.

In the framework of the project, ERIAC will release thematic evidence-based position papers which gather the expertise of ERIAC's members to serve the work of European institutions and member states in implementing their commitments as part of the EU Roma Framework.

Objectives of the Position Paper

Drawing on the knowledge, experience, and expertise of the ERIAC community, this position paper provides a comprehensive overview of crucial issues in Roma remembrance, commemoration, and history teaching. Developed through consultations with ERIAC associate members, including prominent scholars and experts, and building on existing research, this paper explores the representation of Roma history in educational and commemorative contexts. It identifies priority areas for intervention and reflects on past successes and failures in these domains.

This position paper specifically examines the following key aspects:

- The representation of Roma history, including the Roma Holocaust, in school curricula and teaching materials.
- The role of commemoration practices in fostering intercultural understanding and combating antigypsyism.
- The status of Romani studies within higher education, with a focus on the recognition, institutionalization, and expansion of Roma scholarship.

- The need for ethical and inclusive research methodologies that challenge prejudiced narratives and highlight Roma agency and contributions to European history.

The paper concludes with a set of recommendations tailored to diverse stakeholders, including European institutions, member states, donors, academic institutions, and civil society organizations. These recommendations aim to advance Roma remembrance and ensure the effective integration of Roma history and culture into mainstream education and public memory.

It is important to note that this position paper remains grounded in the scope outlined by ERIAC's mandate, focusing on Roma history teaching and commemorative practices. It emphasizes the importance of ethical representation and institutional accountability in shaping accurate and inclusive narratives of Roma history.

By addressing these issues, this position paper seeks to inform and guide policymakers, educational institutions, and donors in developing more effective initiatives and policies that enhance the quality of life of Roma Europeans. Furthermore, it underscores that the urgency to improve Roma-targeted measures extends beyond the Roma community; it is essential for fostering social cohesion and building a more inclusive Europe for all.

Challenging the prejudiced image and representation of Roma in majority societies is not only a moral imperative but also a precondition for broader socio-economic progress. Cultural recognition, remembrance, and inclusion are foundational to creating equitable opportunities and addressing historical injustices. Without these measures, the success of policies aimed at Roma inclusion will remain limited.

4. METHODOLOGY

This position paper is based on a combination of expert research and direct engagement with stakeholders in the field of Roma remembrance, commemoration, and history teaching. To ensure a comprehensive and evidence-based analysis, ERIAC employed a qualitative research approach that integrates expert contributions and data collection through a targeted questionnaire.

Three experts were commissioned to conduct in-depth research and provide insights on key themes related to Roma history, remembrance, and commemoration. Their work included a review of existing policies, historical narratives, and best practices in the field, ensuring a well-rounded perspective on the challenges and opportunities in this area.

Additionally, ERIAC disseminated a structured questionnaire among its network, gathering valuable input from Roma and non-Roma scholars, educators, and cultural practitioners. The responses provided firsthand experiences, perspectives on commemoration practices, and recommendations for policy improvements.

The findings from expert analyses and questionnaire responses were synthesized to form the basis of this position paper, aligning with ERIAC's broader mission of advancing Roma knowledge production, cultural heritage, and historical recognition.

5. ROMA HISTORY, REMEMBRANCE AND COMMEMORATION

The Importance of a Shared Roma History

The Roma need a history. Awareness and knowledge of a shared past is key both to community building and the development of Roma identity and pride, and to their recognition as a transnational group by majority societies in Europe. Regarding the first consideration, the notion of a shared Roma history is important for the numerous and diverse Roma communities in Europe to develop a sense of common belonging. A typical and essential feature of nation-building processes has been the development of a national history, codified in systems of national education, with their schools, curricula, textbooks, archives, research institutions, and universities. As we know from the scholarship on nationalism, even in that prototype of a European nation, France, peasants had to be made "into Frenchmen" as late as the late 19th century.⁵ Even within one country, outside of the thin stratum of the educated elites, people spoke different dialects, upheld different traditions, and rarely thought beyond their immediate, local realities; the majority of them were illiterate, in most cases all the way into the 20th century. The Roma were no different in this respect, until European processes of nation-building turned them from just one among many diverse groups to a 'minority' distinct from an ever-more-homogenous 'majority'.

As Europe's largest minority group, yet one that does not have its own territory, but is rather spread across different European countries, the Roma could not and did not develop into a nation, on the one hand; and their already existing diversity was rendered even more diverse by hybridisation with majority cultures, now codified as 'national', on the other. Like other minorities, the Roma did not learn their own history,

⁵ Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976. See especially Chapter 18, 'Civilizing in Earnest: Schools and Schooling', pp. 303-338.

but that of the country where they were living, as a national history they were written out of. Unlike other minorities, they had neither the history of a kin-state as an alternative to identify with, nor a rich written tradition, like the other large transnational European minority without a territory – the Jews, at least until the establishment of Israel – possessed. And since nationalisation is the form that modernisation took in Europe,⁶ Roma identities might have leaped from pre-modern to post-modern, without establishing at any point a national canon or a common history, those features characteristic of European modernity. In a post-national world, that could represent an interesting experiment at the avant-garde of new forms of identity; unfortunately, despite earlier hopes and claims to this effect, such a world is unlikely to materialise anytime soon. And in a world of nation states, the Roma need to develop a common, quasi-national identity: if they are to acknowledge their shared culture and heritage beyond the diversity of Roma communities, but also if they are to be recognised as such, and as *equals*, by European societies.

This recognition is the second dimension of the need for a Roma history, one that concerns majority societies across Europe rather than the Roma themselves. Here, the first thing to note, as already mentioned above, is that the Roma were for the most part written out of history. In pre-modern times, histories were primarily exemplary or cautionary tales about elites; with modernity, they became the national histories of groups that were titular nations in their own state or aspired to establish one.⁷ The Roma were neither ruling elites in pre-modern times, nor a nation in modern ones, which accounts for their absence from historical narratives. When they featured, as in what is commonly referred to as the earliest historical text dealing specifically with the Roma, Heinrich Grellmann's 1787 *Dissertation on the Gypsies*, they were typically the object of curiosity, an exotic 'Other' to be studied as a rare, colourful, outlandish species rather than as a subject of history making a contribution to the societies amidst which they were living, or to European culture more generally.⁸ This was to be developed further during the Romantic period, when the Roma were portrayed in Orientalist manner as 'mysterious' Bohemians prone to transgression and regarded with a mixture of fear and envy for their presumed 'freedom' from a modern state that

⁶ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1983.

⁷ Reinhard Koselleck, 'Historia Magistra Vitae: The Dissolution of the Topos into the Perspective of a Modernized Historical Process', in *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, pp. 26-42.

⁸ Heinrich Moritz Gottlieb Grellmann, *Dissertation on the Gypsies, Being an Historical Enquiry Concerning the Manner of Life, Economy, Customs and Conditions of these People in Europe, and their Origin*. London: Printed for the Editor, by G. Bigg, And to be had of P. Elmsley, and T. Cadell, in the Strand, and J. Sewell in Cornhill, 1787. The authors of this position paper would like to note that "Gypsy" is a pejorative term, a racial slur that is grounded in a historically erroneous association of the Roma with Egyptians. Its use as a descriptor is rejected by the majority of Roma organisations today. At the same time, the authors acknowledge that for much of history, this was the term more commonly used for the Roma, causing additional confusion due to the fact that in the historical record "gypsies" could also refer to non-Roma nomadic groups or be used as a synonym for nomadic people (Roma and non-Roma) more generally. For the purposes of the present paper, the term is only used when reproducing the language of original historical documents and/or publications, and is consistently placed in inverted commas to indicate its contemporary unacceptability.

was becoming ever more interventionist in society.⁹ This romanticized notion of the 'Bohemian Roma', while drawing on the very real cultural heritage of Roma and their involvement in the arts (storytelling, music, painting) and entertainment (nomadic fairs, theatres, puppet shows, and circuses), simultaneously glossed over the violence of states' ruthless policing of nomadism.¹⁰

More generally, the apparently benevolent image of the Romantic Bohemian Roma papered over the centuries of marginalisation, exclusion, and outright persecution of the Roma across Europe, and of their slavery in the Romanian principalities.¹¹ Intensifying in times of crisis, whether brought about by famine, war, natural disasters, or epidemics, the violent scapegoating of the Roma (and other minorities, especially the Jews) had been a constant feature of European history.¹² For the Roma, it manifested in policies of forced settlement, expulsions, "gypsy hunts" in Saxony and the Habsburg Empire, forced assimilation in Spain and Portugal – whose failure led to the Great "Gypsy" Roundup of 30 July 1749, when between 10,000 and 12,000 Roma were interned in Spain –, corporal punishment (whipping, branding, torture), execution without trial, forced sterilisation of women, and the abduction of children from their families and their placement in workhouses.¹³ This violence did not abate with the onset of 'Enlightened' modernity and its inclusive discourses of citizenship. While the more abhorrent pre-modern institutions such as slavery were abolished in the mid-19th century in the Romanian principalities, this emancipation of the Roma was accompanied by the parallel racialization of the group. Perhaps paradoxically given its initially emancipatory project of breaking down barriers of inherited rank and status, it was the nation that drew sharper lines between majorities and minorities, as the inclusion of ever more citizens into the now-sovereign 'people' was doubled by the exclusion of those deemed to be 'others' to it. A formal, legal divide was

⁹ Tony F. Sonneman, 'Dark Mysterious Wanderers: The Migrating Metaphor of the Gypsy', *The Journal of Popular Culture* 32(4), 1999, pp. 119-139; Sarah Houghton-Walker, *Representations of the Gypsy in the Romantic Period*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

¹⁰ Tara Zahra, "'Condemned to Rootlessness and Unable to Budge": Roma, Migration Panics, and Internment in the Habsburg Empire', *The American Historical Review*, 122(3), 2017, pp. 702-726.

