

IHRA Recommendations for

Teaching and Learning about the Persecution and Genocide of the Roma during the Nazi Era



INTERNATIONAL
**HOLOCAUST
REMEMBRANCE**
ALLIANCE

“We, the IHRA Member Countries, remember the genocide of the Roma. We acknowledge with concern that the neglect of this genocide has contributed to the prejudice and discrimination that many Roma communities still experience today.”

Article 4 of the 2020 IHRA Ministerial Declaration

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About the IHRA

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) unites governments and experts to strengthen, advance, and promote Holocaust education, research, and remembrance and to uphold the commitments of the 2000 Stockholm Declaration and the 2020 IHRA Ministerial Declaration. The IHRA (formerly the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research, or ITF) was initiated in 1998 by former Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson.

Today the IHRA network consists of thirty-five member countries and key international partner organizations with a mandate to deal with issues related to the Holocaust and the genocide of the Roma. This mandate is supported by the IHRA's network of experts, which includes representatives from leading institutions specializing in education, remembrance, and research related to the Holocaust and the genocide of the Roma.

The IHRA established the Committee on the Genocide of the Roma in 2009. The working definition of antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination, adopted in 2020, underscores the IHRA's commitment to countering the prejudice and discrimination that Roma communities continue to face today.

The following Recommendations for Teaching and Learning about the Genocide of the Roma during the Nazi Era were developed as part of these efforts. The project was officially initiated during the 2021 IHRA Athens Plenary and was further advanced through an IHRA pledge at the 2021 Malmö International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism.

About this resource and contributions

This resource was developed by the IHRA Committee on the Genocide of the Roma. It was carried out in close interdisciplinary cooperation with experts from other IHRA Working Groups and Committees, its Permanent International Partners, and in dialogue with Roma civil society actors and representatives.

The development of this resource occurred over the course of four years, beginning in 2021. It builds on the [IHRA Recommendations for Teaching and Learning about the Holocaust](#), developed for educators and education policymakers and adopted in 2019.

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The project was coordinated by Natalie Harshman (2021–2024) and Rebecca Bamberger (2023–2024) at the IHRA Permanent Office, Berlin.

Dr. Kathrin Meyer

IHRA Secretary General from 2008 - 2025



Krystyna Gil only survived the massacre in the town of Szczurowa because her grandmother was in the right place at the right time.

Szczurowa had been home to Polish Roma families for centuries but on 3 July 1943, a Nazi German police unit and local collaborators executed ninety-three members of the Roma community in a local churchyard. On the way to the execution site, Krystyna's mother managed, unnoticed, to pass her daughter into the hands of her Polish grandmother.

This massacre was just one of many carried out during the Second World War, during which hundreds of thousands of Roma were murdered across Nazi-occupied Europe. In the decades that followed the end of the war, the stories of the victims and the survivors were ignored and neglected. Despite the considerable progress that Roma activists have made in advancing recognition of the genocide

of the Roma in recent decades, the crimes against Roma committed by the Nazis, the Fascist states, and their collaborators remain largely unacknowledged in mainstream historical narratives.

Against the backdrop of this history of neglect, I am particularly proud to present the *IHRA Recommendations for Teaching and Learning about the Persecution and Genocide of the Roma during the Nazi Era*. Initiated by the IHRA Committee on the Genocide of the Roma and developed in close cooperation with Roma organizations and international experts from the fields of education, museums, and memorial sites, these comprehensive recommendations offer policymakers and educators practical guidance on exploring this long-forgotten history. I am delighted that this resource is published in partnership with UNESCO and I hope that other organizations will support our dissemination efforts.

In the 2020 IHRA Ministerial Declaration, the IHRA's Member Countries pledged their political commitment to remember the genocide of the Roma. We remember to honor the victims and the survivors. We remember because the neglect of this genocide plays a role in anti-Roma discrimination today. And we remember because it is only when governments and societies reflect openly and honestly on their pasts that we can succeed in living out the democratic values that our societies are built on.

After the mass execution in Szczurowa, the Nazis tried to eliminate the memory of the Roma community by burning the homes of those they had murdered. Krystyna, who lost her mother, brother, and younger sister in the massacre, spent her life fighting for recognition of the crimes committed against her family and community – first as a member of the Association of Polish Roma and later as chairwoman of the Association of Roma Women. With these recommendations I hope that we contribute – in a meaningful and practical way – to keeping the history and the memories of the victims and survivors of the genocide of the Roma alive.



Roma voices

“My family suffered from Nazi persecution and was heavily traumatized. After the war, they had no one to turn to, and the post-war society did not recognize their suffering. To the contrary, the genocide of the Roma has been ignored for decades, and the victims were further stigmatized. It is a matter of justice and recognition to teach about it.”

Mirjam Karoly, Austria

“The victims of National Socialism were not recognized in Poland until the 1990s. The enormous suffering, the injustices that continued to befall Roma even after the war, the lack of mutual trust - all of this did not help Roma to speak publicly about their experiences under National Socialism.”

Stanisław Stankiewicz, Poland

“The persecution and genocide of the Roma is part of our shared history. It must be recognized and addressed in order to prevent similar dark chapters from being repeated in the future. By learning about these events, we can work to promote tolerance, inclusion, and respect for all people, regardless of their background. Continuing to learn about the experiences of Roma communities after the Second World War is also important because it gives us insight into the long-term consequences of persecution. Many Roma continued to face discrimination, marginalization, and poverty even after the war, and it is important to understand and pay attention to these issues and their connections to the past in order to work towards creating a more just and equal world for all.”

Mia Taikon, Sweden



Preface

For many generations, Roma have lived in Europe, participated in the development and prosperity of civil societies and contributed to European cultural, social, and economic life.


Today, the Roma population constitutes the largest ethnic minority in Europe, with an estimated total of about twelve million people with diverse histories and identities. Roma communities are also present on all other continents. Roma have both a specific identity as an ethnic minority group and a national identity as citizens of their respective nations.

They are, however, still one of the most discriminated against and disadvantaged groups in Europe – facing hatred and human rights abuses, discrimination, persecution, violence, and economic and social deprivation.

Since the 19th century, due to persecution, racism, and social exclusion, some Roma have sought to establish a better life in countries outside of Europe. After 1945, many survivors of Nazi persecution and genocide and their descendants left their homelands, and some left Europe. They all brought their histories, memories, and narratives with them to their new home countries across the world.

Thanks to the efforts of Roma activists, significant progress has been made in advancing civil rights and the recognition of the persecution and genocide of the Roma during the Nazi era. However, more work remains to be done to ensure that the Nazi crimes against Roma are acknowledged and understood by society.

There is a link between past and present antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination, the consequences of the persecution and genocide of the Roma during the Nazi era, and the lack of recognition and knowledge about the injustices and crimes committed against Roma communities. Education can play a vital role in fostering empathy, raising awareness of the past, and encouraging critical engagement with the present.

*Roma voices*

“Tragically, since 1945 until today, there has been an ongoing struggle for justice for the acknowledgment of the atrocities and crimes committed against thousands of European Roma. The Roma population in many countries was murdered, and many, including children, survived camps, sexual violence, and horrific medical experiments. Their stories need to be told, heard, and known. We are their legacy.”

Gina Csanyi-Robah, Canada

“Roma youth are lacking confidence and pride now. Knowing the past means knowing the future. I believe we need to acknowledge the importance of learning about history, so the new generation of Roma youth will grow up confidently as young Europeans and proud citizens.”

Olena Vaidalovych, Ukraine



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Executive summary

Between 1933 and 1945, European Roma were targeted by Nazi Germany and other Fascist states and their collaborators, fuelled by long-standing discrimination and a racial ideology. It is estimated that up to 500,000 Roma were murdered, while many were imprisoned, used as forced laborers, or subjected to forced sterilization and medical experimentation. Across Nazi-occupied Europe, the persecution of Roma was carried out in different ways by different perpetrators, including occupying forces and local populations, which contributed to varying experiences among Roma communities.

The *IHRA Recommendations for Teaching and Learning about the Persecution and Genocide of the Roma during the Nazi Era* contribute to the IHRA strategic priorities of safeguarding the historical record of the Holocaust and the genocide of the Roma and countering distortion. With the publication of these Recommendations, the IHRA seeks to provide a strong foundation to support countries in including the history of the persecution of Roma in mainstream research, memory culture, and education. These Recommendations aim to assist not only policymakers but also educators and practitioners in their efforts.

Benefiting from the expertise of delegates from thirty-five Member Countries, these Recommendations:

- emphasize the importance of advancing teaching and learning about the genocide of the Roma.
- develop knowledge of the persecution and genocide of the Roma, as well as their resistance and agency in the face of persecution and murder.
- foster teaching environments grounded in best practices for learning about the persecution and genocide of the Roma, and offer practical guidance to support the further development of national and regional curricula, educational resources, and teacher training initiatives (including formal, informal, and non-formal education opportunities, and actors and institutions such as museums, memorials, libraries, archives, and civil society initiatives, including Roma-run organizations).
- promote critical thinking about the persecution and genocide of the Roma during the Nazi era and its legacies, which underscores that a lack of awareness about the genocide has had an impact on the current situation of Roma.
- contribute to human rights and genocide prevention education. These Recommendations are future-oriented, seeking to foster broader awareness about the relationship between the past and present, and a broader inclusion of Roma in memory culture and society.



Roma voices

“By learning about the persecution and genocide of Roma during the Nazi era and the experiences of Roma communities after the Second World War, we are given the invaluable opportunity to learn about European history from the perspective of an oppressed group of people who have never been heard.”

Tania Gessi, United Kingdom

“Today’s Roma communities suffer from continued marginalization and prejudice. Ignorance about their history perpetuates stereotypes and systemic discrimination, keeping them in a cycle of poverty and exclusion. A society that ignores such a significant part of history is likely to repeat its mistakes. This ignorance breeds prejudice, weakens our collective moral fabric, and hinders social progress. Not knowing this history limits the understanding of the world. It prevents full appreciation of the struggles of others.”

Adonis Borneo Salihi, Croatia



1 Why teach about the persecution and genocide of the Roma?

Teaching about the persecution and genocide of the Roma advances awareness of an essential chapter of European history – **casting light on an under-acknowledged historical event**, deeply rooted prejudices, and ongoing antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination. A lack of recognition of the genocide of the Roma in mainstream society has contributed to the continued marginalization of Roma today. Teaching and learning about the persecution and genocide of the Roma provides an opportunity to foster historical understanding, critical thinking, and an awareness of contemporary social injustices.

In addition to offering an opportunity to **study the social dynamics and processes** that contributed to discrimination, social exclusion, and murder, teaching and learning about the persecution and genocide of the Roma requires **the critical analysis of instances of collaboration** in crimes in various countries, as well as the injustice in their aftermath. Educational stakeholders can emphasize the agency of Roma in resisting discrimination and persecution before, during, and after the Second World War and challenge the negative images and stereotypes of Roma handed over from perpetrators.

The Why teach about the persecution and genocide of the Roma section provides recommendations for educational stakeholders on how to frame the study of this past event with consideration about how it shapes the present.

2 What to teach about the persecution and genocide of the Roma?

While the genocide of the Roma is under-researched, education on the subject should be grounded in established facts. Learners should be introduced to the **historical conditions and key stages in the process of this genocide** – which varied depending on national and local contexts – and the extent to which individuals and institutions initiated or participated in crimes or refused to participate in them. Teaching should focus on the **effects of persecution and mass murder on Roma** and how Roma responded to and resisted this.

Learners should be given the opportunity to discuss **the current relevance of the historical experience of the persecution and genocide of the Roma on three levels**: in relation to the contemporary situation of Roma communities, antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination, and a general **understanding of genocidal processes**. There may also be relevance in better understanding how the genocide of the Roma relates to the genocide of the Jews and how Nazi racist ideology fueled both.

The [What to teach about the persecution and genocide of the Roma](#) section outlines core historical content that contextualizes and supports teaching and learning on the subject, as well as concepts that foster understanding of these crimes, their antecedents, and their legacies.


3 How to teach about the persecution and genocide of the Roma?

Educational stakeholders should be confident that the genocide of the Roma can be taught effectively and successfully with careful preparation and appropriate material.

