

Roma and Sinti Holocaust

On 27 January 1945, the Red Army liberated the Auschwitz concentration and extermination camp. Held on this date since 2002, the International Holocaust Remembrance Day is a solemn occasion to commemorate the Jewish, Roma and Sinti victims of Nazi terror. The Roma and Sinti Holocaust is still largely unknown to the public.

Background

Simone Veil, the first female president of the European Parliament and a Holocaust survivor, deeply regretted the lack of knowledge about the history of WWII, including remembrance of the Roma and Sinti Holocaust. On receiving the European [Civil Rights Prize](#) of the Sinti and Roma on [16 December 2010](#) in Berlin, she stressed the importance of teaching about the [Roma genocide](#), but also about the history and various cultures of Roma communities, to prevent discrimination against them and to enhance their rights.

The general term '[Roma](#)' covers groups such as Roma, Travellers, Sinti/Manouches, Kalés/Gitans, Romanichels, Boyash, Ashkalis/Égyptiens, Yéniches, Doms and Loms, that have lived in Europe for centuries, and were victims of Nazi persecution, deportation and extermination; also called the Roma Holocaust.

The Roma genocide took a toll of between [250 000](#) and [500 000](#) victims, or between a quarter and half of the pre-WWII Roma and Sinti population. The exact number is not known, since many victims' families did not report their losses and the perpetrators erased the records of their killings.

It was not until 1982 that Germany recognised the [racial](#) grounds for the deportation, imprisonment and extermination of Roma in Nazi camps; despite the fact that the Roma and Sinti were 'Aryan' by Nazi standards, anti-Gypsy laws had already targeted them as 'asocial' populations in Germany.

In 2001, the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum devoted a [permanent exhibition](#) to the Roma and Sinti who had been incarcerated in the '[Gypsy Camp](#)'. The exhibition also commemorates the May 1944 revolt, when, armed with sticks and stones, the Roma and Sinti resisted their removal from the camp. On 2 August 1944, fearing the revolt could spread, the Nazis sent around 3 000 Roma to their death. In 2015, this date was designated European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day, also called [Samudaripen](#)/Pharrajimios.

Knowledge and commemoration of the Roma and Sinti genocide in the EU

Since 2014, the Council of Europe publication, 'Right to Remember. A [handbook](#) for Education with Young People on the Roma Genocide', provides knowledge on the Roma and Sinti genocide as a measure against discrimination and racism. It also helps young Roma learn their history and its importance in Europe.

Already in 2003, the '[Action plan](#) on improving the situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area' considered education on the Roma and Sinti Holocaust important for the recognition of the suffering and persecution of these people and for the effective eradication of discrimination against them. In 2015, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe ([OSCE](#)) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) published a [report](#) on 'Teaching about and Commemorating the Roma and Sinti Genocide. Practices within the OSCE area'. The document analyses the situation in 34 countries, covering 24 EU Member States (all except Denmark, Estonia, Malta and Cyprus). Based on information collected through a survey, the report takes stock of OSCE countries' practices in teaching about the Roma Holocaust.

Table 1 shows the answers provided by 24 EU Member States to six questions related to: Roma persecution or genocide in the country; primary/secondary school, and university [education](#) about the genocide; the causes, effects and death toll of the genocide; and the availability of [teaching materials](#) and awareness-raising events about the genocide (that is, [commemorations](#), their date and their official or unofficial status). The majority – Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden – have opted for 27 January, the International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Croatia, Czechia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia commemorate Roma and Sinti Holocaust victims on 2 August.

Table 1. Roma genocide commemoration /education

Countries	National school curriculum on Roma genocide	University curriculum on Roma genocide	Teaching materials on Roma genocide	Awareness-raising on Roma genocide	Roma genocide government supported event date	Roma persecution/extermination
Belgium	✓		✓	✓	NO	☠
Bulgaria	✗	✗	✗	✗	08/04	
Czechia	✓		✓	✓	4 dates	☠
Germany	✓	✓	✓	✓	27/01	☠
Ireland	✓	✗	✗	✓	27/01	NO
Greece	✓		✓	✗	NO	NO
Spain	✗	✗	✗	✗	27/01	NO
France	✓	✓	✓	✓	NO	☠
Croatia	✓	✓	✓	✓	02/08	☠
Italy	✗	✓	✓		27/01	☠
Latvia				✓	3 dates	
Lithuania	✓	✓	✓	✗	02/08	☠
Luxembourg	✗	✗	✗	✗	NO	NO
Hungary	✓	✓	✗	✓	02/08	☠
Netherlands			✓	✗	04/05	☠
Austria	✓		✓	✓	05/05	☠
Poland	✓		✗	✓	02/08	☠
Portugal	✓	✓	✓		27/01	NO
Romania	✓	✓	✓	✓	NO	☠
Slovenia	✗		✓	✓	27/01	☠
Slovakia	✓	✓	✓	✓	02/08	☠
Finland	✓	✓	✓	✓	27/01	NO
Sweden	✓		✓	✓	27/01	NO
United Kingdom	✗			✓	NO	NO

✓ --> Yes ✗ --> No

Blank --> No answer ☠ --> Roma persecution/extermination

Source: 'Teaching about and Commemorating the Roma and Sinti Genocide. Practices within the OSCE Area', 2015, [OSCE](#).

Other Member States have chosen dates reflecting their local history, and yet others have chosen three or more dates. For example, Czechia has 2 August and three other dates for commemorations: 7 March, 13 May and 21 August, and Latvia – 27 January and two other dates for commemorations: 8 April and 8 May.

Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czechia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia are also included in a list of at least 28 [memorial sites](#) for Roma and Sinti victims of the genocide.

European Parliament

In April 2015, the European Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) on 'International Roma Day – anti-Gypsyism in Europe and EU recognition of the memorial day of the Roma genocide during World War II'. In the context of growing anti-Gypsyism, anti-Semitism, racism and xenophobia in Europe, the EP called for the establishment of a European day to commemorate the victims of the Roma genocide during World War II, a European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day. This call was reiterated in an October 2017 EP [resolution](#) on 'Fundamental rights aspects in Roma integration in the EU: fighting anti-Gypsyism'. It designated 2 August as a memorial day, as well as appealed for the inclusion of the Roma victims in the genocide in the Holocaust Remembrance Day on 27 January, the date on which the Auschwitz camp was liberated back in 1945.

Consequently, on 27 January 2018, the European Parliament commemorated the Roma, Sinti and Jewish victims of Nazi extermination together, inviting representatives of the Roma people to the celebration and hosting an [exhibition](#) on the Roma genocide.

Holocaust education is crucial to keeping the memory of Roma victims alive. EU funding from the [Europe for Citizens](#) programme supports projects related to World War II Roma history. The [Roma Genocide](#) Remembrance Initiative is one such project, undertaken and coordinated by the ternYpe International Roma Youth Network, aiming at raising awareness of the Roma Holocaust among educators. North Macedonia and Hungary participated in a similar project, '[Roma Genocide – Part of European History](#)', and commemorated Roma victims on 2 August 2015 in the Csillagerőd (Star Fortress) in Komárom, from where thousands of Roma were deported to concentration camps.