¹¹ Viorel Achim, *The Roma in Romanian History*. Budapest: Central European University Press, 1998.

¹² Samuel K. Cohn, *Epidemics: Hate and Compassion from the Plague of Athens to AIDS*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018; Raul Cârstocea, 'War against the Poor: Social Violence Against Roma in Eastern Europe During COVID-19 at the Intersection of Class and Race', *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* 21(2), 2022, pp. 81-109.

¹³ Angus Fraser, *The Gypsies*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1992; Antonio Gómez Alfaro, *The Great Gypsy Round-up. Spain: The General Imprisonment of Gypsies in 1749*. Madrid: Editorial Presencia Gitana, 1993; David Crowe, *A History of the Gypsies of Eastern Europe and Russia*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1995; Council of Europe, *Roma History Factsheets*, available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/roma-and-travellers/roma-history-factsheets> (accessed 11 November 2024).

increasingly doubled by (pseudo-)scientific racial theories that made Roma alterity immutable and associated it with alleged inferiority.¹⁴

Roma Historical Marginalization and Exclusion

Modern racism inscribed difference into the Roma's bodies and rendered it permanent. The plans for improving societies characteristic of European modernity increasingly started to include eugenics, ideas about improving the biological quality of populations, drawing distinctions between people seen as 'valuable' and people whose alleged 'genetic traits' were seen to be 'dangerous' to the nation. For the well-being of societies, the former were to be fostered; the latter to be prevented from reproducing, with the eventual aim of their elimination.¹⁵ People seen to be racially different fell into the second category, and the Roma, alongside Jews, were identified as the two most dangerous groups by Nazi Germany, the epitome of a racial state. The radicalising policies of a regime that saw itself as "nothing but applied biology"¹⁶ eventually led to the Holocaust, where Jews and Roma were the only groups slated for extermination exclusively on racial grounds.

Roma Holocaust and its Impact on Recognition

Yet even the genocide of the Roma, which was a European crime perpetrated not only by the Nazi regime, but also (and often independently of German influence) by its Axis allies in Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Romania, or Slovakia or by local collaborators across occupied Europe, became 'the forgotten Holocaust' in the aftermath of the Second World War. This was partly because of a lack of institutional capacity in representing Roma voices, having in part to do with the absence of a united, transnational Roma movement representing Holocaust survivors, as well as its victims; and partly because of continuing suspicions of majority populations about the legitimacy of such Roma claims to victimhood, which often reproduced the Nazi stereotypes concerning the Roma's alleged 'asocial' or 'dangerous' nature.¹⁷ Official recognition of the Roma Holocaust came very late, being formally acknowledged by

¹⁴ Raul Cârstocea, 'Historicising the Normative Boundaries of Diversity: The Minority Treaties of 1919 in a *Longue Durée* Perspective', *Studies on National Movements* 5(1), 2020, pp. 43-79.

¹⁵ Marius Turda and Paul Weindling (eds.), *Blood and Homeland: Eugenics and Racial Nationalism in Central and Southeast Europe, 1900-1940*. New York: Central European University Press, 2006.

¹⁶ Statement made in 1934 by Hans Schemm, Bavarian cabinet minister, cited in Robert N. Proctor, *Racial Hygiene: Medicine under the Nazis*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1988, p. 63.

¹⁷ Ari Joskowicz, *Rain of Ash: Roma, Jews, and the Holocaust*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023.

West Germany only in 1982, while a memorial to the Sinti and Roma murdered in the Holocaust was only unveiled in Berlin in 2012.¹⁸ It should not be surprising that this recognition only came *after* the establishment of Roma institutions, especially following the first World Romani Congress, held in Orpington, near London, in 1971.¹⁹

It should be fairly evident even from the succinct presentation above that *the Roma have a history*. It is on the one hand, if we focus on the Roma, the history of a distinct culture, with a specific cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, transmitted across generations primarily via the medium of oral tradition – and thus less prone to formal codification but more open and fluid, subject to and accepting of constant change. Along these lines, its acknowledgment and recognition would contribute to a better understanding of the diversity of European societies. It is on the other hand, if we look at the relationships between Roma and majority societies, a history of almost uninterrupted suffering, of slavery, victimisation, and violence, culminating in genocide. Along these lines, the issue is not only that of getting the historical record straight by including previously marginalised and/or silenced voices – although this in itself is important for a democratising historical discipline that in the last 5-6 decades has gone beyond the Whig History of ‘great men’ to rescue “from the enormous condescension of posterity” not just E.P. Thompson’s “poor stockinger”, “Luddite cropper”, “‘obsolete’ hand-loom weaver”, or “‘utopian’ artisan”,²⁰ but also “women, minorities and migrants, children, or members of subcultures. All of them came to be regarded not just as objects, but as subjects of history in their own right, their voices enriching the complex picture of the social fabric just as global and post-colonial history revealed the intrinsic connectivity of the modern world”.²¹ But in cases of histories of violence, of centuries-long exclusion, persecution, and mass murder, there is also an *ethical* imperative for societies to know and accept these histories that goes beyond the exigencies of the historical discipline. If we are to understand and respond to antigypsyism, whose definition identifies it as “a specific form of racism, an ideology founded on racial superiority, a form of dehumanisation and institutional racism nurtured by historical discrimination, which is expressed, among other things, by violence, hate speech, exploitation, stigmatisation and the most

¹⁸ Ellie Keen (author), Rui Gomes (editor), *Right to Remember: A Handbook for Education with Young People on the Roma Genocide*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2014.

¹⁹ Thomas Acton and Ilona Klímová, ‘The International Romani Union. An East European Answer to West European Questions? Shifts in the Focus of World Romani Congresses, 1971-2000’, in: Will Guy (ed.), *Between Past and Future. The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, pp. 157-226. See also Council of Europe, *Roma History Factsheets*.

²⁰ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, London: Victor Gollancz, 1963, p. 12.

²¹ Raul Cârstocea, ‘The Democratisation of History’, *Observatory on History Teaching in Europe*, 7 July 2022, available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/observatory-history-teaching/-/the-democratisation-of-history> (accessed 6 November 2024).

blatant kind of discrimination”;²² we have to take into consideration this long history of the relationships and interactions between Roma and majority populations. In other words, we need to acknowledge that antigypsyism and the present-day marginalisation of the Roma is rooted in historical injustices, and that history also has the function of providing for some degree of moral reparations in such cases.

Yet in a field that has (mostly) accepted the post-colonial / decolonial paradigms, attempts at decolonising the curriculum have for the most part left out the Roma.²³ This is partly explained by the predominant focus of post-colonialism on spaces outside Europe, with applications of the paradigm within the continent remaining relatively few and quite contested.²⁴ It is also very much dependent on differentials in infrastructural capacities. Following the process of decolonisation, former colonies who gained their independence established themselves as nation-states and were in a position to develop their national histories, backed up by the requisite infrastructure associated with systems of national education: schools, curricula, textbooks, archives, and institutions of higher learning. Asymmetrical as these processes of knowledge production might be when compared to those ensuing from similar institutions in the former colonial core, they are still much better placed than the opportunities available to the Roma, who do not possess such infrastructures and have to rely instead on those of their host states or on the platforms of international organisations. Among these, the Council of Europe has played a leading role in drawing attention to the importance of Roma history, including through a crucial recommendation of the Committee of Ministers, issued in 2020, on the inclusion of the history of Roma and/or Travellers in school curricula and teaching materials.²⁵ Nevertheless, these are policy instruments that, while certainly laudable, are very much dependent on the political will of member states for their implementation, a subject to which we will return below.

²² European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) General Policy Recommendation No. 13 on combating antigypsyism and discrimination against Roma – adopted on 24 June 2011 and amended on 1 December 2020, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/ecri-general-policy-recommendation-no-13-on-combating-anti-gypsyism-an/16808b5aee> (accessed 19 November 2024). Emphasis added.

²³ For some few exceptions that have approached Roma history, art, and education from a decolonial perspective, see e.g., Ioana Vrăbiescu, ‘The ‘Nomad Gypsy’ through Decolonial View: The Roma Situation in Romanian National State Building’, in Daniel Boswell, Roger O’Shea, and Efrat Tzadik (eds.), *Inculturalism: Meaning and Identity*, Leiden: Brill, 2013, pp. 117-127; Timea Junghaus, ‘Roma Art: Theory and Practice’, *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica* 59(1), 2014, pp. 25-42; Miye Nadya Tom, Julia Suárez-Krabbe, and Trinidad Caballero Castro, ‘Pedagogy of Absence, Conflict, and Emergence: Contributions to the Decolonization of Education from the Native American, Afro-Portuguese, and Romani Experiences’, *Comparative Education Review* 61(S1), 2017, pp. 121-145.

²⁴ For an early warning against applying such paradigms uncritically to European spaces, see Maria Todorova, ‘Balkanism and Postcolonialism, or on the Beauty of the Airplane View’, in: Costică Brădăţan and Serguei Alex. Oushakine (eds.), *In Marx’s Shadow. Knowledge, Power and Intellectuals in Eastern Europe and Russia*, Lanham: Lexington Books, pp. 175-195.

²⁵ Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, Recommendation CM/Rec(2020)2 (adopted by the Ministers’ Deputies on 1 July 2020) on the inclusion of the history of Roma and/or Travellers in school curricula and teaching materials, available at: <https://search.coe.int/cm?i=09000016809ee48c> (accessed 19 November 2024).