The How to teach about the persecution and genocide of the Roma section offers recommendations that aim to support policymakers, ministries of education, and education professionals. It acknowledges the challenges and opportunities in engaging with this history, as well as practical considerations regarding educators' limited time and resources.

This section empowers educational stakeholders to:

- teach about the genocide of the Roma in a way that is guided by **sensitivity and precision** regarding historical facts, historical comparisons, language, and imagery.
- situate the genocide of the Roma during the Nazi era within a **wider history of discrimination and prejudice** against Roma communities.
- foster learning about this history, as well as learning from it, thereby helping learners to recognize the **warning signs** of atrocity and genocide, while highlighting what is at stake if these are left unchecked.
- explain the **characteristics** of the experience of Roma during the persecution and genocide.
- underscore why the genocide of the Roma is an **important and meaningful focus** for educators and learners seeking to understand genocide, and emphasize the vital importance of recognition, education, and remembrance in its aftermath.
- build learning opportunities into **remembrance activities** and visits to memorials and museums.
- create positive and inclusive learning environments.
- use learner-centered approaches that support **critical thinking** and reflection, that prioritize **Roma perspectives**, and support learners in **drawing appropriate connections** between the persecution and genocide of the Roma and current antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination.
- **apply gender perspectives** to the study of the persecution and genocide of the Roma, as the gender approach reveals many new layers that are essential to building a better understanding of this topic.



Roma voices

“It fills me with great concern when I see the increasing nationalism and right-wing extremism in the world today. My family and I have had to experience what racist hatred and violence can lead to. In the 1990s, I myself experienced two right-wing extremist attacks on my person and my business. The legacy of the victims of Auschwitz is an obligation and responsibility for all nations and for the global community gathered here. It is not just about protecting minorities such as Sinti and Roma and Jews, it is about the fact that today - more than ever - we must defend our democracy and our constitutional state.”

Christian Pfeil, Germany

“Educators often face a lack of resources, insufficient training, and rigid curricula that do not prioritize Roma history. Overcoming these hurdles is essential for providing a well-rounded education. Policymakers and textbook authors should work closely with Roma communities to develop inclusive curricula and ensure sufficient funding for educational initiatives.”

Adonis Borneo Salihi, Croatia

“Hate speech and abuse threaten the fundamental values and principles of democracy and human rights, and it is unacceptable. Therefore, knowledge about genocide and about the atrocities that the victims of the Nazi era went through is essential. Both Roma and non-Roma must understand that what happened during the Holocaust was deeply wrong and that there can be no justification or excuse. This is obviously an important message for non-Roma – not least because without that understanding, the discrimination and abuse of Roma today cannot be addressed.”

Olena Vaidalovych, Ukraine



Introduction

Rationale and justification

The IHRA brings together governments and experts from thirty-five Member Countries to strengthen, advance, and promote Holocaust education, remembrance, and research worldwide. It is in a unique position to offer comprehensive recommendations on teaching and learning about the Holocaust and the genocide of the Roma based on the expertise of its international delegates.

From the founding of the [Committee on the Genocide of the Roma](#) in 2009, to the adoption of the [working definition of antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination](#) in 2020 – the genocide of the Roma has remained core to the IHRA’s mandate.

In October 2021, at the [Malmö International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism](#), the IHRA pledged to develop recommendations on teaching and learning about the genocide of the Roma. This built on the [2020 IHRA Ministerial Declaration](#), in which the IHRA’s Member Countries committed themselves to remembering the genocide of the Roma and acknowledging that the neglect of this genocide had contributed to the prejudice and discrimination that many Roma communities still experience today.

With the publication of this resource, the IHRA aims to support Member Countries in honoring this commitment and fulfilling their duty to incorporate the history of the persecution of Roma into mainstream research, memory culture, and education.

These Recommendations build on the [IHRA Recommendations for Teaching and Learning About the Holocaust](#), adopted by consensus at the IHRA Luxembourg City Plenary in 2019 and follow a similar structure. They provide guidance on Why, What, and How to teach and address the distinct challenges presented by advancing teaching and learning about the persecution and genocide of the Roma. In particular, these Recommendations address the lack of recognition of the crimes committed against Roma, the lack of research on this history and the lack of quality teaching materials, and, consequently, a lack of exposure to the subject matter among educators and educational stakeholders.

These Recommendations aim to provide an expert-led framework and encourage policymakers to promote and develop educational materials and programs that reflect their national histories and meet the needs of their populations.

Aims of the Recommendations

The *IHRA Recommendations for Teaching and Learning about the Persecution and Genocide of the Roma during the Nazi Era*, developed by an international group of experts, aim to provide policymakers, teacher trainers, and educators – including school teachers, museum pedagogues, memory workers, and civil society educators – with a fact-based and educationally sound framework for increasing awareness of the history of the genocide of the Roma as well as of contemporary antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination.

These Recommendations are intended to provide an expert-informed basis for policymakers, educators, and practitioners that will help them:

- develop their knowledge of the persecution and genocide of the Roma and of Roma resistance and agency in the face of Nazi crimes, ensuring accuracy in understanding, while also raising awareness of the consequences of antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination.
- create engaging teaching environments based on best practices for learning about the persecution and genocide of the Roma.
- promote critical and reflective thinking about the persecution and genocide of the Roma during the Nazi era, including the continued discrimination and exclusion of Roma communities as a consequence of post-war ignorance by mainstream societies, the lack of recognition of and compensation for Roma victims, and the impact of that on contemporary antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination.
- identify appropriate sources and best practices in formal and informal educational settings and offer practical guidance to bring national curricula up to date.
- contribute to human rights and genocide prevention education. Though rooted in the past, these Recommendations are future-oriented – seeking to foster broader recognition and inclusion of Roma in memory culture and society.

These Recommendations are designed to guide the creation of policies, strategies, and teaching materials and methodologies at national and local levels. This should include the active participation of national and local Roma communities and other relevant stakeholders in memorialization and education, such as memorials and museums. Educational outreach programs and materials can be tailored for different age groups and adapted to both formal and non-formal educational settings.

Context and terminology

The focus of these Recommendations is the persecution and genocide of the Roma during the Nazi era. Fuelled by historical discrimination and a pseudoscientific racial ideology, the Nazis and their collaborators targeted Europe's Roma.

Across Nazi-occupied Europe, the persecution of Roma was carried out in different ways by different perpetrators, including occupying forces and local populations, which contributed to varying experiences among Roma communities.

These Recommendations use definitions and terminology adopted by the IHRA. The phrase *Nazis and their collaborators* or similar formulations refer to Nazi Germany and those Fascist and extreme nationalist partners and other collaborators who participated in these crimes.

The term *Roma*, formally introduced during the first Roma World Congress in 1971, is used in these Recommendations as an umbrella term to describe a European minority of Indian origin with its own history, language, and culture. It includes more than forty different related groups, some of which choose not to use this term. In Romanes, the language of many of these groups, *Roma* is used to denote all members of the communities.

Some terms related to the memorialization of the persecution and genocide of the Roma are the subject of ongoing discussions and debate. We acknowledge such cases without preference.

Roma intellectuals have proposed several terms derived from Romanes to name the persecution and genocide of the Roma during the Nazi era (for example, *Samudaripen*, meaning "murder of all"). It is important to consult with local Roma communities and experts about preferred terminology in local and national contexts.

Throughout these Recommendations, the term Roma includes men, women, and non-binary people.

The term *antigypsyism* has a different meaning from *anti-Roma racism*, *anti-Roma discrimination*, or *hatred against Roma*.

The terms *anti-Roma racism/anti-Roma discrimination* describe hatred against Roma as an ethnic group. They refer to discrimination against Roma simply because they are Roma. In other words, these terms are a targeted, specific form of xenophobia.

Antigypsyism refers to hatred based on the racist and stereotypical concept of “the gypsy” (in German, *Zigeuner*) and the false racist characteristics associated with the term. It is often directed against Roma but can be aimed at **any individual or group perceived to fit this racist concept**. This term is important because it helps to highlight and explain a racist concept that is deeply rooted in society. The term *antigypsyism* **changes the lens to focus on the racist, not the victim**. “The gypsy” does not exist except as a distorted racist construction in the mind of the hater. The meaning of the term *antigypsyism* stresses the responsibility of societies for the long-lasting effects of racist exclusion.

The term *Zigeuner*, or its equivalent in other languages, is always derogatory and should never be used, particularly in educational contexts.

When developing teaching materials and commemorative activities on local and national levels, engaging in dialogue with local Roma communities is essential.

IHRA working definition of antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination

These Recommendations reference the working definition of antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination, adopted by the IHRA in 2020:

Antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination is a manifestation of individual expressions and acts as well as institutional policies and practices of marginalization, exclusion, physical violence, devaluation of Roma cultures and lifestyles, and hate speech directed at Roma as well as other individuals and groups perceived, stigmatized, or persecuted during the Nazi era, and still today, as “Gypsies.” This leads to the treatment of Roma as an alleged alien group and associates them with a series of pejorative stereotypes and distorted images that represent a specific form of racism.

The working definition details contemporary manifestations of antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination, taking into account the overall context in examples.

Learn more about the working definition of antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination on the IHRA's website.

Denial and distortion of the genocide of the Roma

The IHRA's non-legally binding working definition of Holocaust denial and distortion reads:

Holocaust denial is discourse and propaganda that deny the historical reality and the extent of the extermination of the Jews by the Nazis and their accomplices during World War II, known as the Holocaust or the Shoah. Holocaust denial refers specifically to any attempt to claim that the Holocaust/Shoah did not take place. Holocaust denial may include publicly denying or calling into doubt the use of principal mechanisms of destruction (such as gas chambers, mass shooting, starvation and torture) or the intentionality of the genocide of the Jewish people.

The distortion of the Genocide of the Roma exhibits the same strategies. The IHRA addressed denial and distortion of the genocide of the Roma within the #ProtectTheFacts campaign in 2024.

Roma voices

“Education and memory policymakers should work closely with Roma communities. Roma communities also need education about their past, but their perspectives, needs, and narratives should be a major part of what and how is communicated about Roma history.”

Anna Daróczy, Hungary

Who can benefit from these Recommendations

These Recommendations are targeted towards political decisionmakers (political advisors, ministers, education administrators, etc.), policymakers in the field of education and remembrance, developers of teaching training and school curricula, textbook authors, teacher trainers, teachers, educators at museums and memorial sites, archives, libraries, as well as agents of formal and non-formal education (by civil society and non-governmental organizations).

These professionals play different roles in their educational environments, and can all benefit from thinking critically about why, what, and how to teach about the persecution and genocide of the Roma.

As memorialization and commemorative events are important for advancing learning and awareness, these Recommendations can also be used by governments and/or non-governmental organizations to inform the development of programs that commemorate the persecution and genocide of the Roma, including ceremonies, exhibitions, and workshops.

How to use these Recommendations

These Recommendations are comprised of the following sections:

1. Rationale and justification: **Why** teach about the persecution and genocide of the Roma?
2. Content: **What** to teach about the persecution and genocide of the Roma?
3. Educational policy and pedagogy: **How** to teach about the persecution and genocide of the Roma?

Roma voices featured throughout these Recommendations offer insights from Roma community members, including youth and descendants of survivors, reflecting diverse experiences and perspectives on the legacies and consequences of the persecution and genocide of the Roma, and the importance of education today.

Throughout these Recommendations, historical examples are not meant to be encompassing or universal. Educational stakeholders should strive to use local and context-specific examples and inclusive learning practices that integrate Roma perspectives.


Teaching this history should be conducted with sensitivity and care, as the topic may evoke traumatic personal and/or family histories, particularly for Roma educators and Roma learners in classrooms and other educational settings.

Historical example

1

The Roma Memorial Center Uštica in Croatia and the Lety u Písku Memorial in the Czech Republic are built in situ to commemorate the genocide of the Roma during the Second World War, and are examples of great initiatives taken by local Roma communities and activists and their cooperation with national governments and states.

Why teach about the persecution and genocide of the Roma?



Roma voices

“Learning about the persecution of Roma during the Nazi era helps develop empathy and a deeper understanding of human suffering. It’s about seeing beyond one’s own experiences and recognizing the injustices others have faced, which can make one more compassionate and socially aware.”

