

## Roma and Sinti genocide in Europe during WWII

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**Mentor:** Loranda Miletić, ETTA, Croatia

**Allocated total time of the LA:** 90 minutes (2 school hours)

**Target group** (age indication and place in the curriculum),

Country	Austria	Croatia	Slovenia
Age indication	ca. 14 years old	14 - 15 years old	14 - 15 years old
Place in the curriculum	<p>8th grade: - <u>module 1</u>: Fascism - National Socialism - Political Dictatorships</p> <p>- <u>module 5</u>: Holocaust/Shoah, Genocide and Human Rights</p> <p>- <u>module 6</u>: Historical Cultures - Cultures of Remembrance - Politics of Remembrance</p>	<p>History</p> <p>POV OŠ A.8.1. The student analyzes the interrelationships and dynamics in individual societies during the 20th century</p> <p>Racial, religious, national, political, and ideological persecutions and sufferings, concentration camps, and death camps. Holocaust and other crimes against humanity in Croatia, Europe and world context</p> <p>POV OŠ D.8.2. The student analyzes the impact of wars and revolution on the transformation of state organizations in the 20th and 21st centuries. World War II in the world, Europe, and Croatia. Quisling regimes: the example of the Independent State of Croatia. A policy of terror against citizens</p>	<p>History curriculum</p> <p>9th-grade</p> <p>Political characteristics of the 20th century:</p> <p>How the Nazis built the society of the chosen Aryan race</p> <p>Collaboration and the resistance</p> <p>Why the Holocaust happened</p> <p>How many victims were caused by the IInd World War</p> <p>Why communism collapsed in Europe Western bloc; Yugoslavia: the bloodstain in Europe</p> <p>What was the situation of Slovenian minorities</p>

		(especially Jews, Serbs, and <b>Roma</b> ). Antifascism - partisan movement.	
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**Teaching aims** (What do we intend to achieve by this learning activity?):

Encourage students to reflect, research, and analyze the Roma and Sinti minority in Europe, not only on the genocide during World War II, but also about the time before the genocide and the situation today. Sensitize students on this topic by condemning all forms of violence, persecution, and racism in modern Europe.

**Learning outcomes** (What will the learners know, and be able to do after taking part in this learning activity?)

Students will be able to:

1. explain the meaning of new concepts in learning activity: Roma, Sinti, genocide, Antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination
2. analyze different groups of Roma and Sinti communities in Europe
3. describe how racial laws were applied to the Roma and Sinti communities during WWII
4. examine discrimination, exclusion, and persecution experienced by the Roma and Sinti in the first half of the 20th century
5. compare the life of Roma person before and after the war
6. combine the past with the present by comparing, evaluating, and discussing the political events of the present concerning the solution of the "Roma question" in different European countries.

## **Introduction**

**Roma and Sinti before WWII** (exposing prior thinking and knowledge)

### **a) Introduction to new terminology**

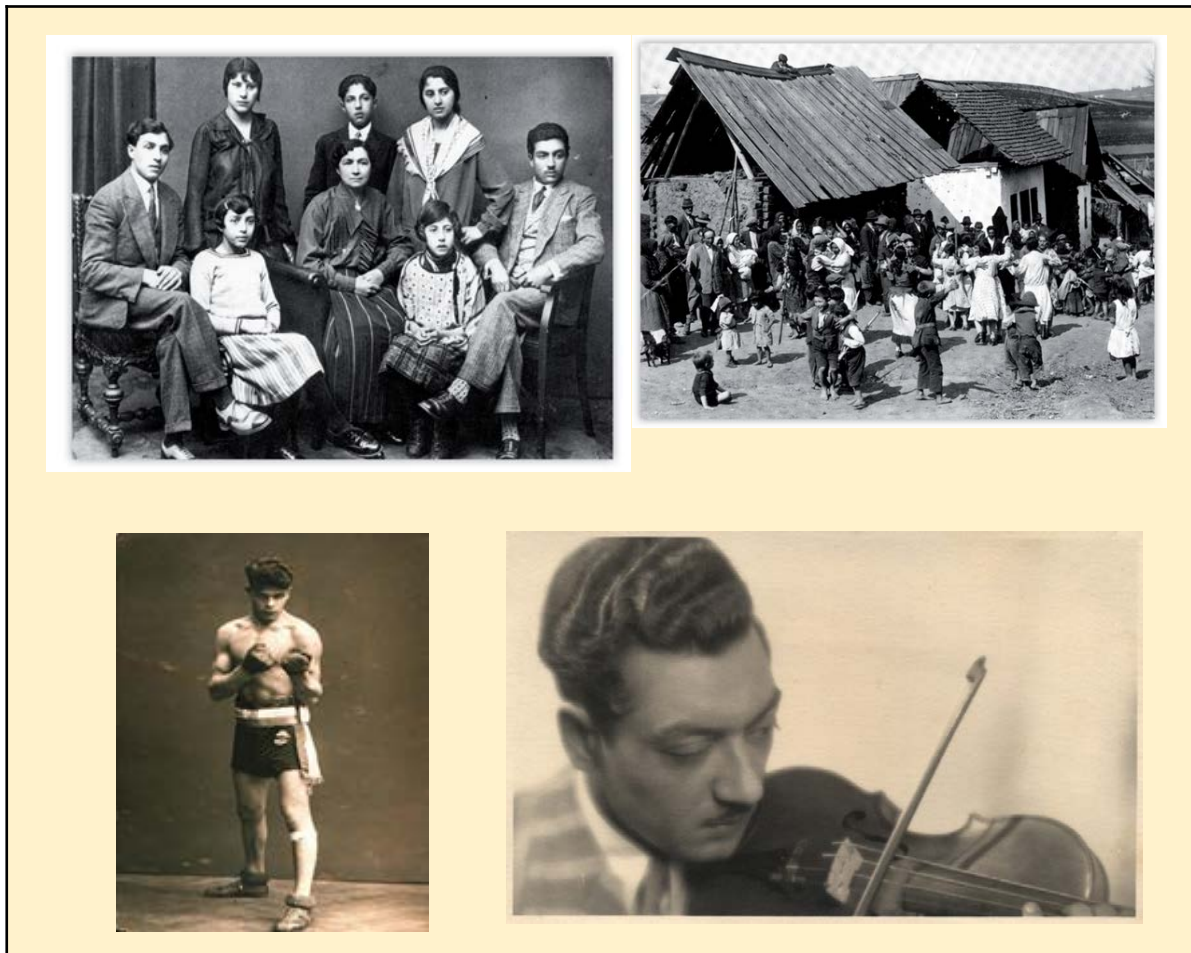
Time frame: 10 minutes

**Note for teachers:** The first task in preparing to teach about Roma and Sinti genocide is to clarify and expand students' understanding of the complex set of historical events known as the Genocide.