In this context, there was a pressing need for Roma organisations to develop their own institutional capabilities for promoting Roma history in public space, both within Roma communities and among the population at large. It is important to note here that both the strategies for addressing these two different audiences (Roma and non-Roma) and potentially also the historical content that needs to be emphasised in each context are likely to be different. Roma youth learn their history both within their communities, and to a significant extent still via the medium of oral tradition, and in national school systems that, depending on the country and/or locality, might or might not have special provisions for education in minority languages or a separate curriculum. The focus here should be on promoting a sense of common identity, via a shared history, across the diverse Roma communities in Europe and beyond, always-already hybridised by their interaction with majorities and/or other minority groups. With regard to a more general audience, the focus might be instead on promoting awareness and recognition of the existence of the Roma as a European group with a long history stretching back a millennium; of Roma culture, heritage, and traditions; as well as of the history of oppression that acts as a historical legacy accounting for inter-generational patterns of exclusion and structural racism that have as a result the present-day marginalisation of the Roma and persistent antigypsyism.

The establishment of the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIANC) in 2017 was a salutary development to this effect. In the first seven years of its activity, especially through its 'History and Commemoration' and 'Knowledge Production' sections, ERIAC has produced an impressive database of historical knowledge about the Roma in Europe and beyond, through various media that are available to its members, to Roma communities more generally, and to the public at large. The Barvalipe Online University is precisely the kind of initiative that, in the absence of national institutions of higher education, can act as a virtual educational platform about Roma identity(ies), history(ies) and culture(s).²⁶ Understandably, its first course, which launched on 1 September 2020, provided an 'Introduction to Roma Cultural History', from the arrival of the Roma in Europe to the importance of contemporary Roma knowledge production. Consisting of 15 lectures delivered by prestigious scholars, the course's intentions to "propose a canon" and "act as a reference for Roma cultural history" replicated closely the construction of a national historical narrative.²⁷ The second course was entitled 'European Roma History' and delved more deeply into "the understanding of Roma as integral to the mainstream national and regional histories", re-positioning the Roma from the periphery of such narratives to their core. For accessibility to non-Roma populations in the respective countries, the lectures of the second course were mostly delivered in local languages, with subtitles

²⁶ European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIANC), *Barvalipe Online University*, available at: <https://eriac.org/barvalipe-roma-online-university/> (accessed 20 November 2024).

²⁷ European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIANC), 'First Course', *Barvalipe Online University*, available at: <https://eriac.org/barvalipe-university-first-course/> (accessed 20 November 2024).

in English and Romani.²⁸ The Barvalipe Online University further developed a Masterclass series, on subjects ranging from history to Romani language, poetry, performing arts, or media representation, and established a Barvalipe Digital Library of Critical Romani Scholarship consisting of "seminal pieces from peer-reviewed, academic publications by Romani researchers and scholars, adopting an orientation and positionality that reflects their identity as Roma".²⁹

It is clear from the short descriptions above that what the Barvalipe Online University aims at is nothing short of the establishment of a quasi-national virtual learning environment akin to a national university – and national library, with the Barvalipe Digital Library of Critical Romani Scholarship –, effectively setting up a (quasi-)national historical canon. At the same time, and unlike the national – and nationalist – iterations of the 19th / 20th centuries, this is a canon that is self-reflexive (the Library sees itself as a "'living archive' and not a fixed canon, nor [...] a 'museum artefact'") and fully aware of its positionality in time and space, open to change, additions, and transformations, and also aiming to speak to outsiders as much as to members of the group, while simultaneously insisting on the representation and prominence of Roma voices when speaking about the Roma community(ies).³⁰ As already noted above, this is a post-modern, perhaps post-national, canon rather than the more familiar national type associated with European modernity. Unlike other national canons, it is inclusive and aimed at mutual understanding rather than the exclusion of 'others', and thus, perhaps paradoxically for a group that is not seen as a 'nation', could serve as a model for the development of national histories that are less nationalist, something that is on the agenda of history education more generally.

Launched in 2018, the journal *Critical Romani Studies*, while not focused exclusively on Roma history, has already made its mark in terms of knowledge production about the Roma.³¹ In doing so, it has joined the longer-established *Romani Studies*, relaunched in 1991 as the heir of the first journal ever published on Roma history and culture, the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, which was issued (intermittently) from 1888 to 1982.³² The number of publications on Roma history has also increased recently in generalist history journals, particularly on the topic of the Roma Holocaust. For the most part however, this has been the result of the rise to prominence of new

²⁸ European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIANC), 'Second Course', *Barvalipe Online University*, available at: <https://eriac.org/barvalipe-university-second-course/> (accessed 20 November 2024).

²⁹ European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIANC), 'Barvalipe Digital Library of Critical Romani Scholarship', *Barvalipe Online University*, available at: <https://eriac.org/digital-library-of-curricula-roma-scholarship/> (accessed 20 November 2024).

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ *Critical Romani Studies*, available at: <https://crs.ceu.edu/index.php/crs> (accessed 25 November 2024).

³² *Romani Studies Journal*, available at: <https://www.liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk/journal/rost> (accessed 25 November 2024).

generations of Roma scholars, as well as of the efforts of Roma institutions such as ERIAC rather than of support by mainstream academic institutions. Among ERIAC's activities related to Roma history, another project, 'Re-thinking Roma Resistance', deserves special emphasis. Developed in the space of little over one year, from October 2019 to December 2020, the project challenged dominant narratives that regard Roma almost exclusively as victims, by focusing instead on stories of Roma resistance, heroism, and bravery, going also beyond their persecution during the Second World War.³³ Combining history and commemoration, the project was innovative not only in collecting such stories of individual and collective resistance (of which the best known is the Roma uprising at Auschwitz-Birkenau on 16 May 1944), but also in designing a board game, 'Roma Heroes'. Inspired by the classic children's board game 'Guess Who?', this is an educational game that allows the players to discover the life stories of real heroes of Roma history while playing.³⁴ The project has also resulted in an academic publication, co-edited by Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka and Jekatyerina Dunajeva, focusing on Roma agency and strategies for survival that the Roma have engaged in throughout history.³⁵

The Role of Roma Institutions in Promoting Historical Awareness

While the establishment of Roma institutions that have the capacity of projecting Roma voices into public space and engage in debates on Roma history from a specific Roma positionality is certainly a most welcome development, and one that was much needed following decades when non-Roma were over-represented in knowledge production about the Roma, this might not be sufficient for the mainstreaming of Roma history on a European level. For that to happen, consistent intervention by European states (especially, but not exclusively, those with significant Roma populations) in reconsidering curricula, textbooks, university programmes, and research priorities in a way that is more inclusive of Roma history. And here, the present state of affairs is less encouraging.

As recently as 2021, a historiographical article undertaking a review of the scholarship focusing on the history of the Roma and Travellers, particularly, but not exclusively, in Britain, was suggestively entitled: "What field? Where? Bringing Gypsy,

³³ European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERiac), *Re-thinking Roma Resistance*, available at: <https://eriac.org/re-thinking-roma-resistance/> (accessed 20 November 2024).

³⁴ European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERiac), "Roma Heroes" Board Game, *Re-thinking Roma Resistance*, available at: <https://eriac.org/re-thinking-roma-resistance-heroes-game/> (accessed 20 November 2024).

³⁵ Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka and Jekatyerina Dunajeva (eds.), *Re-thinking Roma Resistance throughout History: Recounting Stories of Strength and Bravery*, Budapest: European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture, 2020.

Roma and Traveller History into View".³⁶ After a fairly broad-ranging analysis starting from the beginning of academic publications dealing with the Roma in the 19th century, the authors acknowledged that there is a body of scholarship that has been growing in quality and volume, especially recently, but also, following the work of Jodie Matthews, that "the (over) representation and fetishisation of Gypsies in arts and literature has not been reflected in their inclusion in national histories".³⁷ Their conclusions called for the integration of Roma history into broader histories and historical questions, as well as for a nuanced consideration of the implications of the project of decolonising history for the Roma, all of these against "the tendency [...] to ghettoise their experiences and render them marginal to broader national histories, in the process reinforcing their status as something alien and 'other'".³⁸ The authors' call for moving away from quasi-exclusive discussions of the Roma along the lines of 'ethnicity' or 'race' to also include considerations related to their class status in societies is a salutary one that is also visible in recent scholarship dealing with the Roma in the very different context of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.³⁹

Two other problems become apparent when considering how Roma history has thus far been written. First: the existing historiography is still significantly dominated by non-Roma scholars' works, based on sources which are themselves not a reflection of Roma agency. In spite of more recent developments that have finally done away with the exoticizing paradigm previously associated with the "Gypsy Lore Society", the source-base of Roma history remains mostly comprised of an assemblage of documents in which Roma voices rarely make themselves heard. When they do, they are recorded under duress, in interrogations or depositions, sometimes in petitions. But – and this brings us to the second problem – Roma voices are far less heard in pamphlets, the press, or parliamentary debates. The predominantly oral culture of an oppressed people leaves us with few written traces that would allow us to recover its own perspective and agency in a more direct way. This means that Roma history faces the same methodological challenges and would benefit from the same insights of subaltern history more generally. In this regard, the groundbreaking sourcebook *Roma Voices in History*, edited by Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov and comprising an impressively extensive collection of primary sources in numerous languages

³⁶ Becky Taylor and Jim Hinks, 'What Field? Where? Bringing Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History into View', *Cultural and Social History* 18(5), 2021, pp. 629-650.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 643.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 644.