Adonis Borneo Salihi, Croatia

“The IHRA Recommendations can help strengthen the identity of young Roma. This implies creating an environment where they can grow up free from discrimination and be confident about their identity and future, while appreciating their history and pluralistic cultural backgrounds and affiliations. It will also help mainstream society better understand this part of Roma history and cease treating them as ‘foreigners’ or ‘outsiders.’”

Olena Vaidalovych, Ukraine



Why teach about the persecution and genocide of the Roma?

Teaching and learning about the persecution and genocide of the Roma is imperative to achieving the following goals:

Acknowledging the genocide of the Roma

The Nazis' rise to power in Germany in 1933, and the subsequent war triggered the persecution and murder of Roma. Genocide was systematic in the German Reich and occupied territories, as well as in some collaborating states, and reached most European countries by the end of the Second World War in 1945. The outcome of this crime has had consequences spanning generations.

For decades, the genocide of the Roma was widely ignored. Its official recognition started in the 1980s, after sustained pressure from Roma activists and NGOs. Many countries have officially recognized their role in this genocide. However, the suffering of Roma is still not sufficiently acknowledged due to a lack of knowledge and negative attitudes toward the Roma minority. Teaching and learning about the persecution and genocide of the Roma means acknowledging and communicating this history and studying the ramifications of antigypsyism/ anti-Roma discrimination. Studying this genocide is important in its own right as a significant historical event. An important step towards acknowledgment was the establishment of a remembrance day on 2 August, initiated by Roma communities, and supported by many countries, particularly after the resolution of the [European Parliament in 2015](#).

Reflecting on the historical roots of antigypsyism and hatred against Roma

When learning about the genocide of the Roma, learners should comprehend the long-running consequences of stereotypes, prejudice, and hostility against minorities. In many parts of Europe, Roma have been stigmatized and

persecuted for centuries. They were the victims of the rise of ethnically defined nation-states in the 19th century, which saw the rise of exclusionary nationalism and later left many Roma without citizenship.

While it is necessary to recognize centuries of antigypsyism, there is also the need to recognize the historical contributions, cultural influence, and the rightful place of Roma in their respective countries.

The policy of the Nazi regime against Roma made use of widespread stereotypes and deep-rooted prejudices, reinforcing and entrenching them within their racist ideology. This was translated into genocidal politics in Germany and German-occupied countries. The Second World War further enabled countries aligned with Germany to implement their own policies and persecution against local Roma communities.

Learning about the conditions and processes that led to mass murder

The genocide of the Roma did not happen overnight. On the contrary, it is the culmination of a very long history of persecution. It is important to understand its roots, the context, and the processes leading to annihilation. Based on racial policies, people who were identified as “gypsies” were deprived of human rights and subject to social and economic exclusion. This was unchallenged by the majority population and paved the way to destruction: Roma were targeted and forcibly sterilized, deported, starved to death, and murdered in ghettos, concentration and extermination camps – or executed where they were found.

Teaching about the persecution and genocide of the Roma should show that it was not an isolated event. It developed in the context of a dictatorship, culminating during the war and against the backdrop of the Holocaust. The genocidal process was set into motion, supported, and executed by a multitude of actors: academics, scientists, politicians, various administrative bodies, security agencies, army units, and ordinary citizens.



Roma voices

“Failure to recognize and acknowledge the suffering of Roma not only keeps feelings of marginalization and trauma alive but also risks repeating the mistakes of the past. At the same time, while we commemorate the resilience of survivors, we must also acknowledge the ongoing challenges they face.”

Kludia Veizaj, Albania





Roma voices

“The perspective of Roma only as victims should be replaced with the fact that Roma were antifascists and resistance fighters. There were many Roma partisans, true and real combatants against fascism. Roma should be ranked among the victorious nations of the Second World War. More focus should be on Roma participation – not just suffering – in the creation of Europe after the Second World War. A sense of pride is needed among Roma. It should be encouraged.”

Osman Balić, Serbia



Challenging the negative images handed down from perpetrators

To legitimize their actions during the Nazi era, perpetrators drew on longstanding historical stereotypes and stigmatized Roma as “asocial” and “born criminals.” This distorted image of Roma was kept alive after the war and hindered the prosecution of these crimes and their recognition as a genocide. These images, spread by the perpetrators, are very influential to this day.

Teaching about the persecution and genocide of the Roma is a means to challenge and change perspectives. The stories of victims and survivors and their families need to be at the center of teaching and learning. Listening to their stories allows one to gain an understanding of how they experienced persecution – and the burden of this experience that was also placed on subsequent generations.

Teaching about this genocide should also include the stories of those Roma who resisted the Nazis and their collaborators and contributed to their defeat.

Critically analyzing collaboration and responsibilities in the past and present

Various forms of antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination continued to exist after the Second World War. This helped perpetrators to successfully downplay the deportations and murders as preventive measures against alleged criminality. Countries claimed that the crimes against Roma were exclusively committed by German forces. In fact, in many occupied territories, collaborators and parts of the population welcomed and supported

Nazi Germany's murderous actions against Roma. In countries aligned with Germany, national agencies played a leading role in the persecution, and some implemented specific measures against Roma, for example, internment or detention camps. Discussing the multiple causes and situations helps to identify national specificities.

For decades after the end of the Second World War, many countries continued implementing coercive measures against Roma such as strict segregation, forced sterilization, removal of children or placing children in "special schools", and the displacement of survivors of the genocide and their families. To this day, in many countries, Roma are discriminated against and denied their rightful place as citizens.

Confronting and addressing the past includes addressing and critically analyzing collaboration and responsibilities during this genocide and the injustice that occurred in its aftermath.

Historical examples

2

Romani Rose (1946), born into a Sinti family in Heidelberg, Germany, is the founder of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma. Thirteen of his relatives were murdered in the genocide. He was instrumental in ensuring the recognition of the genocide in Germany in 1982, as well as the recognition of Sinti and Roma as a national minority in Germany. He was the driving force behind the establishment of the central Memorial to the Sinti and Roma of Europe murdered under National Socialism in Berlin, which opened in 2012.


3

In Lety u Písku, German-annexed Protectorate Bohemia and Moravia, there was a particular camp where Sinti and Roma were sent. Many died in the camp, while most of them were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. The history of the camp was forgotten after 1945, and the site was used as an industrial pig farm. In the 1990s, the use of the site sparked significant outcry, and the farm became the center of public controversy. Thanks to the advocacy of survivors and activists, the Czech state acquired the site and established a memorial, inaugurated in April 2024.

Raising awareness of the persistence of antigypsyism and racism against Roma

Roma are still exposed to violence and persecution and are even still at risk of becoming victims of genocide. Hate speech and prejudice against this minority are increasing in many places. Antigypsyism is one of the main reasons for social exclusion and marginalization. In addition, Roma are often targeted as scapegoats in times of social and political transformation. Learning about this genocide can support understanding of how dangerous such attitudes and behavior are and how they can escalate under certain conditions.

Teaching, informed by sound historical research and pedagogy, allows for the identification of biased images and narratives. Further, it aids in understanding the differences between facts and politically or ideologically motivated constructs. This also augments critical thinking and deconstructs dangerous and derogatory images and stereotypes.



Roma voices

“Education for remembrance and commemoration is both a tool for strengthening the identity of Roma and a tool for fighting for human rights and against discrimination.”

Olena Vaidalovych, Ukraine

“For survivors of the genocide of the Roma and their descendants, the lack of understanding and acknowledgment of their experiences can lead to feelings of isolation, invisibility, and trauma. Without proper recognition and support, individuals may struggle to process and heal from the intergenerational trauma caused by the persecution. Without a comprehensive understanding of the genocide and its impact, educational curricula may fail to address this chapter of history adequately. This can perpetuate stereotypes, misinformation, and ignorance about the Roma community, hindering efforts to combat discrimination and promote inclusivity.”


Mia Taikon, Sweden

“On a national level, understanding this history ensures that the stories of all victims are remembered, fostering a more inclusive and honest portrayal of our past. This awareness can drive better policies and social attitudes, helping to heal historical wounds and promote unity. Globally, this knowledge strengthens our commitment to human rights and combats discrimination. By acknowledging these atrocities, countries can work together to support marginalized communities and prevent such horrors from happening again.”

Adonis Borneo Salihi, Croatia



What to teach about the persecution and genocide of the Roma?



Roma voices

“Throughout my fifteen years of public school education, I was never once educated about the Roma experience during the Holocaust. If not for my grandmother sharing her family stories, particularly about her sister who endured medical experimentation, I would never have known about this tragedy. I want to see our stories included in Holocaust education throughout my country and internationally.”

Gina Csanyi-Robah, Canada

“Lack of political will could be a big problem. The lack of recognition of Samudaripen and discrimination against Roma can limit the implementation of public and educational policies.”

Javier Amicelli, Argentina



What to teach about the persecution and genocide of the Roma?

The history of the Nazi era and the genocide of the Roma is rarely taught in schools and knowledge among educators and learners remains limited. It is, therefore, important to focus on conveying factual knowledge about the genocide and its broader context.

Learners should be introduced to:

- the historical conditions and key stages in the process of this genocide.
- the extent to which persons or institutions initiated or actively participated in or refused to commit crimes.
- the effects of racial persecution and mass murder on Roma and how they responded to it.

Teaching and learning about the persecution and genocide of the Roma will vary depending on national and local contexts

There may be general knowledge that can be introduced to all learners and then more context-relevant information can be introduced depending on the country and/or local histories. Educators are encouraged to identify relevant country-specific content to further deepen the learners' knowledge:

- The genocide of the Roma was initiated by Nazi Germany but was implemented with the help of or in collaboration with individuals and states.
- Some states implemented radical persecution and murder of Roma – almost without any German initiative or support.
- The steps that laid the ground for this genocide, such as stigmatization, registration, deprivation of rights, and isolation, varied across pre-war Europe.

- Countries that did not initiate direct persecution measures on their territory may have been involved in the persecution and genocide in other ways, for example, by closing borders, accepting or ignoring persecution, propagating racist and eugenic practices, or actively participating in the warfare of Nazi Germany.

Teaching and learning about the persecution and genocide of the Roma will benefit from more historical knowledge and educational resources

Basic knowledge should be imparted about the following:

- Roma, present in all European countries before the founding of modern states, have a diverse history and identity. The predominant distorted view and representation of Roma does not reflect this diversity.
- Roma, having lived in Europe for a thousand years, have been citizens of their respective countries for many generations, are part of European history, and have contributed to European culture.
- From the 19th century and until today, Roma have sought to establish an existence in other countries, also outside of Europe due to persecution, racism, and social exclusion. They brought their history with them to their new home countries.
- In many countries, Roma are protected under the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. Stressing equality, participation, national citizenship, and their contribution to European societies plays an important role in the fight against antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination.

Historical example

4

Anton Reinhardt (1927-1945), a German Sinto¹ from Weiden, fled Germany by swimming across the Rhine to Switzerland in August 1944. The Swiss police handed him over to Germany in September of that same year following the rejection of his asylum request. He was shot by the Nazis in March 1945.

¹ Sinto: Word for a Sinti man. Sintizza: Word for a Sinti woman.

What to teach: core historical content

The genocide of the Roma was a state-driven campaign of persecution and murder by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. With Germany's increasing annexation and occupation of European territories, and the collaboration and self-initiated actions of Germany-aligned states, persecution and murder became widespread.

Key historical knowledge enables learners to pose questions and raise issues arising from the genocide of the Roma. Structuring the content into different phases serves to divide the knowledge into manageable topics. The history of the persecution and genocide of the Roma should be embedded in the history of National Socialism, Fascism, the Second World War, and the Holocaust.

Previous history	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Antigypsyism in Europe • The development of racism and eugenics • The impact of nation-building since the 19th century • Roma as Europeans and integral parts of European history and culture • Roma communities at the beginning of the 20th century
Nazi Germany 1933–1939	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nazi racial policy against people labeled as “Zigeuner” • State institutions of persecution • Measures against Sinti* and Roma • International and societal responses to persecution
Second World War	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The impact of war on the persecution of Roma • Deportations, camps, internments, forced labor, and forced sterilization • Mass killings • Differing approaches and manifestations of persecution in the European states • Entangled history: victims of “euthanasia,” Jews, other groups, and Roma • Resistance and rescue
Post-war: Aftermath	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Situation of survivors after liberation and intergenerational trauma • Prosecution of perpetrators • Antigypsyism in post-war societies • Denial and distortion, lack of recognition and compensation, and lack of research • Roma civil rights movements • Culture of remembrance

* Sinti were the largest affected group in Nazi Germany.