The teacher is going to check students' understanding of three new terms (Roma and Sinti, prejudice, genocide). Few photos will be shown to the students. They will analyse them with the support of the teachers' questions.

### The task for students:

#### ROMA/SINTI:



Photos: [A. Roma and Sinti Before the War — English \(romasintigenocide.eu\)](http://romasintigenocide.eu)  
[sintiundroma.org](http://sintiundroma.org/) / „Rassendiagnose: Zigeuner“  
[Holocaust Memorial Day Trust / Johann 'Rukeli' Trollmann \(hmd.org.uk\)](http://hmd.org.uk)

1. Who do you think these people are?
2. What are they doing in the photos? According to these photos can you assume their social status, occupation, hobbies...

#### PREJUDICE:



Photo: <https://scroll.in/article/807086/graphic-novel-the-story-of-the-roma-europes-most-stigmatised-ethnic-group>

Questions:

1. What do you see in the graphic photo?
2. Can you translate the sentence?
3. At which time is the graphic made?
4. Can you briefly describe people's attitude towards Roma.

**GENOCIDE:**



[D Englisch 2013.indd \(romasintigenocide.eu\)](#)

[The Roma in Auschwitz - Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum — Google Arts & Culture](#)

Questions:

1. What do you see in the photos?
2. Who do you think these people are?

3. Can you explain their facial expressions?
4. What do you think the second picture represents? Can you assume what were the living conditions in those huts?
5. Can you assume what the last photo (the list) tries to tell us ?

After the introduction and discussion, the teacher projects the definitions of the new terms Roma and Sinti, prejudices, and genocide on the school board or distributes them to students in the form of handouts. They are asked to match the definitions with the previous photos. In the second step, the teacher asks the students to study the meaning of the words, genocide of Roma, in the list of key terms and connect them with the meaning of the term genocide. After that, the teacher announces the title of the learning activity.

### **b) Roma and Sinti: A European Minority**

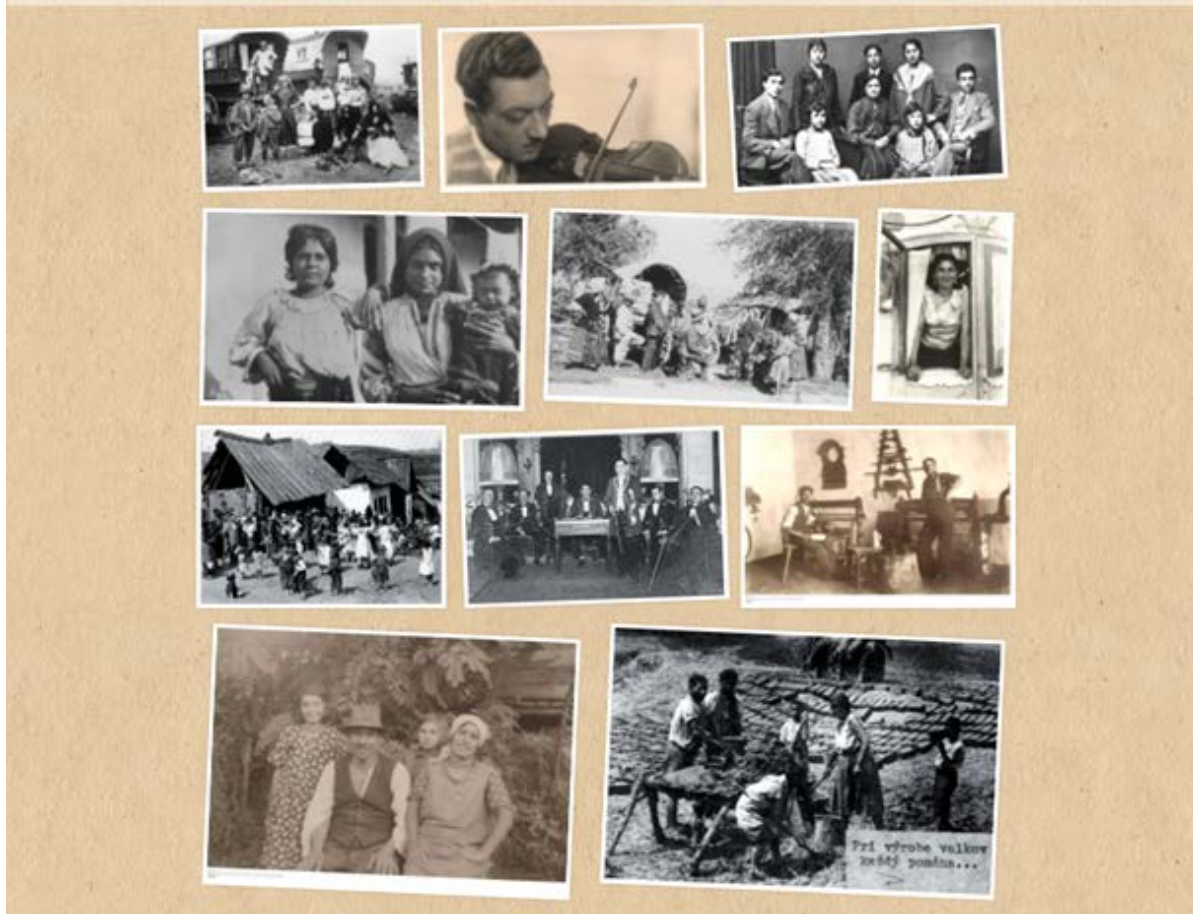
Time frame: 20 minutes

#### **Note for teachers:**

The teacher divides the students into several groups (optimally 3-5 students in a group). The same photographic historical sources are presented to each group.

The teacher presents to the students photographs depicting the life of the Roma before the beginning of World War II. Photos can be presented on a projection screen (via a link) or printed (as worksheets). The photos show excerpts from the life of Roma communities across Europe, their specific living conditions, belonging to different social groups, and their different professions.