³⁹ See Cârstocea, 'War against the Poor'.

available in open access format represents an essential resource for research and teaching on Roma history alike.⁴⁰

Beyond academic scholarship, the status of Roma history in national systems of education appears even more problematic. A report published by the Council of Europe in 2020 was the outcome of a research project commissioned to the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research in partnership with the Roma Education Fund that ran from 2016 to 2018.⁴¹ The project, and the ensuing report, focused on the representation of the Roma in the curricula and textbooks of 21 Council of Europe member states and Kosovo. It looked at curricula in history education and related fields (civics, geography, social sciences) and covered a very large sample consisting of 869 textbooks, combining a quantitative with a qualitative approach in terms of methodology.⁴² It found that only 8 states out of 22 included Roma in their curricula, and that even some states with very large Roma communities (e.g., Bulgaria: 9.9% of the population; Slovakia: 9%; Serbia: 8.2%; Albania: 3.6%) did not mention the Roma at all in their curricula.⁴³ The situation was better for textbooks, where Roma were present in some textbooks from every country included in the study, even when the curricula did not prescribe it. However, the report also found that “the representation of Roma mostly falls within a limited number of thematic contexts and can still be seen as largely insufficient, often stereotypical and in some cases inaccurate”.⁴⁴ More specifically, mentions of the Roma were for the most part limited to the Holocaust or to succinct presentations of the demographic situation with respect to minority groups in a country; they were stereotypical, presenting them as a uniform group and one that is distinct from the majority population – and such stereotypes about poverty, poor hygiene, or ‘uncivilised’ behaviour were worse in countries with larger Roma communities; they consequently perpetuated prejudice rather than challenging it. Moreover, with very few exceptions, primarily in Germany and Hungary, there were almost no references to the contribution of the Roma to their societies, or positive examples of prominent Roma individuals, with the group typically treated collectively and with an emphasis on its alterity.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov (eds.), *Roma Voices in History: A Sourcebook*, Leiden: Brill, 2021, available at: <https://brill.com/display/title/58332?language=en> (accessed 20 November 2024).

⁴¹ Council of Europe, *The Representation of Roma in European Curricula and Textbooks*, a joint report commissioned by the Council of Europe to the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research in partnership with the Roma Education Fund, Strasbourg: Council of Europe Roma and Travellers Team, 2020.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 7-9.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 10.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 22.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 22-24.

An article drawing on the dataset collected for the same project while focusing specifically on representations of the Roma Holocaust in European history, civics, and geography textbooks drew even more worrying conclusions. Based on a critical discourse analysis of a sample of 472 passages and images from the 869 textbooks included in the project, it concluded that the representation of the Roma Holocaust, with very few exceptions, was woefully inadequate. It found “that both explicit and implicit racist discourses permeate the portrayal of the Roma Holocaust in European textbooks. Coupled with a lack of critical tools to deconstruct racist discourses, this coexistence may serve to reproduce wider social Romani exclusion and antigypsyism”.⁴⁶ For the most part the textbooks reproduced the perpetrators’ perspective (“grammatically via active verbs or semantically via the unmarked and unreflective reproduction of perpetrator terminology or causal narratives”); the extensive use of the passive voice served both to render persecution and mass murder impersonal and to deny the agency of the Roma, who were portrayed as passive victims to whom things “happened”; and Roma were relegated to the position of an “additional, secondary group of victims” (through the use of expressions such as “also” or “as well as”).⁴⁷ Finally, the textbooks failed to connect the Roma Holocaust to notions of the importance of universal human rights, despite that being in some cases their explicit purpose. Similar conclusions can be drawn also from analysing academic publications on Roma history – one can note, for example, the prevalence of the pejorative “Gypsy” over “Roma” among the titles referenced in this paper, if one leaves out the publications issued by Roma scholars or organisations.

An even more recent General Report on the State of History Teaching in Europe published in 2024 by the Observatory on History Teaching in Europe (OHE), an Enlarged Partial Agreement of the Council of Europe, reached similar conclusions about the under-representation of the Roma in history education. It found that only 9 of the 16 member states of the Observatory include the history of Roma and/or Travellers in their curricula, a significantly lower number than that of (other) cultural, ethnic, linguistic, national, or religious minority groups, which are represented in the curricula of 14 states.⁴⁸ Moreover, 56% of the 6251 teachers in 16 countries surveyed for the purposes of the report indicated that they found the representation of the Roma and/or Travellers in history textbooks inadequate, compared to only 24% who found it adequate.⁴⁹ With regard to the procedures in place for the quality control and monitoring of educational resources by the educational authorities in the Observatory’s member states, only 4 out of 16 states take into account the

⁴⁶ Marko Pecak, Riem Spielhaus, and Simona Szakács-Behling, ‘Between Antigypsyism and Human Rights Education: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Representations of the Roma Holocaust in European Textbooks’, *Critical Romani Studies* 4(2), 2021, pp. 100-120 (p. 116).

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp.116-117.

⁴⁸ Observatory on History Teaching in Europe, *General Report on the State of History Teaching in Europe, Volume I: Comparative Analysis*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2024, pp. 44-45.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 65.

representation of Roma and/or Travellers in these processes.⁵⁰ There were however also some positive examples identified that are worth highlighting. In Spain, Roma histories are taught with the purpose of showing students the value of cultural differences in order to combat stereotypes; in Portugal, the Atmo Romano Pedagogical Kit is available on the website of the national Directorate-General of Education; and in Ireland, a "Traveller culture and history" research report was published in 2023 "and is meant to inform the review and updating of curriculum specifications, the development of resources and materials for teachers/practitioners, and more generally to promote intercultural approaches to education".⁵¹ Even if limited for the time being to a few examples, these could perhaps be read as indications that things might be changing in terms of the recognition and inclusion of Roma histories into national history curricula.

In some respects, there appears to be some momentum regarding this recognition of the importance of Roma history. Over the past 10 years, the visibility of commemorations of Roma Holocaust Memorial Day, on 2 August (marking the liquidation of the so-called "Zigeunerlager" at Auschwitz-Birkenau on 2 August 1944), has grown exponentially, as the occasion is no longer relevant just to Roma communities, but increasingly to majority societies as well. There have been a number of excellent publications issued by Roma organisations or authored by Roma scholars on the subject of the Roma Holocaust,⁵² and the intensity of the debates over terminology, for example (with terms such as *Samudaripen* or *Porrajmos* proposed by some groups and contested / rejected by others) is itself a testament of how active – and important – the subject has become within Roma communities. There are excellent teaching resources available on the subject of the Roma Holocaust,⁵³ and an online Encyclopaedia of the Genocide of Sinti and Roma is being developed by a consortium led by the University of Heidelberg.⁵⁴ The International Holocaust

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 63.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 45-46; Direção-Geral da Educação, *Kit Pedagógico Romano Atmo (Alma Cigana)*, available at: <https://www.dge.mec.pt/kit-pedagogico-romano-atmo-alma-cigana> (accessed 2 December 2024); National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, *Traveller culture and history research report*, available at <https://ncca.ie/en/resources/traveller-culture-and-historyresearch-report/> (accessed 2 December 2024).

⁵² See e.g., Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, Esteban Acuña C., and Piotr Trojański, *Education for Remembrance of the Roma Genocide: Scholarship, Commemoration, and the Role of Youth*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Libron, Filip Lohner, 2015; Mirga-Kruszelnicka and Dunajeva, *Re-thinking Roma Resistance throughout History*; Margareta Matache, Gabriela Ghindea, and Matei Demetrescu, *The Roma Holocaust/Roma Genocide in Southeastern Europe – Between Oblivion, Acknowledgment, and Distortion*. The Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities and the Roma Program at the François-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights, Harvard University, 2022.

⁵³ Anna Carballo, Tetiana Storozhko, and Georgina Laboda, *Working with Testimonies: Toolkit of the Dikh He Na Bister Educational Program for Facilitators and Participants*, ternYpe – Roma Youth Network, 2023; *The Genocide Committed against European Roma and Sinti during the National Socialist Era*, available at: <https://romasintigenocide.eu/en/> (accessed 2 December 2024).

⁵⁴ *Encyclopaedia: Genocide Sinti and Roma*, available at: <https://encyclopaedia-gsr.eu/eng/> (accessed 2 December 2024).

Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) is currently preparing a set of recommendations for teaching and learning about the persecution and genocide of the Roma during the Nazi era that should be published in 2025.⁵⁵ Beyond the Holocaust, which understandably dominates recent efforts aimed at a better understanding of Roma history, the first two volumes in a series on the representation of Roma in major European museum collections have been published by the Council of Europe.⁵⁶

The momentum behind the development of Roma history is further compounded by the existence of numerous Council of Europe recommendations that point in this direction. Starting from the 2009 Committee of Ministers Recommendation on the education of Roma and Travellers in Europe, which included references to Roma history and its teaching,⁵⁷ through other recommendations that are directly relevant although not explicitly and/or exclusively aimed at the Roma,⁵⁸ to the landmark 2020 recommendation on the inclusion of the history of Roma and/or Travellers in school curricula and teaching materials,⁵⁹ there are numerous policy documents for states to draw on that would lead to a better representation of the Roma in national and European histories. Two other recent recommendations of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, on Roma youth participation (2023) and the equality of Roma and Traveller women and girls (2024) explicitly reference the importance of history in support of their respective aims.⁶⁰ Finally, the Analytical Report on *The Representation of Roma in European Curricula and Textbooks* published in 2020 also

⁵⁵ International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, *Recommendations for Teaching and Learning about the Persecution and Genocide of the Roma during the Nazi Era*, <https://holocaustremembrance.com/what-we-do/our-work/ihra-project-recommendations-teaching-learning-genocide-roma#:~:text=In%20order%20to%20appropriately%20teach,dismantle%20stereotypes%20and%20discrimination%20today> (accessed 2 December 2024).

⁵⁶ Sarah Carmona, *The Representation of Roma in Major European Museum Collections, Volume 1: The Louvre*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2020; Sarah Carmona, *The Representation of Roma in Major European Museum Collections, Volume 2: The Prado*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2020.