Roma voices

“The Roma community is still persecuted. The view of Roma is derogatory because there are still strong stereotypes. That is why, for me, a heroic person is one who can truly accept someone who is different.”

Rasma Pažemeckaitė, Lithuania



Contexts and developments

In order to understand how the persecution and genocide of Roma was possible, educators should consider a variety of processes, taking several aspects as a starting point. Incorporating and examining national and local contexts is essential throughout.

In the following paragraphs, each topic will be addressed from different perspectives and the issues raised are meant to provide a basic framework for what to teach and learn about the persecution and the genocide of the Roma during the Nazi era.

Previous history: From the Middle Ages to the beginning of the 20th century

- Antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination occurred over centuries in parts of Europe and emerged as a mainstream phenomenon determined by stereotypical images of “the gypsy.”
- With the emergence of modern racism in the 19th century, Roma were stigmatized as “foreigners.” During the formation of nation states, the aspiration for ethnic homogeneity fostered a plethora of discriminatory and anti-Roma laws and initiatives. Without this long exclusion of Roma, which was supported by large sections of society, the Nazi regime and its collaborating states would not have been able to implement its racist policies.
- The realities of Roma communities are not reflected in the widely distributed, stereotypical images resulting from ignorance and prejudice. Roma have been part of European societies for centuries and have helped shape European culture – e.g. in arts, economy, and languages.
- Despite centuries of prejudice and discrimination, Roma women and men were able to achieve social, political, and economic participation.

Nazi Germany 1933–1939: Racial ideology and political practice

- The National Socialist dictatorship, coming to power in Germany in 1933, immediately abolished fundamental rights, enforced their political goals with brutal terror, and established a state in which “race” became one of the main guiding principles of politics.
- Like Jews, Sinti and Roma were declared an “alien race” in 1935 by legislation based on the Nuremberg Laws. The shift to a racial construct was at the core of the Nazi policy of the persecution of Roma, facilitating much harsher methods than previous forms of persecution.
- It was the Reich Criminal Police, under SS Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler, who together with scientists at the Berlin “Racial Hygiene Research Unit,” carried out registration of all Sinti and Roma in Nazi Germany, creating the ideological and practical basis for this genocide.
- Sinti and Roma were forced out of social life and their professions. From 1935, dozens of detention camps were set up just for this minority in Germany and annexed countries. They were thus isolated from the rest of the population and recruited for forced labor. Already in 1938, hundreds of Roma men were deported to concentration camps due to racist motives.

The Second World War: Radicalization of persecution and mass murder

- With the invasion of Poland by German troops in September 1939, the policy against Sinti and Roma became radicalized – the Nazi Reich seized the opportunity to deport all Sinti and Roma. The war created an opportunity for mass murder.
- The persecution of Roma during the Second World War operated differently in the various German-occupied countries. Where Roma were racially targeted and considered threatening as a group, persecution was more severe. Where Roma remained relatively invisible to the occupying forces and there were no local anti-Roma initiatives, persecution was less severe. The type of occupation policy, national specifics, tactical considerations, the willingness for collaboration, and the progression of the war over time also played a role in the intensity of persecution. In numerous states, Roma were subjected to internment, relocation, forced labor, and other repressive measures.
- Germany pushed ahead with mass deportations from German territory including Austria and the Protectorate Bohemia and Moravia, as well as from annexed parts of Poland, Belgium, northern France, and the Netherlands. Sinti and Roma from those territories mostly fell victim to concentration and extermination camps. Additionally, a rigorous policy of forced sterilization was implemented in Germany against a small group of Sinti and Roma who had not been deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. One reason for this, for example, would be because they were married to an “Aryan” (see historical example number 5 and 6).

- In Eastern and Southeastern Europe, most Roma were murdered outside of camps. In the fall of 1939 in parts of annexed and occupied Poland, and from 1941 in the occupied Soviet Union (Ukraine, Belarus, the Baltic States, and parts of Russia), the Wehrmacht, the Einsatzgruppen (mobile killing squads), and local and auxiliary police units murdered thousands of Roma on the spot (see historical example number 7).
- The persecution of Roma in Fascist and Nazi collaborating countries was manifold and determined by the initiatives of the individual states. Roma were almost completely annihilated in the Independent State of Croatia, many in the Jasenovac camp. In Fascist Italy, Roma were sent to places of banishment, partly interned in camps, and a small number were deported to camps in Nazi Germany. In Romania, Roma were victims of mass deportations to Transnistria, of which only half survived. In Slovakia and Hungary, Roma were subjected to forced labor, massacres, and deportations, especially after German troops invaded these former collaborating countries in March 1944 and August 1944 (see historical example number 8).
- The persecution and genocide of the Roma was not an isolated event. The Nazi regime's racial policy first crossed the threshold into murder with the killing of people who were considered "handicapped" or "hereditarily ill." The experiences with these murders, the personnel, and the techniques of killing were then used in the murders of the Jewish and Roma populations. Most Roma victims were killed by authorities such as police battalions, the Wehrmacht, and local auxiliaries (the same units responsible for the murder of millions of Jews outside of camps and the massacres of Slav civilians in Eastern Europe).

Historical examples

5

In November 1941, 5,007 Roma, more than half of them children, were deported from Austria (which was annexed to Germany) to the Łódź ghetto. After several hundred deportees died in the ghetto, those still living were taken to the Chełmno extermination camp a few kilometers away in December 1941 and January 1942, where they were murdered in gas vans. No one survived.

6

On 16 December 1942, SS Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler ordered the deportation of Sinti and Roma to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration and extermination camp. From February 1943 to July 1944, around 23,000 men, women, and children were deported there and housed in a separate camp section (BIIe). Due to the appalling conditions in the camp, the violence of the SS, medical experiments, and regular selections for the gas chambers, the death rate was very high. After prisoners who were supposed to be "fit for work" were transferred to other concentration camps, the remaining approximately 4,300 Sinti and Roma were murdered in the gas chambers.

- The murder of Roma would not have been possible without support from wide parts of the population. And yet there were individuals who refused the murderous policy and sought to protect and save Roma.
- Even amidst severe oppression and increasingly limited opportunities for action, many Roma fought back. They fled persecution and deportation to camps and helped one another. Roma also fought as partisans or in regular armies against the perpetrators (see historical example number 9, 10, and 11).

Aftermath: Liberated but not acknowledged

- With the Allied victory over Nazi Germany, the killing stopped. The camp survivors were left with nothing. Many had lost their families and owned only what they wore.
- Societies were often unsympathetic to Roma survivors and continued to be hostile towards them. At the same time, there was no organized international aid for this group of victims. In many countries, discriminatory measures like registration and criminalization or segregation continued.
- During the post-war trials, the persecution and genocide of the Roma was dealt with only peripherally. Despite numerous efforts by survivors to bring those responsible to justice, the perpetrators remained largely unpunished.
- It took decades for this genocide to be recognized by the public and by governments. Because the persecution was not recognized as a National Socialist crime and its racist character was neglected, the victims received little to no compensation.
- It was only thanks to the consistent and organized efforts of Roma survivors, their families, and civil society that the crimes against Roma were acknowledged. Roma played a key role in fighting for justice (see historical example number 14).
- The memory of the persecution and genocide of the Roma only became part of the public culture of remembrance decades after the war but to this day is still not sufficiently present in many countries.

Roma voices

“The consequences of the lack of knowledge and understanding of the persecution and genocide of the Roma during the Nazi era for society are reflected in the rise of nationalism and the rise of anti-Roma sentiment, where social frustration seeks scapegoats.”

Osman Balić, Serbia



Historical examples

- 7** | In German-occupied Serbia, thousands of Jews, Roma, and Serbs were shot on German orders in retaliation for Wehrmacht soldiers who had been killed or wounded fighting the insurgency. The infamous massacres took place in Kragujevac, Leskovac, and Zasavica. In the German concentration camp Topovske Šupe in Belgrade, about 5,000 Jews and 1,500 Roma men were held hostage. They were shot from September to November 1941 at various killing sites around Belgrade.
- 8** | In August 1941, the Ustasha authorities of the Independent State of Croatia formed the Jasenovac camp, which consisted of a series of smaller camps. Serbs, Jews, Roma, communists, and antifascists were deported and killed there. The mass deportation of Roma to Jasenovac began on 19 May 1942, following a special order issued by the state authorities to the police and military. Most of the Roma victims in the Independent State of Croatia were killed in this largest Ustasha camp, which remained operational until the end of April 1945. According to the list of individual victims of Jasenovac concentration camp, prepared by the Jasenovac Memorial Site, at least 16,173 Roma were killed there.
- 9** | **Stevan Đorđević Novak** (1919–1943) was born in Radičevac, Yugoslavia (Serbia). During the Second World War, he joined the Yugoslav partisan resistance in Eastern Serbia, where he distinguished himself as a fighter and partisan officer, holding the rank of sergeant. Stevan was wounded in battle and did not recover from his injuries. In November 1953, Stevan Đorđević Novak was declared a National Hero, becoming the only Roma in Yugoslavia to receive such esteemed recognition.
- 10** | Roma were also active as partisans in German-occupied Belarus. Eight of the fifty-six known Belarusian Roma who received honors for their partisan activities from 1941–1944 were women. One of them, **Stanislawa Chubreeva** (1924), fought in a partisan group after her family was murdered by German occupiers in November 1942. She took part in four open battles and five partisan operations, and captured weapons from the enemy.
- 11** | **Josef Serinek** (1900–1974) was born in Bolevec, today part of Plzeň, Czech Republic. Working as a courier among communists in Germany and Czechoslovakia, he was imprisoned in 1937 until the end of the 1930s. Together with his wife and six children he was deported to the Lety camp in 1942. His family was murdered there or in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Serinek managed to escape and fought as a partisan in the Czech resistance movement. He organized his own group of partisans and quickly gained a good reputation. In 1944, he was tasked with various resistance actions; he fought until the end of the war. After the war he married again, and he and his wife successfully ran a pub that was called “At the Black Partisan’s”.

Historical examples

- 12** | Following the German offensive against the Soviet Union and the occupation of Crimea, Crimean Tatars objected to the persecution of local Kırımli Roma on the grounds that they were fellow Muslims, and thus managed to protect them from the Nazis.
- 13** | In 1943, Sinto **Oskar Rose** (1906–1968) tried several times to contact German bishops personally and through letters to request their intervention against the deportation of the German Sinti and Roma, most of whom were Catholic. However, none of the Catholic dignitaries would listen to his urgent pleas and stand in defense of the members of the minority.
- 14** | The first Roma World Congress, held in 1971 near London, was attended by 23 delegates from ten countries. It heralded the creation of the International Romani Union and the start of both the Roma emancipation and the Roma civil society movement. During this meeting, the Roma flag and anthem were chosen. During the third Roma World Congress, held in 1983 in Göttingen, Germany, the persecution during the Second World War was one of the most important issues.

Conceptual understanding

Learners should be able to understand that each mass atrocity committed by the Nazis and their collaborators, had its own causes and outcomes. Learners need to be able to understand that genocide is a specific crime: genocide aims to destroy a group in whole or in part and indiscriminately targets children, women, and men only because they belong to that group.