## ROMA AND SINTI BEFORE THE SECOND WORLD WAR



<https://sway.office.com/ExuaApTl7ScKvEWh?ref=Link>

### Sources of photographs:

1. <https://www.romasintigenocide.eu/>
2. Bársony, J. (ed.) 2013., *Pharrajimos: fotografije i dokumenti*, Artresor naklada, Zagreb
3. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/roma-gypsies-in-prewar-europe>

### Task for students:

Students choose two photographs that, in their opinion, best show the life of Roma communities. Students in groups discuss the questions asked and express their thoughts. After a brief agreement within the group, a representative of the group presents the conclusions.

### Questions:

1. Why did you choose that photo?

2. What is shown in the chosen photos? What do the protagonists do in the photos?
3. Describe their appearance.
4. Why do you think the chosen photo best illustrates the everyday life of Roma?
5. Name one similarity and one difference between members of Roma communities shown in the photos?

### **Note for teachers:**

The teacher invites the students to consider whether their interpretation of the photographs was influenced by their previous knowledge (perhaps even prejudices) about the Roma people or their cultures.

The teacher explains that the photos show Roma of different social statuses, different occupations, some of the wealthy and respectable (an example is the photos of musician Max Bamberg). One part of Roma communities lived a sedentary lifestyle while many Roma still lived a nomadic lifestyle in search of better opportunities and their own existence. The Roma people are marked (as well as other nations of Europe) by great diversity.

The teacher asks the students questions by checking their previous knowledge of the Roma people.

Questions:

1. Do you know where the Roma come from? What are the origins of Roma ?  
What language do they speak? What religion do they belong to?
2. Do members of the Roma minority live in your region?
3. How well do you know their culture and customs?

### **Note for teachers:**

A brief overview of the history of the Roma people you can find on

[https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/roma/histoculture\\_EN.asp](https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/roma/histoculture_EN.asp)

The teacher shows a video - *We Call Ourselves "Roma"*

Students, divided into groups, answer questions. The answers can be found in the video material.

Link: <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/video/we-call-ourselves-roma>  
(00:00 - 3:53)

#### 4. The task for students:

After watching the video, students answer the questions.

Questions:

1. Is there a Roma state?
2. On which continent do most of the Roma live?
3. Where do Roma come from? When did Roma (in which historical period) start immigrating to Europe? What skills did Roma immigrants have? What occupations were they engaged in ?
5. What happens to many Roma after settling in European countries?
6. Consider how the poor position of the Roma in many European countries is linked to their nomadic way of life. Consider how the way of life has affected the position of the Roma in individual countries. In doing so, take care that it is *80% of the Romas in Europe are sedentary and live where they settled since the XVI century*. Among the Roma, only a minority live a nomadic life.

#### c) Steps towards genocide

Time frame: 15 minutes

#### Note for teachers:

Research into the Roma Genocide is relatively recent, and cannot compare with the numerous and substantial studies which have been carried out into experiences of the Jewish population. Partly for this reason and partly because the records relating to Roma victims are very incomplete, it is hard to give an accurate estimate of the number of Roma affected

Even experts disagree, which can be seen in quotes with statistics. Such disagreement is important to acknowledge, but the debate over numbers should not cloud the real message behind the Roma Genocide: hundreds of thousands of innocent Roma were brutally murdered, and the intention was to eliminate the entire Roma population. It's



important to underline that the assassinations concern families. 90% of the Romas in Austria were killed, 80% in Germany and 90% in Czechoslovakia.

### The task for students:

Teaching strategy: think - pair - share

A description of the strategy is available at the links: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mig4olzUy4M>

### Statistics

Study statistics about Roma victims during WWII and answer:

1. How do you explain the different estimates for Roma victims?
2. What proportion of the Roma population were killed or otherwise affected by the genocide?
3. Which other groups or communities were targeted or murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators?
4. What was the intent behind these killings?

*According to estimates, at least 500,000 Roma were exterminated during World War II by the Nazi regime and their allies, and ... in some countries, more than 80% of the Roma population was exterminated...*

European Parliament Resolution on the Occasion of International Roma Day  
(2015/2615(RSP))

*It is still unknown how many Roma fell victim to the Nazi persecution... Research has to rely on estimations; whatever their testimony, a number of at least 250,000 victims is considered highly probable.*

Factsheets on Roma, Council of Europe

*[w]e believe that something between half a million and a million and a half Romanies were murdered in Nazi Germany and occupied Europe between 1939 and 1945*

Sybil Milton, Senior historian at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

*The repeated number of 500 000 Romani deaths in the Porrajmos is becoming the conventional, accepted total. But we do not know this for a fact. The documentation has not been completely located nor analyzed. We must guard against this figure becoming the accepted total... the number, in reality, was in fact much higher.*

Ian Hancock, Roma activist and academic

Sources: Keen, E.: *Right to Remember: A Handbook for Education with Young People on the Roma Genocide* (Second edition) (2017), Council of Europe Publishing