⁵⁷ Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)4 to member states

on the education of Roma and Travellers in Europe, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/09000016805b0a1c> (accessed 3 December 2024).

⁵⁸ E.g., Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, Recommendation CM/Rec(2011)6 to member states on intercultural dialogue and the image of the other in history teaching, available at: <https://search.coe.int/cm?i=09000016805cc8e1> (accessed 3 December 2024); Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)5 to member States on passing on remembrance of the Holocaust and preventing crimes against humanity, available at: <https://search.coe.int/cm?i=0900001680a5ddcd> (accessed 3 December 2024).

⁵⁹ Recommendation CM/Rec(2020)2.

⁶⁰ Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)4 to member States on Roma youth participation, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/0900001680aacef2> (accessed 3 December 2024); Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)1 to member States on equality of Roma and Traveller women and girls and Explanatory Memorandum, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/recommendation-cm-rec-2024-1-on-the-equality-of-roma-and-traveller-wom/1680b21286> (accessed 3 December 2024).

included an extensive set of recommendations aimed at the different stakeholders involved: national ministries of education; textbook authors and publishing houses; civil society organisations; academia; and the Council of Europe.⁶¹ The implementation of already existing recommendations would go a long way toward a better representation of Roma history in national and European histories.

The European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERAC) has deepened its strategic partnerships to advance the teaching and remembrance of Roma history across Europe. ERAC has actively contributed to the Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues (ADI-ROM) of the Council of Europe, participating as an observer and enriching discussions with cultural insights. Additionally, ERAC has taken part in meetings of the Steering Committee on Anti-Discrimination, Diversity, and Inclusion (CDADI), delivering speeches that highlight the importance of Roma history in combating discrimination and promoting diversity.

As part of this partnership, ERAC has contributed to the development and dissemination of educational resources, facilitated expert consultations, and organized high-level discussions to advocate for the systematic integration of Roma history into formal education. These efforts have focused on ensuring that Roma narratives, including the history of the Roma Holocaust and the community's cultural contributions, are accurately represented in textbooks, public history initiatives, and teacher training programs. ERAC has also been involved in developing the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) recommendations for teaching about the persecution and genocide of Roma during the Nazi era, providing expertise to ensure accurate and comprehensive educational guidelines.

Furthermore, ERAC is part of the Council of Europe working group responsible for creating a capacity-building program and tools to support the implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec(2020)2, which focuses on including Roma history in school curricula and teaching materials at the national level. In addition, ERAC has collaborated with the Observatory on History Teaching in Europe (OHTe) to promote accurate and inclusive representations of Roma history in educational content across Europe.

ERAC has played a key role in amplifying Roma voices in historical discourse through its History and Commemoration Thematic Section. By mobilizing Roma scholars, educators, and cultural leaders, ERAC has strengthened knowledge production on Roma history and promoted ethical, inclusive research methodologies. The partnership with the Council of Europe has been instrumental in fostering these efforts, ensuring that member states receive expert guidance on implementing policies aligned with the 2020 recommendation.

⁶¹ Council of Europe, The Representation of Roma in European Curricula and Textbooks, pp. 25-29.

ERAC is preparing to channel this knowledge and recommendations towards the member states through the Council of Europe Roma Strategy, with our close cooperation with the Council of Europe Roma and Travellers Team. This strategic alignment will reinforce the political will needed to advance Roma history teaching and remembrance practices, paving the way for a more inclusive and accurate representation of Roma history in European education systems.

6. ROMA HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE AND COMMEMORATION IN EUROPE

The Roma Holocaust is one of the darkest chapters in European history. Roma and Sinti were targeted for extermination by the Nazi regime under the guise of racial purity or in other words, "racial hygiene" (Rassenhygiene), also known as the pseudo-science of eugenics. Around 500,000 Roma and Sinti were murdered in concentration camps, mass shootings, forced labor, and other brutal methods. Dehumanized by the Nazis as "Gypsies," they endured horrific treatment, yet their suffering was largely neglected in post-war narratives.

The persecution of Roma and Sinti in Europe, however, dates back centuries, with a history of systemic discrimination that began long before World War II. From the medieval period onward, they were often subjected to laws restricting their movement, occupation (which also meant access to education), and even their existence in certain areas. Roma and Sinti were frequently scapegoated, enslaved, and violently expelled, laying the foundation for the atrocities they faced during the Holocaust.

In recent decades, there has been growing recognition of this tragic history, which includes the efforts to commemorate the victims of the Roma and Sinti Holocaust, such as International Roma Day⁶² or the European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day for Sinti

⁶²International Roma Day was officially declared for April 8 at the 4th World Romani Congress. It commemorates the anniversary of the founding of the International Roma Union at the 1st World Romani Congress in 1971 in London. During this congress, the Romani flag was adopted, the song *Gelem, Gelem* was officially recognized as the Roma anthem, and it was decided to use the term 'Roma' instead of 'Gypsy'. Since then, this day has been dedicated to celebrating Romani culture and raising awareness of the challenges Romani communities face worldwide.

and Roma⁶³, and memorials at former concentration camp sites, and in some European countries. Yet, much work remains to raise awareness and ensure that their experiences, their stories are integrated into the broader narrative of World War II atrocities.

The Roma and Sinti continue to face discrimination, hate crimes, and social exclusion in modern Europe. This ongoing struggle highlights the importance of continued education, advocacy, and remembrance to prevent such tragedy from happening again and to foster a more inclusive society.

This chapter explores the history, challenges, and significance of Roma and Sinti Holocaust remembrance and commemoration in Europe, as well as ongoing efforts to preserve and honor their memory.

The Romani term "Porajmos" (or Pharrajimos) meaning "the Devouring" or "the Destruction" - was popularized by the Romani linguist Ian Hancock, although its exclusive use remains debated among Roma communities due to cultural sensitivities and variations in terminology. In the international academic scene some argue that the term such as "Roma Holocaust" or "Roma and Sinti Holocaust" might better encapsulate their experiences without cultural implications and emphasize the importance of inclusivity and clarity in acknowledging their suffering. Others accept referring to it as the "Genocide and the Persecution of the Roma and Sinti during the World War II." In this paper, we use the name "Roma and Sinti Holocaust" and also refer to it as "the Genocide and Persecution of Roma and Sinti during the World War II."

Historical Context: Roma and Sinti and the Nazi Genocide

The Nazis viewed Roma and Sinti communities as racially inferior and a threat to the purity of the Aryan race. This dehumanizing ideology led to their systematic persecution, including forced sterilizations, deportations, and mass murders.

The largest single event of mass murder against the Roma occurred on the night of August 2-3, 1944, when the Nazis liquidated the so-called "Gypsy Family Camp" (in German: Zigeunerfamilienlager) at Auschwitz-Birkenau⁶⁴. 4300 Sinti and Roma men,

⁶³ The European Parliament declared August 2nd, the date of the liquidation of the Zigeunerfamilienlager in Auschwitz II Birkenau concentration camp, the European Holocaust Memorial Day for Sinti and Roma in 2015. <https://www.roma-sinti-holocaust-memorial-day.eu/>

⁶⁴ The "Zigeunerfamilienlager" was placed in Section B-II e at Auschwitz II Birkenau Concentration Camp, where Roma and Sinti families were held as prisoners together.

women, and children were murdered that night. This date is now commemorated as European Holocaust Memorial Day for Sinti and Roma⁶⁵.

Despite the scale of their suffering, the Roma genocide remained under-recognized in post-war Europe. Unlike Jewish survivors, Roma survivors were often excluded from restitution programs and were met with ongoing discrimination.

The Struggle for Recognition

The acknowledgment of the Roma Holocaust was hampered by entrenched anti-Roma racism in many European societies. Right after World War II ended the Roma and Sinti communities found themselves regarded in the same, prejudiced, racist way in European societies as it was before the war. Their victimhood was officially recognized only 4 decades after World War II, first by West-Germany. Until then depicting them as asocial criminals was in practice and it has been still in practice in Europe. This narrative marginalized their struggling experiences and left their voices silenced and also unheard in public and academic discourse until only very recently.

The turning point came decades after World War II, in the late 20th century, driven by advocacy from Roma organizations, historians, and human rights activists.

Some of the key milestones of the recognition, remembrance and commemoration of the Roma Holocaust⁶⁶:

- In 1967, a memorial was unveiled in Auschwitz Birkenau to honor the camp's victims. One of its tablets featured a Romani inscription translated by Polish writer Jerzy Ficowski. In 1994, it was replaced with a revised text reflecting new victim estimates, prepared by Roma linguist Marcel Courthiade.
- In 1973, a memorial was erected at the former "Gypsy Family Camp" site on the initiative of the Zentralrat Deutscher Sinti und Roma. Featuring a brick wall resembling camp barracks and an obelisk with a memorial tablet, it later became a site for commemorations and visitors. In 1994, the Association of Roma People in Poland renovated it.