Culpability and responsibility

- When learners begin to understand how multifaceted the process of persecution was and how the genocide of the Roma could happen, they are enabled to address the question of culpability and responsibility. In this way, the learning content forms a basis for topics related to the present, such as civic responsibility and respect for human rights.
- The murders in the death camps and at the hundreds of murder sites in Nazi-occupied Europe were the endpoint of a process of exclusion and dehumanization consisting of many individual steps, during which thousands of people were directly involved.
- In addition to direct perpetration, for example, as an SS member in an extermination camp or as a soldier in a mobile killing unit, there were many degrees of participation in murder. Whether it was a doctor who carried out forced sterilizations, a welfare worker who had a young girl committed to a concentration camp, a journalist who published articles reproducing anti-Roma stereotypes, or a civil servant who implemented a deportation order –all bore responsibility for the inhumane policies of the Nazi regime in their fields.
- The reaction of the public should be carefully examined in all its complexity. The degree to which the public supported persecution measures against Roma varied, and yet far too few refused to cooperate, or failed to intervene, or help. Rather, they actively looked the other way, often even enriching themselves with the property of those deported or murdered.
- There are examples of people who stood up for Roma, helped them to escape, or hid them at the risk of their own lives. These examples show the conditions under which people took such risks and the possibilities for action that existed.
- The role of religious communities and institutions needs to be presented, particularly the absence of protests by religious leaders and officials against the persecution and deportation of the Roma (see historical example number 12 and 13).
- The systematic murder and dehumanization of Roma in Nazi Germany and occupied territories has been known to the international public since at least 1943. This raises the question of why the Allies did not show more of an interest in what was happening, why some states closed their borders to Roma, or some even handed Roma over to their persecutors.

Visibility and agency of the victims

- For decades, the victims of the persecution and genocide of the Roma were ignored by states and mainstream societies.
- Learners should get to know the victims of persecution and genocide as people, not as anonymous numbers. They should understand them as individuals with different identities, hopes, goals, wishes, and aspirations.
- Since this genocide was not recognized by broader society for a long time, there was no understanding of the suffering of persecuted Roma. It is therefore of great importance that the victims' experiences are exemplified.
- The persecution of entire families is a characteristic of genocide. Although all men, women, and children were targeted by the persecutors, some of them were affected by specific persecution measures (e.g. medical crimes, sexual abuses, abduction to orphanages, or youth concentration camps). In this context, it is important to point out that a high percentage of the murdered Sinti and Roma were children.
- Learners should also be able to recognize that the victims were not passive objects, but individuals who had agency and resisted persecution in many ways.



Roma voices

“The first time that I learned about the genocide of the Roma was in 2013, when I participated in the Dikh He Na Bister (Look and Don’t Forget) event organized by ternYpe. I was twenty-four years old and had never heard of the genocide before. The information was so shocking that it marked a turning point in my life. Immediately after the event, I decided to dedicate my volunteer work to this topic.”

Klaudia Veizaj, Albania

“The lack of awareness about the genocide of the Roma can contribute to a broader disregard for human rights and social justice principles. When one group’s suffering is overlooked or minimized, it can weaken an overall commitment to upholding the rights and dignity of all individuals, leading to a more divided and unjust society.”

Mia Taikon, Sweden


“Trauma in families is transmitted over generations. There was a lot of fear and mistrust towards mainstream society. For me, it urged me to engage in fighting racism and discrimination, including in the areas of history and politics.”

Mirjam Karoly, Austria



Relevance for contemporary questions

- Learners should be given the opportunity to discuss the relevance of the historical experience of the persecution and genocide of the Roma in today's context on three levels: in relation to (a) the situation of Roma communities, (b) antigypsyism in today's societies, and (c) a general understanding of genocidal processes.
- The effects of the persecution were severe for the survivors and their descendants and have a lasting impact on the social, economic, and political situation in many Roma communities today.
- The situation for Roma throughout Europe, and beyond, is marked by antigypsyism as a specific form of discrimination, which may be expressed through negative attitudes, institutionalized and racially motivated actions, and violence.
- The study of the persecution of the victims of Nazi, Fascist, and racial ideologies can advance the understanding of the impact of human rights violations on societies today. At the same time, the major importance of asserting and defending human rights is emphasized.
- Understanding genocide as a step-by-step process that develops in society as a whole can help learners identify warning signs and possibilities for prevention and intervention.
- Acquiring factual knowledge helps learners to recognize historically incorrect references and attempts to relativize, deny, or distort the persecution and genocide of the Roma. Studying this history fosters an understanding of how contemporary negative images and related prejudices continue to be shaped by racist narratives supported by the Nazi regime.



Roma voices

“The IHRA Recommendations can help by setting guidelines for inclusive education and promoting accurate historical narratives. They can support efforts to integrate Roma history into school programs and encourage international cooperation to combat discrimination. The IHRA and its national delegations can push for international standards in teaching about the genocide of the Roma, facilitate research and resource sharing, and support initiatives that promote remembrance and education about Roma experiences during the Nazi era.”

Adonis Borneo Salihi, Croatia

“Deep-seated prejudices and stereotypes against Roma continue to exist in society, hindering efforts to promote empathy and understanding towards this marginalized community. Negative perceptions and biases can impede individuals from seeking out information and engaging with the history of Roma persecution in a meaningful way.”


Mia Taikon, Sweden

“I believe that if we know about and acknowledge how our ancestors suffered and still survived and nurtured successful, strong, and capable new generations, we can draw strength for our own struggle for justice.”

Anna Daróczy, Hungary



How to teach about the persecution and genocide of the Roma?



Roma voices

“There is a lack of discussion about states’ and individuals’ roles in the humiliation, exclusion, and murder of families and whole communities. If people gain a better understanding of the history of Roma during the Second World War and the ongoing persecution, they may comprehend their responsibilities to make a change today.”

Anna Daróczy, Hungary

“Political factors, including institutionalized discrimination and lack of government recognition, can pose challenges to raising awareness about the persecution of Roma. Inadequate governmental support for initiatives focused on Roma history, education, and remembrance can impede efforts to enhance public understanding. Overcoming these obstacles requires concerted efforts to promote inclusive education, challenge stereotypes, address systemic inequalities, amplify Roma voices, and advocate for greater recognition of the genocide of the Roma.”

Mia Taikon, Sweden



How to teach about the persecution and genocide of the Roma?

Policymakers make critical decisions about the nature of educational provisions in their national and regional contexts, and each country will have its own distinct systems and capacities to consider.

What follows is a range of recommendations to support policymakers in introducing and developing teaching and learning about the persecution and genocide of Roma into various learning programs within educational settings. They point to principles and approaches conducive to powerful and effective learning interactions.

In addition, these will also be helpful for educators, providing guidance on good pedagogical practice. These recommendations echo many of those found in the *IHRA Recommendations for Teaching and Learning About the Holocaust*.

A deeper understanding about the genocide of the Roma is of tremendous importance and relevance, not only for learners who live in areas impacted by this history, but for all. It is an essential part of European history – a catastrophe that devastated a group of individuals with a long history and tradition who are, today, Europe's largest minority.

Teaching about the crimes inflicted on Roma during the Nazi era, their responses to it, the struggle for recognition of this genocide in the years that followed, and its links to contemporary antigypsyism, is essential. When taught well, learners can engage with key concepts and questions, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the significance of this history in the current context, and ensuring it is no longer forgotten.

Challenges and opportunities

Challenges

Teaching about mass atrocity is far from straightforward and can challenge even the most experienced of practitioners. When it comes to education about the genocide of the Roma, policymakers will need to be ready to tackle and resolve a number of issues:

Knowledge gaps

Due to a general lack of public attention to the genocide of the Roma, and the shortage of research, scholarship, literature, and training on the subject, the extent of educators' knowledge may understandably be limited. This, in turn, can affect educators' confidence, and raise anxiety as to whether they feel they can do justice to this important history. Building educator capacity and confidence to provide robust, quality learning experiences on this history is a key consideration.

Time, textbooks, and terminology

Teaching challenging and complex histories such as the genocide of the Roma cannot be done in a hurry. Yet curricula and learning programs are crowded spaces and it may well require a degree of lateral thinking to overcome this issue. Without time, the rich educational opportunities that this history presents can be lost and might result in overly simplistic and distorted understandings.

Textbooks about this period rarely provide enough coverage of the genocide of the Roma. There is often an emphasis on what was done to Roma, rather than including personal stories that reflect Roma perspectives, agency, and action. Historic photographs of Roma featured in many textbooks are often those taken by perpetrators intent on reflecting Roma in a certain light as part of propaganda policy, yet this vital information is frequently missing from photographs' captions. It can leave the textbook reader with a false impression that misrepresents and reinforces negative stereotypes.

Another challenge is that there is no universally agreed-upon terminology to describe the genocide of the Roma, which can generate confusion.

Negative attitudes and misconceptions

As schools reflect the societies within which they exist, and since misconceptions about the genocide and stigmatization of Roma are widespread and ongoing, it is possible that such negative attitudes will also be present in classroom spaces. Policymakers will need to consider how to help practitioners pre-empt, recognize, and address such incidents. They should also reflect on how they can encourage practitioners' self-awareness of unconscious biases and tacit or explicit prejudices about Roma. Policymakers may also encounter resistance at a policy level and will need to demonstrate bold and well-informed direction.

Providing the right support for Roma educators and learners

It is important to be responsive to the needs and emotions of learners – their views, opinions, and feelings matter. Thoughtfulness and respect are of paramount importance, especially when handling traumatic events in the company of those who are connected to them. Policymakers will need to consider how to ensure that Roma educators and learners, some of whom may have direct family links to the genocide, are supported, especially when this history is being covered. Roma educators and learners may be open to sharing their perspectives and family stories, which can bring about positive, inclusive, and empathic learning for all those present. Practitioners need to generate a culture of respect, care, and compassion for this to be achieved.



Roma voices

“Educators should be curious, enthusiastic, and willing to learn about this history. When teaching this history in schools, educators should be aware of the presence of Roma students in the classroom and also ensure that safeguarding policies are properly implemented if Roma pupils are bullied.”

Tania Gessi, UK

“As an official international resource, the IHRA Recommendations should find their way into educational policymaking to provide a good framework for educators who want to teach about the genocide of the Roma. This is crucial to understanding and stopping contemporary forms of antigypsyism.”

Anna Daróczy, Hungary



Opportunities

These challenges are not insurmountable. Recent years have seen considerable momentum and support for recognizing the importance of including the history of this genocide (and broader Roma history) into national curricula and learning programs. With it, new resources for educational stakeholders have emerged. They guide, support, and help address many of the challenges.

Conferences, exhibitions, public lectures, and days of remembrance are taking place more frequently. These initiatives have been led by Roma and non-Roma activists, civil society organizations, universities, museums, galleries, school administrators, teachers, ministries, governmental departments, international bodies, and Holocaust-related organizations, amongst others.

Opportunities to conduct empirical research will further what we already know and understand about teaching and learning about the genocide of the Roma. Research could usefully measure:

- the effectiveness of various pedagogical approaches.
- the short-term and long-term impact of teaching and learning about the genocide of the Roma.
- factors that inhibit learning and factors that enhance it.
- misconceptions commonly held by learners and how to counter them.
- specific training needs of teachers and educators.
- content knowledge appropriate for different age phases.
- ways in which learners with diverse needs can successfully access this history.
- the impact of new technologies on learning.

While the topic may initially feel daunting, it is possible to teach about the genocide of the Roma effectively, and in a manner which results in powerful educational opportunities and significant learning outcomes.

Policymakers are well positioned to build teachers' capacities to embark on this compelling, important, and rewarding process, provided that the will and the commitment to deploy resources to support this work are present.

Overarching principles

As with teaching about the Holocaust, there are various entry points, curriculum foci, pedagogic methodologies, sources, and inquiry questions that can help determine how teaching and learning about the genocide of the Roma might be approached. Whether teaching from a human rights perspective, a historical paradigm, or an interdisciplinary framework, there are overarching principles for teaching about the genocide of the Roma which should remain constant.

Include Roma perspectives and voices

Testimony from Roma survivors, and their descendants, should form a central pillar of the history that is provided to learners. Only after becoming acquainted with personal testimony may individuals begin to meaningfully understand the scope of the crime of genocide perpetuated against the Roma. Many source documents and photographs relating to Roma, as mentioned earlier, are produced by perpetrators or individuals with biased, stereotypical, and racist views. If used, they must be deconstructed, in conjunction with learners, so that the racist and anti-Roma content and origin is thoroughly explained. Testimony accessed from reliable sources should complement the historical record and documentary evidence, reflecting life before and after the war. Testimony can further be used to help learners understand Roma as a diverse, transnational minority with lives, hopes, and ambitions which were destroyed. From engaging with reflections of Roma today, learners can gain a deeper understanding of intergenerational trauma and the lasting impact of genocide.