## The ten stages of genocide

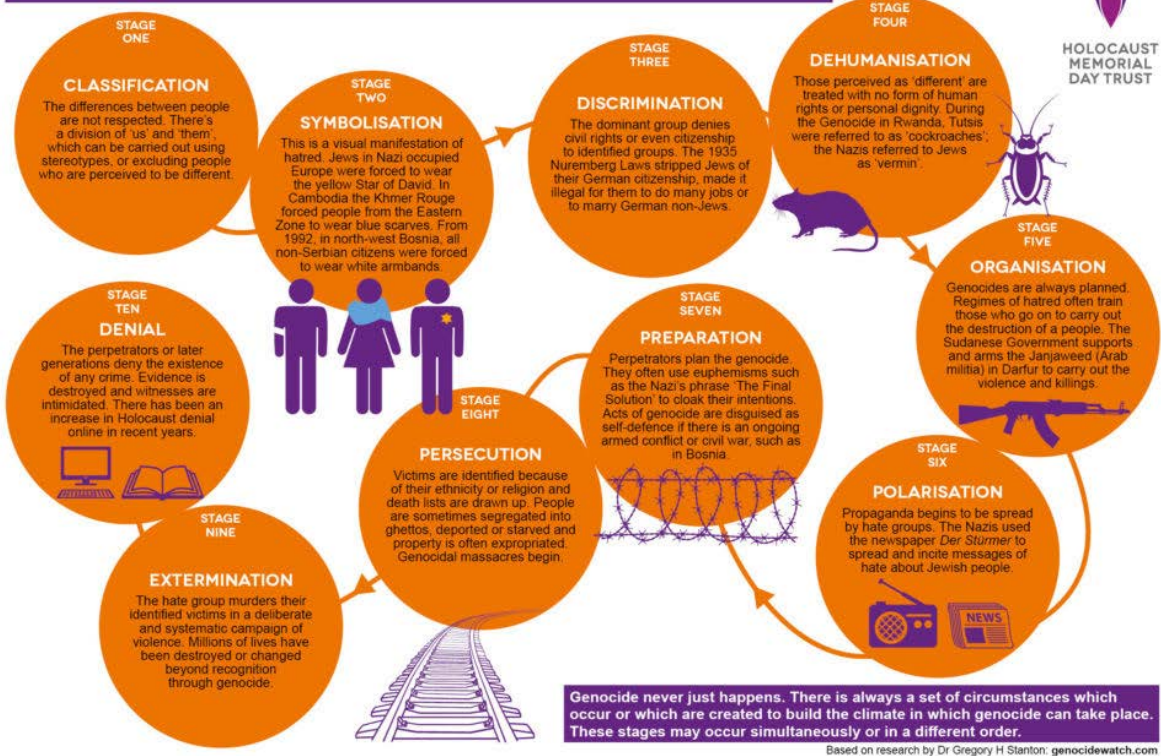
**Note for teachers:** The intention of the Nazis and their collaborators was to eliminate the entire Roma and Sinti population in Europe. This intention has been well documented, and it is one of the key criteria for an act of mass killing to qualify as genocide.

Social scientists and scholars have generally organized their understanding of genocide in terms of the political structure within which it takes place, the context in which genocide occurs, the motives of the perpetrator, the nature of the victims, and the stages through which genocide passes.

Genocide is a process that develops in ten stages that are predictable but not inexorable (see infographic below). The process is not linear. Stages may occur simultaneously. Each stage is itself a process. Logically, later stages are preceded by earlier stages. But all stages continue to operate throughout the process.

### A. Infographic with ten stages of genocide

# THE TEN STAGES OF GENOCIDE



<https://www.hmd.org.uk/learn-about-the-holocaust-and-genocides/what-is-genocide/the-ten-stages-of-genocide/>

The teacher explains to the students that the process that led to this destruction of the Roma community in Europe is called genocide and that they were introduced to its definition at the beginning of the work. He/She announces the next step in which students will become better acquainted with the individual stages of genocide.

Ten Stages of Genocide is a formula for how a society can engage in genocide. Genocide cannot be committed by an individual or small group; rather, it takes the cooperation of a large number of people and the state. The genocidal process starts with prejudice that continues to grow. By knowing the stages of genocide, students are better equipped to identify the warning signs. An infographic showing the 10 stages of genocide needs to be displayed on a whiteboard in the classroom or multiplied and distributed to students. The same should be done with the table, put it on display or multiply it for each student. Teachers need to emphasize two important things before students continue working on the next task. These are:

- The different and sometimes fluid categories of people involved in the genocide and their motivations, perspectives, and roles: these categories include perpetrators (Nazis

and their collaborators and enablers), bystanders and witnesses, beneficiaries, resisters, and rescuers, and victims and survivors.

- The diverse contexts for victims and survivors: Although all Roma and Sinti were targeted by the Nazis and their collaborators, the forms and timing of attacks on Roma varied in different countries, resulting in different survival rates and experiences for Roma and Sinti across Europe and beyond. The table below provides data for Germany. Many other European countries, such as Romania or The Independent State of Croatia had similar or identical laws.

## 2. The task for students:

1. Take some time to explore the infographic of the ten stages of genocide and the table with Anti-Roma laws and policies in Germany: a brief history (1890 – 1945).
2. Find in the table at least three events that you can relate to a particular level of genocide. Share your findings with your pair and then with the whole group.

### Anti-Roma laws and policies in Germany: a brief history (1890 – 1945)

1890	A conference is organized in Germany on the “Gypsies”. The Military is told to control the movements of all Roma.
1909	A policy conference on “The Roma Question” is held. It is recommended that all Roma be branded with easy identification.
1922	All Roma in German territories (but no other groups) have to be photographed and fingerprinted for identification.
1928	All Roma are placed under permanent police surveillance. A professor publishes a document suggesting that “it was the Roma who introduced foreign blood into Europe”. More camps are built to contain Roma.
1934	Roma are taken for sterilization by injection and castration, and sent to camps at Dachau and elsewhere. Two laws issued this year forbid Germans from marrying “Jews, Roma and Negroes”.

1939	The Office of Racial Hygiene issues a statement saying, "All Roma should be treated as hereditarily sick; the only solution is elimination. The aim should therefore be the elimination without hesitation of this defective element in the population".
1940	The first mass genocidal action of the Holocaust: 250 children are used as guinea pigs to test the cyanide gas crystal at the concentration camp at Buchenwald. Employment of any kind is forbidden to Roma in this same year.
1941	In July the Nazi Final Solution to "kill all Jews, Roma and mental patients" is put into operation. The genocide begins. 800 Roma are murdered in one action on the night of 24 December in Crimea.  June - August 1941 Deportations of 26,000 Roma from Romania. 36,000 will be murdered.  November 1941 5000 "Z" and "ZM" Germans are deported to ghettos.  Autumn 1941, 5007 Roma from Burgenland - Austria - (including 2700 children) were deported to Terezin (no survivors in 1945).
1944	On 2 August, about 2,900 Roma are gassed and incinerated at Auschwitz-Birkenau in one mass action, remembered by survivors as "Roma-night".
1945	By the end of the war, 70% - 80% of the Roma population in Third Reich had been annihilated by Nazis.  No Roma were called to testify at the Nuremberg Trials; no one testified on their behalf. No war crime reparations have been paid to the Roma as a people.

Sources: Keen, E.: *Right to Remember: A Handbook for Education with Young People on the Roma Genocide* (Second edition) (2017), Council of Europe Publishing

## Main part

### Roma and Sinti during WWII (Group Work) - Genocide

Time frame: 30 minutes

Teaching strategy: group work.