⁶⁵ The European Parliament declared this date the European Holocaust Memorial Day for Sinti and Roma in 2015
<https://www.roma-sinti-holocaust-memorial-day.eu/>

⁶⁶ Based on the summary of: <https://www.roma-sinti-holocaust-memorial-day.eu/history/commemoration/>

- The first international commemorative event for Roma and Sinti at the former Auschwitz concentration camp took place in 1993 on the anniversary of the first prisoner transport to the "Gypsy Family Camp."
- In 1994, Roma and Sinti from around the world gathered in Birkenau to mark 50 years since the "Gypsy Family Camp" liquidation⁶⁷, and in 1995, Roma representatives joined the 50th anniversary of the camp's liberation⁶⁸, increasing academic and institutional interest in the Roma genocide.
- In 1982, Chancellor Helmut Schmidt officially recognized the genocide of Roma and Sinti, a milestone in Holocaust remembrance, achieved through the efforts of the Zentralrat, led by Romani Rose, and the Dachau hunger strike they organized to demand international recognition of the genocide and protest Germany's continued use of Nazi-era "Gypsy-Race" files.
- In March 1997, the first permanent exhibition on the Sinti and Roma genocide in World War II opened at the Documentation and Cultural Center in Heidelberg, Germany, following the advocacy of the Zentralrat, the country's first recognized Roma political organization.
- In 2001 the permanent exhibition on *The Destruction of the European Roma* was opened⁶⁹.
- In recent years, UNESCO and the European Parliament have supported initiatives to study and commemorate the Roma Holocaust, highlighting its significance in European history.
- In 2015, following efforts by Roma leaders, the European Parliament officially declared the "Gypsy Family Camp" liquidation date as Roma Holocaust Memorial Day, marked by global commemorations organized by the Association of Roma People in Poland, with increasing participation from young European Roma⁷⁰.

⁶⁷ August 2, 1944

⁶⁸ January 27, 1945

⁶⁹ <https://www.auschwitz.org/en/museum/history-of-the-memorial/memorial-timeline/years-2000-2009/>

⁷⁰ Dikh He Na Bister <https://2august.eu/>

Memorials and Commemorations

Memorials dedicated to Roma Holocaust victims now exist across Europe. These sites serve as poignant reminders of their suffering and resilience and as platforms for education and dialogue:

Memorial to the Sinti and Roma Victims of National Socialism (Berlin)⁷¹: Opened in 2012, this memorial is located near the Reichstag and features a reflecting pool with an inscription of a poem by Roma poet Santino Spinelli.

Other National Memorials: Countries such as Hungary⁷², Poland, and the Czech Republic have established monuments to honor their Roma communities. The latest is the Lety Memorial in the Czech Republic, which marks the site of a former concentration camp for Roma⁷³.

These memorials, though significant, face challenges, including vandalism and insufficient funding, which highlight ongoing societal prejudices.

Challenges in Holocaust Education and Roma Representation

Roma Holocaust remembrance is integral to broader efforts to combat anti-Roma racism and promote social inclusion. Yet, significant barriers remain:

- Limited Inclusion in Curricula: In many countries, the Roma genocide is underrepresented in school curricula, leaving younger generations unaware of their history. A recent supportive development in this aspect is that the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) has released recommendations for teaching and learning about the Roma Holocaust⁷⁴.
- Prejudice and Stereotypes (Antigypsyism): Persistent anti-Roma stereotypes hinder the full acknowledgment of their victimhood. This prejudice often

⁷¹ Designed by the Israeli artist, Dani Karavan. Officially opened on October 24, 2012

⁷² Hungarian Roma During WWII – digital map: <https://hungarianromaww2.mnl.gov.hu/en/#landing>

Digital catalogue of Roma Holocaust memorials in Hungary
<https://hungarianromaww2.mnl.gov.hu/en/mapping/#memorials>

⁷³ Lety u Písku. The Memorial to the Holocaust of the Roma and Sinti in Bohemia. <https://www.rommuz.cz/en/lety-u-pisku/>

⁷⁴ IHRA Recommendation for Teaching and Learning about the Persecution and Genocide of the Roma During the Nazi Era. <https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/ihra-recommendations-for-teaching-and-learning-about-the-persecution-and-genocide-of-the-roma-during-the-nazi-era>

translates into inadequate political and financial support for Roma commemorative projects.

- Lack of survivor testimonies: The systematic collection of Sinti and Roma survivor testimonies did not begin immediately after World War II, but decades later, making it difficult to locate survivors, especially those willing to share their experiences. Ongoing marginalization and prejudice after the war contributed to the silencing and forgetting of Romani communities' suffering in Europe's most tragic historical event.

Recent Initiatives and the Path Forward

Despite these challenges, recent initiatives provide hope for greater recognition and understanding:

- Digital Documentation Projects: Organizations such as the Documentation Center in Heidelberg or the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture are working to document and share Roma Holocaust histories through digital platforms⁷⁵.
- Annual Commemorations: European Holocaust Memorial Day for Roma and Sinti has gained increased visibility, with events held across Europe that involve governments, Roma organizations, and international institutions.
- Youth Engagement: Programs aimed at educating Roma and non-Roma youth about the Holocaust foster dialogue and encourage new generations to champion remembrance and fight discrimination. Such program is the international Roma Genocide Initiative, called Dikh He na Bister⁷⁶

⁷⁵ One of ERIAC's recent projects in cooperation with the Fortunoff Video Archive is the Roma Holocaust Voices Fellowship: <https://eriac.org/16093-2/>

ERiac's Re-Thinking Roma Resistance project: <https://eriac.org/re-thinking-roma-resistance/>

⁷⁶ <https://2august.eu/>

7. CASE STUDY: ROMA HOLOCAUST DISTORTION AND ITS IMPACT IN BULGARIA

In a document from April 25, 1942, from the Criminality Police of Cologne, it was written that the "Gypsy girl" Elisabeth Winter, who was born on 05.12.1925 in Bad Homburg v.d. Höhe, was not allowed to stay in a "care center" anymore, and, therefore, she was transferred to a working camp in Brauweiler. The reason for being taken to a care center was that she was "work-shy," and she left her uncle's house in Cologne and traveled to Poland, to the town of Gdansk. The police stopped her to check her documents and found out that she was a Gypsy. They sent her to a re-education center for the "asocial." The police recommended that if the "Gypsy girl" did not show good behavior, she should be sent to a "juvenile protective camp" (i.e., a concentration camp for youth). On July 25, 1942, Elisabeth Winter was transferred to the concentration camp in Uckermarkt, where she stayed until February 8, 1943. At that time, the Uckermarkt concentration camp was a camp for girls and young women (from 12 to 21 years old). On February 9, 1943, Elisabeth Winter was transferred to the women's concentration camp of Ravensbrück, not far from Berlin, where she got a number tattooed on her arm, 16 956, and she stayed there until September 11, 1944. On September 12, 1944, Elisabeth was transferred to the concentration camp in Buchenwald. In Buchenwald, all information about her disappears, and her traces are lost. The reason for sending her to the concentration camps was that she was considered "asocial."

Finding and receiving this kind of information about Roma in concentration camps was only possible for the last 40-50 years. In some parts of Europe, such as Eastern European countries, during the communist regime, it was impossible to speak and write about the topic of Nazism and Roma in concentration camps. There were no studies, research, or publications. After the 1990s, with the change of the political system, the situation of the Roma changed as well. Roma started to become more interested in their historical past. However, historians still did not conduct any new research and continued to deny any repression and forms of persecution, violence, or genocide against Roma. The reason for this is the narrow understanding of the term "genocide." My understanding of genocide is not only the physical destruction of a nation but also psychological harassment, economic restraint, and persecution for belonging to a particular ethnic or racial community. The term "Roma genocide" includes the criminal intentions of individuals or groups behind the deportations, mass killings, and other forms of ethnic cleansing, such as attacks on Roma settlements, psychological harassment, fear of attack, murderous violence, or mass executions.

Until 1990, there was no discourse in Bulgarian society dealing with the Roma genocide. The term "Roma genocide" was not known or used by the communist government or the media. It started to be used after the 1990s, particularly in the last 10-15 years. Moreover, among the Roma communities in Bulgaria, the notion of "Roma genocide" was not well-known. They knew very little about what had transpired for the Roma across Europe during World War II. In the 1990s and especially in the last

10-15 years, Roma activists began using the term more and speaking publicly about it. After the democratic changes, with the celebration of April 8th as International Roma Day, mention was usually made of the Roma Holocaust in Europe. April 8th was considered a day of remembrance for the Roma victims of fascism. In the last 5-6 years, with the commemoration of Roma killed in Auschwitz on the night of August 2nd, 1944, Roma have begun to mark August 2nd as a day for memorializing the Roma Holocaust. Although they know the words genocide and Holocaust and their equivalents in Romani such as Porrajmos, Samudaripen, and Kali Trash, the most recognized and used term in Romani among Roma activists is the term Porrajmos.

Usually, the Roma genocide is commemorated on August 2nd by demonstrations, public talks about new forms of antigypsyism, and a ritual of proceeding to a local river and throwing flowers in remembrance into the water. Typically, a Roma activist will talk or read poetry dedicated to the victims. However, all those forms of commemoration of the Roma Holocaust are more about remembering what the Nazis did to the Roma in many countries in Europe. Still, there is scant talk or evidence regarding what was perpetrated against Bulgarian Roma by the Nazi-allied regime during World War II, or by local fascist Bulgarians.

Lack of Recognition in Bulgarian Society

Officially, August 2nd is recognized as a *national commemoration day for the Roma genocide*. However, the initiative of commemoration of the Roma victims on this day is taken by Roma NGOs. To date, the Bulgarian government has not commemorated it on a national level. There is not a single monument in Bulgaria linked with the memory of the Roma genocide in Bulgaria. There is no single Roma Museum in the country showing the Roma genocide in Europe, what happened to Bulgarian Roma during World War II, or establishing and documenting the Roma fighters who participated in the antifascist movement partisans on the side of Bulgarians opposed to fascism.

The issue of the Roma Holocaust does not exist in the history textbooks in Bulgaria for students from grades 5-11 either. Of 76 textbooks analysed - 27 "History and Civilization" textbooks, 29 "Geography and Economics" textbooks, and 20 textbooks in a range of other different subjects - only 16 referred to "Roma" as an ethnic group or minority. There is no single textbook that mentions the "Roma Holocaust" in general or anything about the Roma persecution during World War II in Bulgaria in particular⁷⁷.