Comparisons are important for understanding – but do not compare suffering

Comparing perpetrators' ideologies, motives, actions, and processes – as well as societal responses to crimes against different groups – helps in understanding the similarities, differences, and characteristics of the different crimes and victim experiences. When striving to shed light on aspects of mass atrocities that intersect or run parallel to one another, educators should communicate respectfully, clearly, and carefully avoid offensive or distortive remarks.

Comparing the suffering of victims is unethical and does not offer any educational value. Any perceived hierarchy of suffering among victims only reflects the skewed racist views and values of the perpetrators, not the value of human lives.

More information concerning comparative approaches and language is available in the [IHRA Reflections on Terminology for Holocaust Comparison](#).

Connect the past to the present

Learners should be aware that genocide is a process that does not start with killings and does not end with liberation. When explaining the persecution of Roma during the Nazi era, it is essential to introduce the life of Roma communities before this period. This includes past atrocities and violence, as well as their everyday life and contribution to European culture and identity. The continuity of anti-Roma discrimination is linked to the lack of recognition and acknowledgment of Nazi era crimes. Making this connection is crucial for understanding and countering contemporary antigypsyism – one of the most salient aspects of teaching and learning about the persecution and genocide of the Roma. Examples of current racist or discriminatory incidents, policies, and other expressions of exclusion of Roma communities, as well as our collective and individual responsibility and accountability to prevent and counter it, should be an integral part of the learning program.

Approaches to teaching and learning

When teaching this history, it is important to follow certain principles to ensure a respectful and meaningful learning experience for everyone present. The following approaches can help guide your instruction effectively.

Be sure to approach the study with care

As with the teaching of any traumatic history, teachers should prioritize and respect: 1) the historical evidence, 2) the memory of the victims, and 3) the independent thinking and emotional well-being of learners. Be sure to present learners with accurate information, unpack any misconceptions, and facilitate critical thinking. It is important to handle disturbing information sensitively and forewarn learners of any difficult information that may be explored. Consider learners' life experiences, and any related issues when determining how to approach the history of this genocide with due care.

Introduce genocide by learning about life

Teaching about the genocide of the Roma should not be the first encounter learners have with Roma. Defining groups by their victimization diminishes their historical and contemporary identity and experience. Rather than starting with the genocide, aim to introduce learners to the vibrancy and diversity of Roma today and in the past. It is also crucial to present the significant contribution they have made to their countries, cultures, traditions, and communities across Europe.

Contextualize the genocide within broader Roma history

It is important to include the long history of Roma to teach about the complexity, diversity, and richness of their experiences. In this, the focus should remain on Roma as agents of their own history, so as not to incorrectly represent Roma as passive objects of the prejudices and persecution of others. To focus solely on persecution is to take a perpetrator perspective which skews understanding. Teaching and learning should aim to value and understand Roma experiences and perspectives.

Emphasize both the local and pan-European dimensions of the genocide

While educators may choose to focus the study on the experience of Roma who lived in the local context before and at the beginning of the genocide, it is also important to help learners locate this within the context of European history as a whole. This will include the centuries of anti-Roma discrimination that came before the Nazi period. Ensuring this is presented alongside a comprehensive overview of the Nazi era will help to ensure that learners come to understand the circumstances and factors that made the genocide possible and how deeply antigypsyism was embedded across Europe.

Learners should be able to identify that the persecution and genocide of Roma was carried out by different perpetrators, in different ways, and to different degrees from country to country, and that this diversified over time. Using historical maps as tools to locate countries, borders, and Roma communities before and during the persecution is vital in understanding the history, timeline, and impact of this genocide.

Help learners to understand that genocide is a social act

Understanding genocide as a process which develops in society as a whole can help learners identify warning signs and possibilities for prevention and intervention. Encouraging them to consider questions such as, “What type of intervention, by whom, and at what point might have changed the course of history and prevented the genocide?” helps learners come to recognize the warning signs, conditions, and indicators of a genocidal threat.

Emphasize the distinctive characteristics of Roma experiences

Rather than analyzing Roma experiences exclusively through the lens of parallel atrocities, focus on its main characteristics.

Consider gender perspectives

Gender-sensitive teaching and learning will enhance understanding not only of the victims – their resourcefulness, courage, and suffering – but also of the complex matrix of perpetrator roles. It is essential to analyze how gender perspectives shaped the perpetrators’ policies and actions toward men and women and, consequently, the victims’ experiences, such as sexual violence and forced sterilization. When faced with persecution, women and men were equipped with very different skills, knowledge, and life experiences.

Key characteristics of the persecution and genocide of the Roma to explore with learners

- 1 Centuries of antigypsyism, discrimination, persecution, and violence against Roma laid the foundation for this genocide.
- 2 Nazi racist ideology against Roma fuelled this genocide.
- 3 Local Fascists and Nazis, extreme nationalists, and other collaborators participated in this genocide together with Nazi Germany. The actions and policies against Roma varied in different regions and localities.
- 4 The aftermath of decades of non-recognition of this genocide resulted in continuous and ongoing discrimination and marginalization.

It is important to reflect on women's, often untold, experiences when teaching this history to provide essential insight towards understanding the full nature of genocide. When teaching and learning about the persecution of the Roma, it is crucial to avoid reaffirming gender stereotypes when presenting the traditional gender roles of the past. One way to do this is to emphasize the agency and strength of Roma women during the Nazi era, for example, those in the resistance or those who helped and saved others. Women also played a leading role in the emancipation of Roma in the decades after the war and continue to be a powerful voice in the movement despite the extreme disadvantages they face in many European societies.

One of the strongest examples of the devastating consequences of the lack of recognition of this genocide is the continuation of forced sterilization of Roma women and men in some parts of Europe, such as Czechoslovakia, Romania, Sweden, and Switzerland, for several decades after the fall of Nazism.

Encourage learners to explore various perspectives of diversity to understand how the persecution affected different people within the Roma community, including men, women, and non-binary people. In addition to gender, these might include perspectives of people of different ages, religions, nationalities, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and others (see historical example number 15 and 16).

Provide opportunities for learners to not only learn about, but also from this genocide

Increasing learners' knowledge about the genocide is only part of the educational objective. Gaining conceptual understanding and insight from the knowledge is where learning is achieved. Using a teaching approach that allows for independent thinking, debate, and structured conversations based on sound evidence and reliable sources enables learners to seek their own connections to history and how it relates to the world they live in and their understanding of the human condition.

Historical examples

15

Milica Katić, Romni,² was born around 1905 in the village of Dren, near Obrenovac (Yugoslavia/Serbia). Shortly after the outbreak of the Second World War, she joined partisan resistance movements with her sons, spied on enemy positions, and guided partisan units to them. In February 1942, however, she was discovered and arrested by Chetnik forces, who tortured and later handed her over to the Germans, who sent her to the Smederevska Palanka Concentration Camp. On 18 June 1942, she was transferred to the Banjica concentration camp in Belgrade where she was executed on 25 May 1943.

16

Ceija (Čeja) Stojka (1933–2013) was an Austrian Romni from a Lovara family, and became a prominent activist, author, musician, artist, and professor. She survived internment in Auschwitz-Birkenau, Ravensbrück, and Bergen-Belsen, where she was freed in 1945. She wrote about her experience in the camps. Ceija Stojka is mainly known for her paintings depicting the death camps and life before the war.

² Romni: Word for a Roma woman. Rom: Word for a Roma man.

Ensure learners are aware of differences and sensitivities of terminology when referring to Roma and the genocide of the Roma

Strive to use terms accurately and responsibly to avoid misrepresentation, confusion, and the inadvertent spread of negative connotations. Learners need to be able to understand the word genocide and its origins. It is important to use the right terminology when describing the genocide of the Roma, as it is related to its recognition. The best way forward is to consult with local, regional, or national Roma communities on preferred terminology.

Provide learners with the opportunity to critically discuss terminology

Educators and learners should avoid using language used by perpetrators in general discussion about the genocide. Many terms are coded words or euphemisms (e.g., liquidation, deportation, evacuation, resettlement) and were deliberate attempts by perpetrators to conceal their intention or deceive and dupe their victims. Unpacking these terms with learners will help them to understand how deception played a role in facilitating mass murder and why, therefore, they need to be referred to appropriately.

Emphasize human stories

Weaving personal accounts into the historical narrative and following the threads will engage learners on an affective as well as cognitive level and can result in deeper levels of understanding than would otherwise be achieved. Drawing out learners' empathy is critical to understanding the impact that the suffering had on real people, the diverse ways individuals responded to the actions inflicted upon them, the dilemmas they faced, the pain they endured and the long-term impact the genocide had on those who survived. Educators should help facilitate learners' emotional literacy by providing safe spaces to express deep feelings and also alternative means of expression, such as through the arts.

Challenge the common misconception that perpetrators and collaborators acted alone and were, in some way, "not like us"

Ordinary people, whether in uniform or not, committed crimes against Roma during the Nazi era. Learners should confront the willing collaboration of many in the persecution and killings. Individuals betrayed their Roma neighbors, sought to benefit from their suffering, or turned a blind eye. Ideology, old prejudices, brutal war, the extreme isolation of "the other," greed, indifference, and government-sanctioned murder, combined to allow ordinary people to become perpetrators. Without confronting these uneasy facts, important lessons about human propensities and motivations and the nature of genocide and complicity in all its forms will be lost. Provide examples and case studies where possible to demonstrate the varied nature of collaboration.

Recognize that the genocide of the Roma was not inevitable

It is important that educators and learners come to understand that the genocide of the Roma was not an accident of history or that it was, in some way, inevitable. Centuries of anti-Roma discrimination across Europe provided fertile ground for an escalation of violence and the eventual genocide was made possible because of the decisions, choices, and actions of individuals, nations, and groups, as well as the non-action of the majority. The murder of men, women, and children could have been avoided. Realization of this truth and its implication is a key educational objective.

Be sure to feature Roma agency

Learners should understand that victims were not passive actors through the unfolding genocide but were individuals with agency who in a number of cases, resisted persecution even while the odds of success were slim. Roma faced unimaginable dilemmas and life-threatening choices. They acted and struggled to live and protect themselves despite the hopelessness of the conditions. They resisted and fought back as partisans or soldiers in allied forces. They made escape attempts and reached out to save others in their efforts to survive. Introducing first-hand accounts of Roma responses (including rescue, resilience, and resistance) from trusted sources, re-balances an otherwise one-dimensional and perpetrator-led narrative. It can help restore Roma agency and broaden understanding of resilience and the capacity for survival. When learners understand the conditions Roma were put in and punishments they were threatened with, they can better understand the risks involved in resistance (see historical example number 17 and 18).

Select and interpret carefully when using images of Roma

It is important to be mindful when using visual representations of Roma. Be sure to seek out and share with learners the provenance of photographs wherever possible, so that they can understand the context. Most of the available photographs from the Nazi era were taken by perpetrators for the purpose of propaganda, or as wartime “souvenirs” to mail home. Roma were forced to smile at the camera or were framed in such a way as to be portrayed in a negative light. As such, these images are evidence of the crime of the perpetrators and are not authentic representations of Roma of the period. Realities were often very different from the representations that have survived in archives. Conversations with learners about how such images should be categorized – “visual evidence” or “visual weapon” – could stimulate critical thinking and debate. For a suggestion of how educators can explore a powerful story with learners through a propaganda image see the example based on the image of Theresia Winterstein and Gabriel Reinhardt.

Historical examples

- 17** | **Alfreda Markowska** (1926–2021) was a Polish Romni who saved approximately fifty Jewish and Roma children. At the age of sixteen, she traveled to sites where massacres had taken place to look for survivors and help them. She was awarded the Commander’s Cross with Star of the Order of Polonia Restituta in 2006 for her heroic humanitarian acts.
- 18** | **Hajrija Imeri Mihaljić** was a Romni from the village of Ade near Obilić, in Yugoslavia at the time. Unfortunately, the dates of her birth and death are unknown. She worked as a housekeeper for the Jewish family Acević in Kosovska Mitrovica. During the Nazi occupation, she saved their daughter, Ester-Stela Acević, from persecution. At the initiative of Ester-Stela Acević, Yad Vashem honored Hajrija Mihaljić as Righteous Among the Nations in 1991. She is the only Romni to receive this recognition. In 2023, a sculpture in memory of Hajrija Imeri Mihaljić was erected in the park of the Roma Memorial Center in Uštica, Croatia.