In 1939, we Roma were still driving around freely in Austria with wagons and horses. My mother was thirty-two years old at the time, my father too. We were six children [...]. Of course, we also had to attend school wherever we were. I still remember my first day at school, my father Wackar took me there. I was mighty proud.

We were somewhere in Styria at the time, in 1939, when my folks learned that we were no longer allowed to travel around. Things got worse and worse for us until my father decided to go to Vienna. He said that he had a good acquaintance in Vienna [...] with a big place. Maybe we could put our caravans with him and live there for a while. And so we went to Vienna, to the sixteenth district [...] to Mr. Sprach. This man welcomed us warmly, but he said to my father: "Karl, the caravan is too conspicuous, you have to convert it into a small wooden house." That's what happened. We children came back to school. [...]

Gusti, my father's brother, visited us with his family, he too had three children. During this bad time, our families tried to stay close together. But we didn't stand a chance. I still remember exactly how we played with our cousins for the last time. They were never seen again. A whole family had disappeared, and to this day no one knows what happened to them.

One day the Gestapo picked up our father Karl Wackar Horvath from our place. They came in a small car and pushed him inside. We children stood there, in tears for our father. He waved once more, then they drove off with him. That was 1941 and my last memory of him. We never saw him again. Now we children were forbidden to go to school. The Gestapo put a Spanish fence around our little wooden house and forbade us to be outside it. Yes, we already felt Auschwitz in our liberty. [...]

The SS men often made large-scale raids. They pushed in our little door, pulled us out of our beds, and held their flares in our faces. It became more and more unbearable. Our landowners helped us wherever they could. Frau Sprach and Frau Brösel hid us and took us under their protection, but then even they could take no more. Our mother said, "There might be another big raid today. Listen carefully, we'll go to the Congress Park and hide under the leaves, you mustn't take your clothes off." So we could still live undetected, but only for a little while, with a lot of fear.

My sister Kathi had a friend, Fritz Karasek, he had a very dear mother. The two of them helped us hide. But they had already been warned and told that they were practicing racial defilement because they were consorting with a Gypsy woman. These people didn't have it easy either. [...] These people tried to help us again and again, but soon nothing helped. And what had to come happened: My sister Kathi was arrested.

Now we were no longer safe anywhere, no one dared to help us. So we hid in our little wooden house or in the congress bath. Mum would sometimes sneak away and get bread and milk from somewhere, and our good Mrs. Brösel could sometimes run hidden to our Spanish grille and throw us a rabbit. She also brought us drinking water. She was really a kind-hearted person. She told our mother that there was a big goulash can at the end of the road and you could get something. My mother was very scared and said that gypsies certainly don't get anything to eat. I quickly put on a cap, took a pot, and ran down the street. There were a lot of people crowding towards this goulash can. In this crowd, I also got a pot full, and we were able to live on for another day.

[...]

In 1943, the Gestapo came to our house in Paletzgasse. At six o'clock in the morning, they pushed down our little door. They had huge light batteries in their hands and

shouted at us children: "Go, go! Everybody up! Where is your mother? She's not hiding, is she? Come on, tell us where she is!" My brother then had to tell them where she was. The fear was very great. Two SS men drove to Odoakergasse and took our mother and the three grandchildren of my godmother. [...] "Come on, pack your most necessary things, you'll be home soon anyway, you won't need much more." So they pushed us towards a green open wagon. My godmother's three grandchildren were sitting there, scared and trembling, they were five, four, and three years old. We were all trembling with fear. [...] The little children were crying, we were hardly wearing anything.

[...]

The first day was very sad. We mourned our father. [...] She was now alone with six children after all. The next day more and more people came into this room, so it became more and more cramped. Then the Gestapo came and took our three brothers Hansi, Karli and Ossi. They shaved them bald and we sisters sat there and cried. But it was to get even worse. No one could imagine what was going to happen now, what the people were going to do with us. When the room was so full that there was no room for a mouse, the transport to Auschwitz was organized. We were squeezed into a wagon. [...] That's how it went all the way to Auschwitz.

abridged from: Stojka, Ceija, *Wir leben im Verborgenen. Aufzeichnungen einer Romni zwischen zwei Welten*, Wien, 2013, 9-15.

[Original text is in German; translated into English with deepl.com]

Students are divided into three groups. Each group studies the teaching material (historical sources, photographs, testimonies) and seeks answers to the questions asked. After the students have studied the sources and formulated the answers to the questions asked, a plenary presentation of the group work follows. During the presentation, the teacher can ask the students of each group what stages of genocide they recognize in the material they worked on.

### **Group 1:** Classification – Dehumanisation – Preparation

#### **Short theoretical background:**

As you already know, the process leading up to genocide is gradual. First, the application of distinguishing symbols is obligatory. Then human rights are stripped away so that people are equated with animals, insects, or diseases. Afterwards the dominant group uses law, custom, and political power to deny the rights of other groups. For example, school attendance was prohibited. Furthermore, they used euphemisms to cloak their intentions, such as referring to their goals as “purification” or “resettlement.”

#### **Activity 1:**

Ceija Stojka was born 1933 in Austria. Her family followed a nomadic life traveling around Austria. In 1943 she and other family members were deported to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp.

Read the short excerpt from her autobiography and complete the assignments below.

1. What is the text passage about? Give the key points in your own words.
2. What is happening?
3. When and where does it take place?
4. Who is involved and how are these persons described?
5. How does she talk about the people who helped her and her family?
  - a. Can you find examples in the text related to *classification*, *dehumanization*, or
  - b. *preparation*? Mark the corresponding passages in the text above.
  - c. What was it like to be classified, dehumanized, and deported in a concentration camp? How is it described?
  - d. Why do you think Ceija Stojka decided to write about the experience?
  - e. What do you think someone who had lived through this as a child would feel afterwards about the people that did this to his/ her and to his/ her family?

**Do some research** on the internet about Ceija Stojka live and write down important points that could be useful for the presentation.

### Activity 2:

The National Socialists believed that all Roma and Sinti would have the potential to commit a crime because it was part of their biological inheritance. In the interests of the so-called “crime prevention” the National Socialists, therefore, arrested all “potential criminals”.

In this context, such file cards were created as you can see below.