The Bulgarian Roma were not sent to concentration camps during World War II, but they are in solidarity with the European Roma and what happened to them during the

⁷⁷ Council of Europe, 2020

war. Because of that among Bulgarian Roma in the last two decades, there has been a lot of talk about the Roma Holocaust. Roma activists are raising this issue more often and discuss the forms of discrimination, anti-Roma racism, and antigypsyism, especially when some Bulgarian politicians, including in the Bulgarian Parliament, dare to make abusive comments about Roma, Roma women, and Roma children using highly offensive classifications that resemble the Nazi classifications in the 1930s when Roma were termed *Untermenschen* (subhuman).

Even though the Bulgarian society did not witness the Holocaust directly, and what information is available is acquired from books and films, this does not serve to prevent denying the existence of the Holocaust, to belittle what happened. One can still encounter comments like "the Roma deserve to have been sent to concentration camps because they are thieving and lazy because they do not pay their electricity and live on the back of the state" (Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva, 2020). Such negative racist commentary is prevalent in social media. Moreover, when April 8th and August 2nd are marked as important dates in the history of the Roma, one can read numerous different comments on social media demeaning the human dignity of the Roma.

Distortions and Misrepresentations of Roma History

One kind of distortion is the denial of the existence of the Holocaust and the denial of the mass extermination of Jews and Roma during World War II. And although there are no scientific publications by Bulgarian authors in Bulgaria, this does not prevent this idea from spreading in society. Some Bulgarian politicians in the near past have denied any systematic persecution of Roma, mass killings, or extermination camps in Europe. The arrogance of Bulgarian politicians went so far that they allow themselves to make jokes in the Bulgarian parliament about the victims in the concentration camp in Buchenwald.

Another distortion similar to the first one is when the existence of a Roma genocide is denied, and it is considered that Roma in Europe were persecuted based on their criminal acts (Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva, 2020). Moreover, this is often connected to the contemporary situation and even goes further when the opinion is voiced that the Nazis should have been strict and exterminated all "Gypsies"⁷⁸. Unfortunately, these xenophobic comments can be found in social media and are often put forward as arguments when issues relating to Roma in Bulgarian society are discussed.

Due to the distortions prevalent, the number of Roma murdered in Europe during World War II is not believed to be true in Bulgarian society. Working with Bulgarian teachers and lecturing about the Roma Holocaust, when I mention the numbers of the

⁷⁸ Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva, 2020

Roma and Sinti who died in the concentration camps across Europe, the teachers' reaction is, "No, it cannot be, the Gypsies are definitely lying"⁷⁹.

Unfortunately, there is no information about the acknowledgment memorialization of the Bulgarian Roma plight in Bulgaria before and during World War II. During the years of communism after the 1944 the plight of Roma before and during World War II was not discussed and mentioned at all in the media, in society, or by scientists. Everything was strictly controlled by the communist government and only the propaganda of the communist party was officially accepted and used. Even historians were not free to work on Roma topics that time. It was possible to do research and to publish only in the last 20-25 years.

The Role of Education in Addressing Holocaust Distortion

There is a direct impact of Roma Holocaust distortion on the whole of Bulgarian society.

1. There are no lessons in the history books on the Roma genocide. The younger generations grow up without believing that the Holocaust occurred, or if it happened, "it was a good thing because the Gypsies should be killed because they are criminals". Most of the Bulgarian textbooks do not provide any information about Roma or Roma Holocaust.⁸⁰
2. Most Bulgarian teachers in the schools do not believe that there was a Roma Holocaust in Europe, which is why they do not want to teach about it (personal communication,⁸¹.
3. The media, especially social media, play an essential role in society for the formation of stereotypes and virulent racist attitudes towards Roma⁸².
4. One segment within the Bulgarian academe does not believe that there was anything terrible done to the Roma in Bulgaria during World War II. They constantly repeat that the Bulgarians saved the "Gypsies and the Jews," a political commonplace in Bulgarian official discourse. There are no objective discussions among scholars on this issue.

⁷⁹ Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva, 2020

⁸⁰ Council of Europe, 2020

⁸¹ Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva, 2020

⁸² Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva, 2020

5. Another critical problem is what is published and the kind of publications on the Holocaust that Bulgarians have. Bulgaria is one of the few countries in Europe, where after the democratic changes in 1990, Hitler's *Mein Kampf* was translated into Bulgarian and published by the publisher Жар птица [Zhar ptitsa] (2001) in Sofia. Even today, one can buy it freely in a bookshop⁸³.

The impact of the Roma Holocaust distortion and obfuscation also springs from the fact that there are books translated and popularized in Bulgaria that present the Holocaust of the Jews as something that did not occur, an outright lie.

To some extent, because of the limited extent of publication on the Holocaust in the Bulgarian language, one part of Bulgarian society believes that there was no Holocaust, and the Jews and Roma were not killed in the concentration camps during World War II. They also think that there was no Roma Holocaust perpetrated anywhere either. Unfortunately, among them are also teachers, intellectuals, and artists. Unfortunately, there is no single publication about the Bulgarian Roma's plight during the World War II. Even the newest publication by Marushiakova and Popov (2021) is dealing more with the civil rights and NGO-movement of Roma during the two wars but there is no information about the persecution, torture and genocide to which the Bulgarian Roma were subjected in the period before and during the Second World War.

From the interviews with the Bulgarian Roma activists, although limited in number, it is evident that we cannot speak about the Holocaust or genocide of the Roma in the form it was perpetrated in Central and West European countries. There was no governmental policy of killing the Roma in ways it was carried out in the Czech Republic, Germany, or Croatia. There is no evidence in the archives about orders or decisions for the annihilation of Roma in Bulgaria. It seems that all the forms of attacks, killings, and forced labour in work camps and attempts of rounding up Roma for possible deportation to concentration camps were decisions by local authorities or by pro-Nazi Bulgarian groups and formations. However, the psychological harassment, economic constraints, and persecution for belonging to a particular ethnic or racial community is also a form of violence. In this sense the term "Roma genocide" includes the criminal intentions of individuals or groups of people behind the deportations, mass killings, and other forms of ethnic cleansing, such as attacks on the Roma settlements, psychological harassment, fear of attack, murderous violence, or mass execution.

⁸³ Duma, 2010

8. CONCLUSIONS

This position paper underscores the urgent need for systemic reforms in the remembrance, commemoration, and teaching of Roma history. Despite growing awareness, Roma narratives remain underrepresented in national histories, educational curricula, and commemorative practices. The marginalization of Roma history perpetuates societal exclusion, reinforcing stereotypes and limiting the recognition of Roma contributions to European heritage.

The research and expert contributions in this paper highlight the historical injustices faced by Roma communities, from centuries of persecution to the horrors of the Holocaust. The absence of structured recognition has led to widespread distortion and denial, particularly in certain national contexts. This lack of acknowledgment fuels contemporary discrimination and hinders efforts toward reconciliation and historical justice.

A key finding of this paper is the necessity of Roma-led initiatives in history education and remembrance efforts. The inclusion of Roma voices in policymaking, academia, and public discourse is essential for ensuring accurate and respectful representations of Roma history. Equally, fostering cooperation between Roma and non-Roma scholars, educators, and institutions will contribute to more comprehensive historical narratives and the dismantling of ingrained prejudices.

Education plays a critical role in reshaping public perceptions. Integrating Roma history into school curricula, university courses, and teacher training programs is fundamental to promoting intercultural understanding and countering antigypsyism. Moreover, robust monitoring mechanisms must be established to ensure that educational reforms are effectively implemented and sustained over time.

This paper also emphasizes the importance of ethical and meaningful commemoration. The remembrance of Roma Holocaust victims and the broader history of Roma struggles should not be limited to symbolic gestures but embedded into national and European remembrance policies. Public memorials, digital archives, and cultural projects must be actively supported to ensure that Roma history is preserved and accessible to all.

The recommendations provided in this position paper outline concrete steps toward addressing these challenges. Governments, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and international bodies must collaborate to ensure that Roma history, remembrance, and commemoration are recognized as integral parts of European identity and collective memory.

By confronting historical injustices and embracing inclusive historical narratives, European societies can move towards greater social cohesion, equality, and mutual

respect. The recognition of Roma history is not only a matter of justice but a fundamental step toward building a more inclusive and democratic Europe.

Given the current situation of Roma communities in Europe, some could make the argument that there are more pressing issues for the Roma – such as healthcare, education, housing, or employment – than Roma history, remembrance, and commemoration. However, with this position paper, we argue that recovering this largely forgotten – or wilfully ignored – history might be more important than we think. Without a shared, common history, a people cannot become a people, and in turn cannot be recognised as such by others. For this reason, history is key to Roma identity, to unity across the diversity of Roma communities in Europe and on other continents. It is also key to acknowledging that the historical roots of the present-day deprivation of Roma communities lie with historical injustices and their inter-generational effects. Such acknowledgment is in turn key to understanding the Roma claim to moral, if not necessarily material reparations for the centuries of persecution it endured in Europe, culminating in the Roma Holocaust, understood as a European phenomenon.

The Roma Holocaust remains a reminder of the consequences of racism and exclusion. Efforts to remember and commemorate it are essential not only to honor the victims but also to combat the prejudice that still affects Roma communities today. As Europe grapples with its history, inclusive remembrance and education offer a path toward reconciliation and a more just society. By recognizing the Roma Holocaust as an integral part of the continent's shared past, we ensure that its lessons endure for future generations.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the exposition above, as well as on the numerous existing recommendations issued by the Council of Europe and other international organisations relevant to Roma history, remembrance, and commemoration, the present paper issues the following recommendations:

1. That, in accordance with the principle “nothing about us without us”, Roma scholars, activists, and organisations are involved in all debates and decision-making processes relevant to Roma history, remembrance, and commemoration, at all levels (local, national, and international), ranging from the design and revision of school curricula through the production of textbooks, their monitoring for quality control, the development of initial and in-service training for teachers, to research programmes and institutions working on relevant subjects.
2. That such processes of re-thinking teaching, research, and dissemination activities relevant to Roma history, remembrance, and commemoration draw

on the existing resources on these topics prepared by international stakeholders such as ERIAC, the Council of Europe, the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), UNESCO, IHRA, the Shoah Foundation / Institute for Visual History and Education of the University of Southern California, the European Association of History Educators (EUROCLIO), etc.