Some photographs, such as those in the private collections of Roma families, are useful for contrasting and refuting the narrative of the perpetrators. Private photographs often show people in their home environment, with family, friends, and neighbors, in everyday life and at work. They show that Roma have always been an integral part of society and firmly anchored in their hometowns. If historical images are not available, contemporary

photographs of Roma are useful for contrasting the stereotyping and demonizing perspectives projected in perpetrator photographs.



Learners need to be informed of the provenance of any photograph, as well as the historical context to understand and interpret what is truly going on. Educators should allow adequate time for learners to carefully unpack an image.

(Courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum USHMM, courtesy of Rita Prigmore. The image forms part of a series of lessons on the genocide of the Roma created by B Warnock, Wiener Library London, and A Chapman, IOE University College London.)

Pedagogical example

This photo depicts Theresia Winterstein and Gabriel Reinhardt taking their twin daughters, Rita and Rolanda, for a walk in Würzburg, Germany in April 1943. At a first glance, the photograph presents a perfect couple, looking happy and having a pleasant day out. The reality could not have been more different. The twin girls had been taken from their parents at birth by German authorities for experimentation and one died just days after this photograph was taken. Here, as part of a propaganda campaign, the couple were allowed to take their babies out and walk along a street in Würzburg, forced to appear happy and well. On closer inspection, a German soldier can be seen overseeing the charade to make sure the Reinhardt family obeys the order to smile at the camera. The couple is not yet married in this photograph. They were only allowed to do so in 1944, a year after this picture was taken, and after being forced to undergo sterilization procedures.

A photo such as this can be examined initially without the context provided. Learners could be asked to simply share what they see in the photo followed by questions. The questions could revolve around when the photo was taken, where, why, who the subjects of the photo might be, the reason for the couple walking down the street looking so happy, and significantly, who might be taking the photo and for what purpose. The learners can be asked to look closer at the photo to try to find clues to answer these questions – identifying the man in uniform with the Nazi insignia armband. This deduction will help learners orient the photo in its context, enabling them to rethink the circumstances that the couple may be in. Layering the examination with further contextual knowledge can reveal the reality behind the propaganda.

Do not expect insightful responses from just a cursory glance, especially if an image depicts suffering. It is important for learners to draw inferences and discuss their reactions on seeing such images. Try to help learners understand that behind an image of a death was a life lost and provide them with the tools to see an image beyond its face value. This will help them better understand photographs of the genocide they may encounter outside class, including on the internet.

Careful use of disturbing images in education

Educators should be very careful when choosing to use images that are graphic and have the potential to disturb the learner. A strong educational rationale and respect for the memory of the victims are crucially important factors to consider. Images need to be handled with great sensitivity and carefully chosen. There is a danger of numbing learners to the humanity of the people captured in photographs if educators do not adequately contextualize them.

The educational priority is to protect against emotional harm and to help learners understand and critically reflect with empathy and accurate knowledge. There is always a risk that graphic descriptions, photographs, and moving images can trigger traumatic reactions. Thus, great care should be taken when choosing to use these materials in class. The educator should consider each learner's psychological wellbeing before deciding whether it is wise to use such images in the classroom and, if so, which images are suitable choices.

Engage learners through site-based learning

Site visits offer immersive educational opportunities to learning about genocide. Location-based learning cannot be achieved within the confines of a regular classroom nor from a textbook, however good the curriculum is. New technologies and multi-media tools have their place in site-based learning, when used responsibly.

Pedagogical example

To show a contemporary image of empty wasteland, a field, the woods, or a city square, with a contextual explanation that reveals where Roma once lived or where killings of Roma took place, can be powerful without exposing young people to traumatizing, graphic content. Works of art and culture by Roma artists can be used instead of photographs, offering distance while still being thought-provoking.

Sites, not just those where killings took place, but also places of everyday life before the persecution and genocide began, are suitable focal points for location-based learning. Using contemporary and historical maps together with other resources including video testimony of personal accounts, educators and learners can set out to discover traces of this past in their vicinity. Site visits help learners better understand local historical connections to this history and how local communities remember the past.

Be sensitive to Roma learners and educators

Care and forethought should be taken when teaching about this topic, especially when working with Roma educators and learners. Roma educators and learners should not be expected to know more about Roma history than other learners and may not necessarily wish to disclose any family connections to this genocide. No one should be put under pressure to contribute. However, others may be keen to participate prominently in the learning process. Consult with parents, caregivers, and local Roma support groups for advice and guidance. Personal stories must be shared in safe spaces and speakers should receive respect and support, along with appreciation for their willingness to access or relive painful individual and familial pasts. It is important that educators recognize that sharing painful and intimate stories can be an emotionally demanding and courageous process. This approach can add to a sense of ownership of the narrative and the inclusion of Roma voices and perspectives in educational settings.

Pedagogical example

A *Stolperstein*, translated as “stumbling block,” is a form of memorial that people can learn about, research, and follow. Stolpersteine, a European-wide project of the German artist Gunter Demnig, are brass plaques engraved with the individual names of persecuted Jews, Roma, or other victims, often placed in front of their former homes, giving information about their persecution. These can be introduced as a way of rehumanizing the victims and ensuring people who pass by this location know and understand what occurred at the site.

Responding to negative connotations or remarks about Roma

In the event of incidents, which may include slurs, “jokes,” or unintentional misunderstandings, it is important not to ignore them and to take immediate action. Ideally, learning spaces such as schools will have a working policy on preventing, monitoring, and responding in such circumstances approved by policymakers. Such incidents need to be confronted and addressed unequivocally. If directed at an individual, the priority should be to ensure that they are protected and listened to before dealing with those who are responsible for the offense. Direct engagement with local Roma communities can help in dealing with the incident and supporting the victims. The IHRA working definition of antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination is a useful tool for informing school policy.

Create opportunities to examine the complex nature of the human condition by considering the choices and actions of individuals

Exploring case studies of real individuals will help learners to better understand the predicaments Roma faced, including the life-and-death dilemmas, decisions, and choices they were faced with. This approach can bring learners closer to the history being studied and help learners relate to it on a personal level. Resources should be available to help learners unpack and identify the many complex factors involved, including the possible consequences of critical choices and action.

Historical example**19**

Zoni Weisz (1937), Sinto from the Netherlands, was the oldest of four children. In May 1944, Zoni’s family was sent by the Nazis to the Westerbork transit camp, with other Sinti and Roma and deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where his mother and siblings were all killed. His father was killed at the Mittelbau-Dora camp. Thanks to the Dutch resistance, Zoni managed to avoid deportation and survive. After the war, he frequently shared his experiences and played a crucial role in seeking recognition and acknowledgment of the atrocities committed against Sinti and Roma victims. On 27 January 2011, he made history as the first Roma or Sinti to address the German Bundestag during an official Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremony.

Using terms and categories such as perpetrator, collaborator, bystander, victim, and rescuer are useful to start learners thinking about individual actors in the genocide. However, these categories should be complemented by actual case studies from the time to reveal to learners how clear-cut categories do not always allow for the comprehensive understating of complex human behavior. An individual can be considered a perpetrator in one scenario and a rescuer in another – illustrating the intricate and even contradicting nature of human behavior, particularly in extreme circumstances.

Using critical thinking skills can help learners understand how potentially dangerous it is to judge, label, and stereotype individuals and communities. Avoid reinforcing stereotypical formulations – not all rescuers were heroic, not all bystanders were indifferent. Counter any misconceptions that Roma were passive in the persecution and genocide that they suffered. It is also important to challenge any myths that there may be certain national traits that characterize people.

Allocate time and space for learners to reflect

Ensure learners can ask questions and engage in discussion. Often the most impactful learning in an educational setting is driven by the questions learners asked and insights shared. Provide learners with time to reflect on what they have learned, their emotional responses, and how this knowledge can inform their actions in promoting tolerance and social justice.

Using sources and resources for teaching and learning

Objects, photographs, and documents are dynamic sources to link learners to the past, bring deeper understanding of historical events, and provide opportunities for critical thinking and evidence-based learning. Several collections of personal objects, photographs, diaries, and journals, belonging to Roma who were murdered or who survived, now reside in museum collections. In many cases, these have been digitized and can be accessed online by educators in learning settings. There are also other stakeholder organizations that are working to make personal items more easily available to educators, together with related lesson plans and supplementary information. Some museums and Holocaust centers have digital collections of survivor testimonies that have been created with learners in mind.

Different storytelling formats such as graphic novels based on real life accounts of individuals have been produced in collaboration with Roma. These can be appealing resources for learners, who may find the visual storytelling language of a graphic novel particularly accessible. Illustrations can provide entry-points into complex content and questions, help identification with the characters, and foster literacy.

Roma communities have often turned to poetry, art, and music as vehicles of expression, in responding to the genocide and in their ongoing struggle for recognition.

Pedagogical example

An example of a poem suitable for exploring with learners is *Auschwitz* by Italian Roma poet and activist Santino Spinelli (born 1964). This poem is inscribed on the Memorial to the Sinti and Roma of Europe murdered under National Socialism in Berlin.

Auschwitz

*Gaunt face
dead eyes
cold lips
quiet
a broken heart
out of breath
without words
no tears*

Educators can ask learners to highlight three words from the poem that sum up what the author is mourning here. Further questions could include:

- Why did the poet write this poem?
- What motivated him?
- How do you understand the poem?
- Now that you have learned about the genocide of the Roma, what three words encapsulate your understanding of it, its legacy, and meaning to you?

Learners could be invited to juxtapose the poem with the well-known image of Anna Maria “Settela” Steinbach (1934-1944), a young girl deported from Westerbork to Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944, with members of her family. The haunting image shows her face peering through a gap in a transportation wagon.

Policy, curriculum and training

Key aspects for policymaking

Educational policymaking should emphasize the necessity of teaching about this genocide. Strive to establish working committees of experts, including local Roma representatives, NGOs, academic experts, and educational practitioners, to support the development of a clear rationale for the inclusion of the genocide of the Roma into educational policy and systems. This is fundamental to effective advocacy and implementation. Policymakers can emphasize that this historical event is not only an important part of Roma history but is also an important part of national and transnational history and identity. Examples and strategies from other educational settings as demonstrations of implementation will help.

Key aspects to consider from a policy perspective are:

- acknowledging the genocide of the Roma.
- reflecting on the historical roots of antigypsyism and hatred against Roma.
- learning about the dynamics that led to mass murder.
- challenging the negative images handed down from perpetrators.
- critically analyzing collaboration and personal responsibilities in the past and present.
- raising awareness of the persistence of antigypsyism and racism against Roma.

Integrating and adopting the [IHRA working definition of antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination](#) is a useful step. The tool enables ministries of education, schools, universities, and other educational sites and spaces to recognize and counter prejudice and discrimination against Roma. Having such a definition embedded in educational policy, school systems, or organizations makes a clear statement of intent and commitment to counter prejudice.



Roma voices

“Educators should organize field trips to relevant historical sites, museums, and memorials where learners can learn about the genocide of the Roma firsthand.”

Kludia Veizaj, Albania





Roma voices

“Whom do we need to teach? Do we need to teach the children or the directors and teachers that Roma are also human beings?”

Natalia Yuzypchuk, Ukraine



Curriculum development

Dedicated time and space in the curriculum are vital for a meaningful examination of the persecution and genocide of the Roma. While the topic should be approached at a defined, dedicated time, it can and should also be incorporated across different stages in formal schooling. This is sometimes referred to as a spiral curriculum – a course of study in which learners see the same topics throughout their schooling, with each encounter increasing in complexity and reinforcing past learning. It can start with age-appropriate questions about equality, rights, diversity, and culture, gradually building up to conceptual knowledge, employed for and empowered by learning about the persecution and genocide of the Roma. Meeting with Roma communities at an early age is a powerful route to build bridges, friendships, and foster understanding.