Photo source: online under URL:

<<http://www.rothenburg-unterm-hakenkreuz.de/sinti-und-roma-was-mit-der-ausgrenzung-begann-endete-mit-voelkermord-bis-zu-500-000-menschen-fielen-dem-rassenwahn-der-nationalsozialisten-zum-opfer/>> [last accessed 04.11.2021]

Look at the photo and answer the following questions:

1. What do you see?
2. What does this photo remind you of? Who is usually photographed like this?
3. What information does the source reveal about the person portrayed?
4. For what reason could it have been taken? Why was Martin Bello photographed in this way?
5. What is not visible in the photo?
6. What impression does Martin Bello make on you?

## **Group 2: PERSECUTION**

Victims are identified and separated out because of their ethnic or religious identity. Death lists are drawn up. Members of victim groups are forced to wear identifying

symbols. Their property is expropriated. They are often segregated into ghettos, forced into concentration camps, or confined to a famine-struck region and starved.

### Note for the teachers:

Students will be divided into 3 pairs. Each pair will firstly get questions to read them through in order to later find answers with the help of the summary of the source. Students will be led to the main term: *persecution*.

### Read the summary above and answer the following questions or do the assignments:

1. Where and when does the text take place?
2. Who is the text about?
3. What is his/her ethnic belonging?
4. Does his/her ethnic belonging affect his life among Germans? In what way? Find an example in the text.
5. Was the person forced to leave his/her home? If so, where and in what way?
6. Can you name the act of oppressing or cruel treatment because of the race with only one word?
7. Can you describe the mental or/and physical consequences of oppressing the people mentioned in the text?

(Text 2): [Holocaust Memorial Day Trust | HMDT Blog: Auschwitz-Birkenau's Roma survivors](#)

Photo: [Die Opfer von Mittelbau-Dora \(highend-archaeology.eu\)](#)

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ewald\\_Hanstein\\_1995.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ewald_Hanstein_1995.jpg)



German Sinto Ewald Hanstein was born in 1924. He grew up in Breslau (then Germany, now Poland) until his family decided to move to Berlin in 1936. They hoped to experience less discrimination as Sinti there, and his father, a member of the Communist Party, also expected to escape Gestapo surveillance. However, when they arrived in Berlin, they were immediately sent to the city's newly established Marzahn camp. In June 1938, all men from Marzahn above the age of 14 were deported to Sachsenhausen concentration camp on the outskirts of Berlin to carry out forced labour, including Ewald's father, his brother Paul and two of his uncles. Barely 14 himself, Ewald became the head of his remaining family, but went underground in 1940 when he was called up for the German army. He was eventually betrayed and in May 1943 deported to the Auschwitz *Zigeunerfamilienlager*. In the camp, he was reunited with members of his family

who had also been deported to Auschwitz, and his unbending sense of responsibility for them helped him survive forced labour, malnutrition, ill-treatment and typhus.

On 16 May 1944, he witnessed the resistance put up by the Roma and Sinti as the SS attempted to ferry them to the gas chambers. In early August, knowing that the liquidation of the *Zigeunerfamilienlager* was only a matter of days, he took the most difficult decision of his life: he joined the last transport from Auschwitz to Buchenwald concentration camp and left his remaining family behind to face certain death in the gas chambers. He was tormented until his final days by the crying of his fellow Roma when his train pulled out.

After a few weeks in Buchenwald, Ewald was sent to Mittelbau-Dora. In early April 1945, when Mittelbau-Dora was evacuated, he was forced on a death march through the Harz mountains until he was eventually liberated by American troops south of Magdeburg, weighing just 40 kg.

Ewald died in 2009 in Bremen. In his 2005 autobiography, he wrote: 'Sometimes, when I lie in bed at night, I see their faces: that of my mother Maria, my father Peter, my sisters Gertrud, Elisabeth, Lydia and Ramona, my brother Gregor, my grandmother and of all the others. Not one of them survived Auschwitz, and the Nazis even took all the photos away – but I recall them vividly. I am astonished that I am still alive: why me?'



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Pair 3 (Text 3): [Holocaust Memorial Day Trust | Johann 'Rukeli' Trollmann \(hmd.org.uk\)](http://Holocaust Memorial Day Trust | Johann 'Rukeli' Trollmann (hmd.org.uk))

Photos: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Trollmanngross.jpg>

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bewegung\\_Nurr\\_Trollmann\\_Viktoriapark.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bewegung_Nurr_Trollmann_Viktoriapark.jpg)

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6. Can you name the act of oppressing or cruel treatment because of the race with only one word?
7. Can you describe the mental or/and physical consequences of oppressing the people mentioned in the text?



Johann 'Rukeli' Trollmann was born on 27 December 1907 near Hannover as one of nine children into a German Sinti family. He took up boxing at the age of eight and won several championships before he was 20.

However, in 1928 he was denied a place in the German team for the Amsterdam Summer Olympics because of his 'non-German' boxing style. With the rise of the Nazis, the right-wing media increasingly abused him as 'the Gypsy in the ring'. On 9 June 1933, Rukeli boxed against Adolf Witt for the German light-heavyweight title. Rukeli was on course to win when the Nazi chairman of the boxing authority intervened, ordering the judges to call a 'no decision' and not award the title. This decision caused such an uproar among the audience that Rukeli had to be crowned champion after all, but only a few days later he was stripped of the title again by the German boxing authorities because of 'bad boxing'. A new fight was scheduled for 21 July, and Rukeli was ordered to fight in the 'German style' and 'not to dance like a Gypsy'. He knew he was meant to lose this fight because he was a Sinto. Rukeli entered the ring with his face and body powdered white with flour and his hair dyed blonde: a caricature of an Aryan and a courageous act of protest against his discrimination. He just stood still and took the blows of his opponent Gustav Eder until he was knocked out in the fifth round. This marked the end of his boxing career. He struggled to fend for himself, was sent twice to Hannover-Ahlen labour camp, and went into hiding for a time to avoid further persecution. Following the outbreak of war in 1939, he was drafted into the German army. In 1942, he was dishonorably discharged from the Wehrmacht for racial reasons, along with all Sinti and Roma, and soon after arrested by the Gestapo, severely tortured, and transported to Neuengamme concentration camp near Hamburg. The camp commandant recognized him as the former boxing star and ordered him to train the camp's SS men at night. He was transferred to Wittenberge, but here, too, he was recognized as the former boxer, and was made to fight Emil Cornelius, a feared kapo. Trollmann won against him, but in a brutal act of revenge, Cornelius beat him to death with a club in March 1944.