3. That member states of the Council of Europe adhere to the extensive sets of recommendations issued by the Committee of Ministers, by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, and by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), as well as other strategic documents on Roma and Traveller inclusion, and consider steps regarding their implementation in national, regional, and/or local policies.⁸⁴
4. Roma organisations, scholars, and activists have been at the forefront of activities promoting Roma history, remembrance, and commemoration, and must continue to do so, both independently and by entering strategic partnerships with relevant state and civil society actors.
5. The difference with regard to target audiences (Roma and non-Roma; children, youth, and adults; academic and non-academic; etc.) should be taken into consideration when considering both the content and the strategies for dissemination of activities relevant to Roma history, remembrance, and commemoration. For example, the existence of a common, shared, transnational, European or even global history of Roma communities could be emphasised when addressing Roma, whereas the emphasis in activities directed at broader publics could be placed more on the relations between Roma and non-Roma across the ages, and/or Roma contributions to national and European cultures.
6. Special attention should be dedicated to history education, with the purpose of redressing both the current under-representation of Roma in history curricula and stereotypical or even outright racist representations that can still be encountered in textbooks and other educational materials. Since recent reports on history education have pointed to the importance of exams and assessment in determining the relative weight of certain topics in history curricula, special emphasis should be placed on the inclusion of aspects of Roma history in formal assessment.

⁸⁴ An updated, comprehensive list of all Recommendations issued by Council of Europe bodies relevant to Roma and Travellers can be found at Council of Europe, Roma and Travellers Division, 'Adopted Texts', available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/roma-and-travellers/adopted-texts> (accessed 12 December 2024). The most directly relevant such document is Recommendation CM/Rec(2020)2 on the inclusion of the history of Roma and/or Travellers in school curricula and teaching materials, available at: <https://search.coe.int/cm?i=09000016809ee48c> (accessed 12 December 2024).

7. Training of new teachers and ongoing in-service training of current ones should be developed in partnership with Roma organisations and experts, to ensure inter-cultural sensitivity and to counteract antigypsyism and prevailing stereotypes about Roma, themselves grounded in historical oppression. To this effect, the development of university courses on Roma history, remembrance, and commemoration could also serve the purpose of training teachers, both those joining the profession and those in service.
8. Aspects of Roma history should be included also in school curricula other than history, for example civic education, literature, religion or ethics, arts, music, or languages. In all these contexts, Roma history should be consistently taught with a view to combatting contemporary antigypsyism and promoting education on human rights, equality, inclusivity, and diversity.
9. The content of Roma history should go beyond the current (understandably) dominant focus on the Holocaust and the 20th century more broadly, to include a more balanced, contextualised, and long-term perspective mindful of the centuries-long Roma presence in Europe. This should include both the history of Roma contributions to national societies and to European culture *and* the history of centuries of marginalisation, exclusion, and persecution that has very long roots and certainly did not start during the modern period.
10. The specific context of Roma slavery in the Romanian principalities should be brought to the fore and integrated with broader contemporary academic debates on transatlantic slavery, for example. In addition to its history, which remains under-researched, this has broader implications also for processes of remembrance and commemoration, including in public space, which are currently under-developed.
11. The centrality of the Holocaust to Roma history should be acknowledged despite its diversification to include other aspects. The emphasis on using 'Roma Holocaust' as a term should act as a safeguard against attempts at marginalising the persecution and mass murder of Roma as just one of the many groups targeted by the Nazi regime and against persistent tendencies to reproduce Nazi categories having to do with alleged Roma behaviour in accounting for it. Instead, the persecution of Roma on racial grounds similar to those directed at the Jews calls for an integrated history of the Holocaust where Roma are no longer excluded from its definitions – such as those employed by IHRA – and where the genocides of the Jews and Roma during the Second World War are treated on equal terms. Additionally, ongoing debates trying to identify a Romani term that would be acceptable to all Roma communities as a descriptor for the Roma Holocaust should continue.
12. As a foundational event for the field of memory studies, the Holocaust is central to remembrance and commemoration after 1945, and this is also key for raising awareness of the Roma Holocaust. Although significant developments in this respect have occurred recently, with 2 August, European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day, increasing in visibility, more should be done to promote

remembrance and commemoration in specific local or national contexts (as, for example, with the recently unveiled Lety memorial in the Czech Republic).

13. Given its current under-development, research into Roma history should be promoted as a priority, by means of dedicated funding, research centres, and/or the establishment of relevant programmes dealing with Roma history, remembrance, and commemoration in higher education institutions.
14. Roma history and heritage should be integrated more visibly into museums, including through the setting up of temporary / travelling exhibitions dedicated to Roma history and culture, drawing on existing resources developed by Roma organisations (e.g., ERIAC's RomaMoMa contemporary art project).
15. To avoid the segregation of Roma history and its transformation into a niche subject of interest only to specialists and/or members of Roma communities, which could reinforce perceptions of the group's 'otherness', an integrated Roma history should be promoted, where connections with broader national, regional, European, or global patterns are emphasised. The history of Roma communities has been shaped by broader historical processes affecting majority societies, as well as other minority groups – offering prospects for potentially fruitful entangled histories –, and in turn Roma have made contributions to European societies and cultures. Subaltern histories have time and again shown the potential that recovering such silenced or marginalised voices has for nuancing and re-thinking prevailing narratives. Along these lines, bringing Roma history into the limelight offers the opportunity not only for recovering a forgotten past, but perhaps also for reconsidering our mainstream, canonical European one.

10. CONTRIBUTORS

Prof. Raul Cârstocea is Professor of History at Maynooth University, Ireland. He earned his PhD in History from University College London, with a thesis that focused on the role of antisemitism in the ideology of Romania's interwar fascist movement, the 'Legion of the Archangel Michael'. His research interests focus on antigypsyism, antisemitism, fascism, nationalism, and the Holocaust, and, more broadly, on state formation and nation-building processes in 19th and 20th century Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe and their consequences for minority groups.

Prof. Cârstocea has previously held positions as Lecturer in Modern European History at the University of Leicester, Lecturer in European Studies at Europa Universität Flensburg, and Senior Research Associate at the European Centre for Minority Issues. He has held research fellowships at the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust

Studies, the Institute for East and Southeast European Studies in Regensburg, the NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies in Amsterdam, King's College London, and the Imre Kertész Kolleg Jena. His research interests focus on anti-Semitism, fascism, nationalism, and the Holocaust,

Prof. Cârstocea serves as the Vice-Chair of the Scientific Advisory Council for the Observatory on History Teaching in Europe at the Council of Europe. He is also a Co-Editor of the *Modern History of Politics and Violence* book series at Bloomsbury Publishing. In 2023, he joined the Barvalipe Academy at the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIANAC)

Dr. Maria Bogdan is a media researcher and social scientist whose work focuses on media representation of Roma, racism, cultural memory, and cultural trauma. She earned her PhD in 2018 from the Film, Media, and Culture Theory Doctoral Program at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest, with a dissertation titled "The Visible Stranger," which examined the media representation of Roma in Hungary.

As a Fulbright alumna, Dr. Bogdan conducted part of her doctoral research at Columbia University in New York City. She was the inaugural Romani Rose Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Antigypsyism Research Center of Heidelberg University from 2019 to 2020.

Dr. Bogdan is a founding member and managing editor of the journal *Critical Romani Studies*.

In 2023, she became a Fortunoff Research Fellow at the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies, where she investigates testimonies in the Fortunoff Video Archive related to the experiences of Sinti and Roma during the Holocaust.

Her research interests encompass media representation, modern forms of racism, cultural memory, and trauma, with a particular focus on Roma communities in Europe. Dr. Bogdan's extensive academic background and research have significantly contributed to the understanding of complex social and cultural issues affecting Roma populations.

Dr. Hristo Kyuchukov is a distinguished linguist and researcher who has devoted much of his career to the study and preservation of the Romani language and culture. His contributions to the field of linguistics, particularly in the documentation and revitalization of Romani dialects, are widely recognized, and his work stands as an important bridge between academic scholarship and the lived experiences of Roma communities.

He has a Ph. D in Psycholinguistics from the University of Amsterdam and two other Ph. D.-s in Education from Bulgaria. Also, he has more than 800 publications in the field

of Romani language, minority languages, education of Roma children in Europe, and Roma culture. He has been teaching as a guest professor or as a full-time professor in USA, India, Turkey, Russia, and in many other European Universities.

Kyuchukov's academic achievements include numerous publications on Romani linguistics, as well as his pioneering work in the development of educational materials aimed at teaching the Romani language to new generations. His efforts to create linguistically accurate and culturally relevant resources have empowered both young Roma learners and educators working within the Romani community.

In addition to his work as a linguist, Kyuchukov has been an active participant in various international initiatives aimed at promoting Roma rights and advancing Roma identity. He has worked alongside leading scholars, activists, and cultural figures to ensure that Roma history, language, and culture are preserved, celebrated, and integrated into broader European cultural narratives.

Kyuchukov's commitment to improving the educational and social standing of Roma communities is reflected in his extensive work with both academic institutions and Roma organizations. His ability to combine rigorous academic research with a passion for cultural advocacy has made him a leader in the field and a trusted mentor for many young Roma scholars.

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