An interdisciplinary approach

Where possible, educators from different subject disciplines should collaborate on multidisciplinary approaches and plan well-conceived themes to integrate and complement learning. This will increase the time and space needed to cover the genocide of the Roma in the curriculum and offer learners a well-rounded and enriching educational experience. Multidisciplinary approaches require collaboration, dialogue, and cooperation between educators in different subject areas. They should carefully work through the distinctive contribution each subject can offer to the study and ensure that learning activities and outcomes fit together logically. Digital learning platforms and communication tools can support learning activities for learners in different fields and locations.

Spaces for exploring this history can also be found through extracurricular activities. These include after-school clubs, special interest clubs, and local history projects. Another useful space can be found through focused learning days, that coincide with Roma art and culture festivals, exhibitions, and various international and national Roma Days of celebration, remembrance, and commemorations, such as the International Roma Day, Roma Language Day, etc.

It is important to caution educators about activities that involve simulation or roleplay, such as exercises that encourage learners to imagine they were directly involved in the genocide. These can lead to false equivalencies or trivialization as learners try to find unrealistic comparisons with their own lives.

Setting clear goals

Policymakers and educators need to determine clear goals depending on several factors, including the age, experience, educational needs, and prior knowledge of learners, as well as the educational settings (informal, formal, museum settings, or alternative learning facilities).

With these fundamentals in mind, learning outcomes should increase the understanding:

- of Roma past and present.
- that the persecution and genocide committed against Roma during the Nazi era was a massive pan-European crime.
- that Roma were victims of the local Fascists and Nazis, extreme nationalists, and other collaborators who participated in the genocide together with Nazi Germany.
- that Roma actively took part in European resistance.
- of the impact which silence in the aftermath, along with the lack of recognition and remembrance, had on Roma.
- that the fight for the recognition of the crimes committed against Roma was a focal point of the Roma civil rights movement since its beginning, and still is.

Learners should be able to:

- formulate their own position on why this history has relevance today.
- formulate their own position on personal responsibility and accountability to prevent human and civil rights abuse, discrimination, and antigypsyism/anti-Roma racism.
- actively take part in debunking and countering distortion and denial of the genocide of the Roma.

Textbook review and development

A review of existing resources and textbooks used in schools is advised. This basic checklist can help policymakers review textbooks and supplementary materials and consider whether changes need to be made.

Textbook checklist:	Yes	No
Does the textbook include names, stories, family photographs, and testimonies of Roma?		
Does the textbook use correct and accessible terminology?		
Does the textbook present Roma life before the war?		
Does the textbook cover the different Roma experiences across Europe?		
Does the textbook reflect Nazi and Fascist collaborators and ordinary people who participated in the persecution of Roma?		
Are accounts of Roma resilience, rescue, and resistance included?		
Are there opportunities for learners to critically analyze diary extracts, documents, eyewitness accounts, or photographs?		
Does the textbook consider gender perspectives?		
What type of imagery is being used? Does it stereotype? Is context provided? Is imagery being deconstructed to show the deliberate attempts to propagate a racist ideology?		
Does the textbook outline what constitutes genocide?		
Does the textbook describe liberation and the immediate aftermath?		
Are the characteristics distinctive of the Roma experience made clear, including the racist ideology of the perpetrators?		
Is there coverage of justice and recognition after the war and the lack of acknowledgment?		
Does the textbook discuss remembrance days and important local and international memorials?		
Does the textbook challenge common misconceptions and historical distortion and denial?		
Does the textbook cover the Roma civil rights movement and its connection to the fight for recognition of the genocide of the Roma?		
Do the activities suggested in the textbook engage learners in critical thinking and personal responses?		

This checklist can also be used to gauge the suitability of other materials on the genocide of the Roma.

Integration with a human rights agenda

Human rights education can provide a powerful entry point and framework for examining the genocide of the Roma. The preservation and protection of human rights are necessary elements in promoting the importance of democratic values and responsible citizenship.

Roma, having been denied basic rights for centuries, are one of the most persecuted communities in the world today. It is important to understand how this leads to normalization of discrimination, marginalization, and segregation in society, and damages human flourishing and freedoms.

Approaching a study of the genocide of Roma through the study of human rights provides an opportunity for interdisciplinary study. It also allows for an examination of laws and treaties that were established after this genocide, which helps to understand, protect, and preserve fundamental freedoms.

The 2011 United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training defines three dimensions of human rights education. These could also be related to the teaching and learning about the persecution and genocide of the Roma.

Historical example

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Rudolf Sarközi was born in the Lackenbach concentration camp in 1944. Under the most difficult conditions, his Roma mother and Sinti father managed to ensure his survival. The family was liberated at the end of March 1945. Like many young Roma, Rudolf Sarközi was unable to find an apprenticeship and worked as a laborer. After moving to Vienna in 1964, he became politically active and began to campaign for the rights of Roma and Sinti in Austria and was one of the founding members of the first Roma association in Austria. A short time later, he also founded the Cultural Association of Austrian Roma and remained its chairman for many years. In 1993, the associations succeeded in having Austrian Roma and Sinti recognized as an ethnic group. Rudolf Sarközi died in 2016 at the age of 72.

Dimensions of Human Rights Education applied to teaching and learning about the persecution and genocide of Roma

Dimension 1	Teaching <i>about</i> human rights: understanding norms and principles of human rights	The impact of the persecution and genocide of the Roma on the formulation, codification, and entrenchment of human rights, especially in the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights and the United Nations Genocide Convention.
Dimension 2	Teaching <i>through</i> human rights: using methods based on human rights approaches	The use of active, learner-centered methods which empower and enhance discovery, in ways that respect, uphold and enhance the rights of learners and educators.
Dimension 3	Teaching <i>for</i> human rights: empowering learners to apply and uphold human rights principles.	Teaching and learning about the persecution and genocide of Roma can provide case studies of mechanisms and processes that lead to human rights violations which can escalate into large-scale targeted violence such as genocide. Perspectives from peace, genocide prevention, or democratic citizenship education can also be used to analyze the events of the genocide.

Training

Provide training opportunities for educators so they are equipped, ready, and able to teach about the genocide of the Roma.

Teacher training is an essential element in implementing impactful and long-lasting policy on teaching and learning about the persecution and genocide of the Roma. Training is most effective when delivered by recognized providers with sound knowledge of this history who can relay its significance.

Where possible, direct engagement with representatives from local Roma communities and/or experts in the history of Roma will enrich a teacher training course.


Training to support teaching about the genocide of the Roma can be incorporated within existing programs for pre-service and in-service educators about racism prevention, citizenship, inclusion and diversity education, global citizenship, human rights education, and humanities teaching. It should be given distinct attention rather than subsumed under a general label of a form of racism.

It is recommended that effective training incorporate three essential components: content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and personal knowledge.

In order to construct effective curricula, teaching strategies, and lesson plans, educational policymakers and stakeholders can use the following chart to design relevant components.

This chart (inspired by UNESCO's 2015 model of global citizenship education: topics and learning objectives) serves as an example and can be filled in to match the needs and context of the course:

Content knowledge <i>What the educator needs to know, the content to pass on to learners</i>	Pedagogical knowledge <i>Pedagogical approaches and methodologies</i>	Personal knowledge <i>Self-awareness of knowledge, experiences, and prejudice (such as inherited family narratives and societal awareness)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intense study of the history and culture of Roma and the genocide particularly in the local context. • Deepen understanding of the broader European context and history of this crime. • Develop awareness of organizations and experts that offer educational materials and resources for educators to teach about Roma history and culture and persecution during the Nazi era. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What skills, awareness, and expert resources do educators need to teach the genocide of the Roma effectively and accurately? • How can various innovative teaching methodologies, along with testimonies, arts, and culture, be used to represent the perspectives of Roma and the genocide? • What are the aims and goals for teaching this topic and how might educators measure achievements? What are the expected learning outcomes? • What are ways to identify anti-Roma prejudice and stereotypes, and what strategies can be employed to counter them? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How self-aware am I? What are my biases and prejudices? What are my responsibilities and duties as an educator to address antigypsyism, bias, and prejudice? What are the wider contexts I am positioned within, and how do they impact my learners? • Which personal and professional responsibilities and obligations are required when presenting the historical record and the memory of the victims? • In what ways can we ensure that individuals are recognized and respected as independent learners? • What are the challenges I will face in teaching this history? • What are my personal goals in teaching about the genocide of the Roma people?
<i>Example: Life of Roma in the interwar period</i>	<i>Example: Incorporate Roma voices and perspectives</i>	<i>Example: Explore and deconstruct local and personal misconceptions</i>



Roma voices

“If there is no knowledge, there can be no acknowledgment, and that is like a silent continuation of the persecution Roma suffered.”

Anna Daróczy, Hungary



Additional resources



Barvalipe Roma Online University

An online educational platform where Roma and non-Roma can access knowledge about Roma identity/identities, history/histories, and culture/cultures through a collection of lectures delivered by Roma scholars.



Council of Europe Programs and Tools

A capacity-building program aimed at integrating Roma history into school curricula, featuring six tools that focus on the broader history of Roma. These resources are compatible with the IHRA Recommendations — which focus on the Nazi era and target policymakers and educational stakeholders — fostering a cohesive approach.



“Dzanes ko sem? (Do you know who I am?)”

The material consists of interactive geo-referenced maps and a publication aimed at high schools as a supplementary workbook about the history of discrimination and persecution of the Roma. It also includes an introduction to Roma culture, art, and general history in Romanes, Serbian, and English.



Encyclopaedia of the Nazi Genocide of the Sinti and Roma in Europe

This encyclopedia was launched in spring 2024 in English and German and is the first comprehensive overview of the existing knowledge on the persecution and murder of Sinti and Roma in Europe. More than 100 authors from 25 countries have contributed to it.



The Forgotten Genocide. The Fate of the Sinti and Roma

Nine biographies of children and young people from eight countries are the focus of this website. The website, which is available in eight languages, tells their stories vividly using documents, photographs, and video interviews.



The Genocide Committed against European Roma and Sinti during the National Socialist Era

This resource is a learning platform, available in 12 languages, and aimed at school children, teachers, and the general public. It offers over 70 worksheets, additional material for teachers and is suitable for ages 14 and older.



The Genocide and Persecution of Roma and Sinti. Bibliography and Historiographical Review

This annotated bibliography with over 1,400 references includes an in-depth overview of the major themes and research areas in the field. It can be consulted for information on individual countries or specific topics.



IHRA Recommendations for Teaching and Learning about the Holocaust

A major resource on educational approaches for teaching and learning about the Holocaust which contains additional essential guidelines and key terms, complementary to the IHRA Recommendations for Teaching and Learning about the Persecution and Genocide of the Roma during the Nazi Era.



OSCE/ODIHR

For further resources concerning general issues and challenges that Roma and Sinti face in Europe.



“Racial Diagnosis: Gypsy” The Nazi Genocide of the Sinti and Roma and the Long Struggle for Recognition

This online exhibition, produced in English and German, presents the most important stages on the path to genocide in a European dimension. It places a special focus on the self-representation of the minority’s history, on the continuity of antigypsyism/anti-Roma racism after 1945, and on the contribution of the communities to the recognition of the genocide.



Tajsja - Video Podcasts and Educational Resources about the Genocide of the Roma

This collection, available in English and Serbian, presents video podcasts and educational resources about the causes and consequences of the genocide of the Roma, but also about Roma identity building, and the self-empowerment of Roma communities around Europe. It was produced in 12 European regions.



Toolkit on Working with Testimonies

With this toolkit, the Dikh He Na Bister Roma Genocide Remembrance Initiative presents educational methods on the genocide of the Roma based on testimonies of survivors.



Voices of the Victims. The Genocide Told through Testimonies of Sinti and Roma

Voices of the Victims is part of RomArchive, the community-based digital archive of the arts and cultures of Sinti and Roma, which has been developed by many international actors since 2014. It is a collection of sources from the perspective of those affected by persecution and murder from 20 countries available in English, Romanes, and German, presented as scans, transcripts, and audio files, provided with contextual information.

Other IHRA resources



[Stockholm Declaration](#)



[2020 IHRA Ministerial Declaration](#)



[Working Definition of Antigypsyism/Anti-Roma Discrimination](#)



[Genocide of the Roma: Overview of international organizations working on historical and contemporary issues connected to the genocide of the Roma](#)



[IHRA Reflections on Terminology for Holocaust Comparison](#)



[IHRA Charter for Safeguarding Sites](#)



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