In November 2003, the German Boxing Association finally recognized Rukeli as the winner of the 1933 championship fight and included him in their list of German boxing champions. His championship belt was given to his surviving relatives.



### Group 3: EXTERMINATION

EXTERMINATION begins and quickly becomes the mass killing legally called “genocide.” It is “extermination” to the killers because they do not believe their victims to be fully human. When it is sponsored by the state, the armed forces often work with civilians to do the killing.

#### Note for teachers:

“Gypsy family camp” Auschwitz

On December 16, 1942, Heinrich Himmler gave out the directive that all “Gypsies” still living in the “German Reich” were to be deported to Auschwitz. The “Auschwitz Decree” was the final revelation of a plan which had existed de facto since 1938 and had been partially carried out already, namely the complete extinction of “Gypsies”. Of all the Auschwitz camps, the “Gypsy camp” had the highest mortality rate. 22,400 people lost their lives there, 6000 were children under 14. Important to mention the difference between “Zigeuner” and “Zigeuner Mischlingue”

Teacher preparation materials:

<https://www.roma-sinti-holocaust-memorial-day.eu/history/zigeunerfamilienlager-gypsy-family-camp/>  
<https://www.ushmm.org/learn/timeline-of-events/1942-1945/liquidation-of-gypsy-family-camp-at-auschwitz-birkenau>  
<http://auschwitz.org/en/history/categories-of-prisoners/sinti-and-roma-gypsies-in-auschwitz/>

The teacher distributes worksheets with teaching materials to the groups.

#### Activity 1

Historical sources:

„... additionally to the Jews, normally only the Gypsies belong to impure races in Europe ...“ (*Nuremberg Laws 1935.*)

„It was the wish of the all-powerful Reichsführer Adolf Hitler to have the Gypsies disappear from the face of the earth.“ (*SS Officer Pery Broad, Auschwitz Political Division*)

„All Gypsies should be treated as hereditarily sick; the only solution is elimination. The aim should therefore be the elimination without hesitation of this defective element in the population.“ (*Johannes Behrendt, Office of Racial Hygiene*)

Source: Keen, E.: *Right to Remember: A Handbook for Education with Young People on the Roma Genocide* (Second edition) (2017), Council of Europe Publishing

### **The task for students:**

Students in pairs answer the questions asked. A representative of the pairs draws conclusions.

1. What do the historical sources you read have in common ?
2. What kind of “solution” to the Roma issue was proposed ?
3. Find in the text and read the sentences in which you can find confirmation that, in the essence of Nazi policy, the complete extermination of the Roma population was planned. (Important to make understand that there are different assassination policies and processes which complete each other on a local, regional and national level for the realisation of the genocide. The role of the KRIPO, the Institution for Racial hygiene, Wehrmacht... )

Activity 2 - Testimony

### **The task for students:**

Maria Peter – deported to Auschwitz

“We travelled for two and a half days. We reached Auschwitz in the middle of the night. My whole family was there: my parents, my brothers Eduard and Josef ... and my three sisters Antonia, Josefina, and Katharine with their husbands and children ... . They crowded us into the barracks. At dawn, we got tea in enormous bowls. I drank my tea outside in front of the barracks and I saw – for the first time I saw something so terrible,

and I will never forget the sight – a pile of naked bodies. The sight of the corpses terrified me so much that I went back inside the barracks ... .

In Birkenau we all had to do slave labour. I worked on the building of the camp road, carrying heavy stones. My sister-in-law and her three children came down with typhus and died in the Krankenbau. They were the first members of our family to die in Auschwitz. Next, my sister Josefina's husband died of pneumonia which he picked up while doing hard labour in the camp. Then her oldest child died, and so one member of our family after another died. My sister Josefina Steinach had nine children and all but one of them died in the camp. To this day I cannot conceive of how the other eight survived until the beginning of August 1944, which is when they were all killed with gas. My sister could have lived. They wanted to send her to Ravensbrück before the liquidation of the Zigeunerlager. She refused on account of her children. She told the SS men that she was not leaving without her children. When the last transport was leaving Auschwitz, she died in the gas chamber ... . My mother also stayed in Auschwitz. I did everything in my power for her, but my mother fell ill one day. She was running a high fever and the Blockältester (block elder) announced that she had to go to the infirmary block. She had boils all over her body. They lanced those boils there and swabbed them with some kind of yellow fluid. She started seeing things and died several days later. My father and my sister Antonia also died in Auschwitz ...

I ended up in the barracks for children in Birkenau. That was the last barracks on the side nearer the entrance to Birkenau ... . it was designated especially for children. I looked after the children during the day, and I served their dinner at noon. Those barracks were also where the orchestra rehearsed. I remember SS man König very well; after all, he gave me a flogging. He was present at almost every execution by shooting and during the arrival of new transports. König gave me a flogging because I defended myself. It happened because of my sister Josefina's children. She didn't get food for them. I saw – and others saw it too – how König gave a crate full of food to the block nurse. All I wanted was for the children to have something to eat. So I complained.... I didn't think I was going to live through it.... I'll remember this till I die..."

*'Voices of Memory', memorial book: The Gypsies at Auschwitz-Birkenau vol 2, Munich, London, New York, Paris, 1993*

Source: Keen, E.: *Right to Remember: A Handbook for Education with Young People on the Roma Genocide* (Second edition) (2017), Council of Europe Publishing



Questiones:

1. How did members of Mary's family arrive in Auschwitz? Where were they placed immediately upon arrival?
2. What work did they have to do upon arrival in Auschwitz-Birkenau?
3. How did members of Mary's family lose their lives in Auschwitz?
4. How could Mary's sister escape death? What was her decision?
5. Briefly describe Mary's experience of living in the camp after being moved to the children's barracks in Birkenau.
6. What emotions does this testimony evoke in you?

## 5. Conclusion - 15 minutes

### How to link the past with the present?

Conclusion: *What does the past have to do with the present?*

Zoni Weisz, a Nazi survivor, Dutch, was the first Sinto to be allowed to speak in the German Bundestag on 27 January 2021 on the occasion of the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of National Socialism.

Here is a small excerpt of his speech:

[...] Allow me to say something about the state of Sinti and Roma in today's Europe. The situation of the Sinti and Roma in large parts of Europe is disturbing. It is inhumane how Sinti and Roma are treated, especially in many Eastern European countries. The vast majority have no opportunities, no jobs, no education, and no proper medical care. Discrimination, stigmatization, and exclusion are the order of the day. There are ghettos for Roma, ghettos with a wall around them. These countries are members of the European Union, call themselves civilized. But civilization also means respect for people, regardless of their origin, skin colour or religion. A civilized society respects human rights!

We, Roma and Sinti, have a right to equal opportunities and possibilities, for everyone. No more and no less. We are Europeans and must have the same rights as every other resident, with equal opportunities as they apply to every European.

It cannot and must not be that Sinti and Roma, who have been discriminated against and persecuted throughout the centuries, are still excluded today, in the 21st century, and deprived of any honest chance for a better future. [...]

from: Detzner, Milena et al. (edd.), *Antiziganismus – Rassistische Steereotype und Diskriminierung von Sinti und Roma. Grundlagen für eine Bildungsarbeit gegen Antiziganismus*, Düsseldorf, 2014, 2.

[Original text is in German; translated into English with deepl.com]

Read the short excerpt from Zoni Weisz's speech, think about the following questions, and exchange ideas with the person sitting next to you. Afterwards, we will discuss them together:

1. What is being talked about? Give the key statements in your own words?
2. What is being criticized? What are the common forms of discrimination against the Roma?
3. Why is this unacceptable?
4. What is being proclaimed by Zoni Wiesz?
5. Are parallels to the past recognizable?
6. What do you think someone who had lived through all those horrific events as a child would feel afterwards about the society that did this to him?
7. Do you think 'labelling' of Roma still takes place in your country?
9. Imagine you heard or came across a nasty comment about "the Roma": what would you do? Do you think it would make a difference if people started objecting to such comments?
10. How could the situation be improved? What should individuals do and what the governments do? What would you do?

### Homework task

What can we do?

Students compile a list of "What can we do?" writing down their suggestions that should lead to better inclusion of Roma in society, removing prejudice and the absence of discriminatory behavior.

### List of Key Terms

**Antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination**

The non-legally binding working definition of Antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, Adopted on 8 October 2020)

Acknowledging with concern that the neglect of the genocide of the Roma has contributed to the prejudice and discrimination that many Roma\*\* communities still experience today, and accepting our responsibility to counter such forms of racism and discrimination (Articles 4 and 7 of the IHRA 2020 Ministerial Declaration, article 3 of the Stockholm Declaration), the IHRA adopts the following working definition of antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination:

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.

To guide the IHRA in its work, the following is being recognized:

Antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination has existed for centuries. It was an essential element in the persecution and annihilation policies against Roma as perpetrated by Nazi Germany, and those fascist and extreme nationalist partners and other collaborators who participated in these crimes.

Antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination did not start with or end after the Nazi era but continues to be a central element in crimes perpetrated against Roma. Despite the important work done by the United Nations, the European Union, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and other international bodies, the stereotypes, and prejudices about Roma have not been delegitimized or discredited vigorously enough so that they continue to persist and can be deployed largely unchallenged.

Antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination is a multi-faceted phenomenon that has widespread social and political acceptance. It is a critical obstacle to the inclusion of Roma in broader society, and it acts to prevent Roma from enjoying equal rights, opportunities, and gainful social-economic participation.

Many examples may be given to illustrate antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination. Contemporary manifestations of antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination could, taking into account the overall context, include, but are not limited to:

- Distorting or denying persecution of Roma or the genocide of the Roma.
- Glorifying the genocide of the Roma.
- Inciting, justifying, and perpetrating violence against Roma communities, their property, and individual Roma.
- Forced and coercive sterilizations as well as other physically and psychologically abusive treatment of Roma.
- Perpetuating and affirming discriminatory stereotypes of and against Roma.
- Blaming Roma, using hate speech, for real or perceived social, political, cultural, economic, and public health problems.
- Stereotyping Roma as persons who engage in criminal behavior.
- Using the term “Gypsy” as a slur.
- Approving or encouraging exclusionary mechanisms directed against Roma based on racially discriminatory assumptions, such as the exclusion from regular schools and institutional procedures or policies that lead to the segregation of Roma communities.
- Enacting policies without legal basis or establishing the conditions that allow for the arbitrary or discriminatory displacement of Roma communities and individuals.
- Holding Roma collectively responsible for the real or perceived actions of individual members of Roma communities.
- Spreading hate speech against Roma communities in whatever form, for example in media, including on the internet and social networks.

\* The use of the national equivalent of the term is recommended, Canada and the United States use the term anti-Roma racism.

\*\* The word ‘Roma’ is used as an umbrella term which includes different related groups, whether sedentary or not, such as Roma, Travellers, Gens du voyage, Resandefolket/De resande, Sinti, Camminanti, Manouches, Kalés, Romanichels, Boyash/Rudari, Ashkalis, Égyptiens, Yéniches, Doms, Loms and Abdal that may be diverse in culture and lifestyles. The present is an explanatory footnote, not a definition of Roma.

<https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-charters/working-definition-antigypsyism-anti-roma-discrimination>

**Concentration camps** are a place in which large numbers of people, especially political prisoners or members of persecuted minorities, are deliberately imprisoned in a relatively small area with inadequate facilities, sometimes to provide forced labor or to await mass execution. The term is most strongly associated with the several hundred camps established by the Nazis in Germany and occupied Europe 1933–45, among the most infamous being Dachau, Belsen, and Auschwitz.

**Death camps/killing centers:** camps that were established for the systematic murder of Jews and Roma. The Kulmhof (Chelmno) gas van station and the Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka camps served this purpose exclusively. Auschwitz, Majdanek, and MalyTrostinets contained facilities similar to those in the death camps as well as playing roles as concentration camps, labor camps, or transit camps.

**Genocide** refers to the coordinated and planned destruction of a group of people (as that "group" is defined by the perpetrators). While genocide is almost always accompanied by mass killing, this crime is an attempt to destroy the group, not necessarily to murder every member of that group. Some call genocide "the crime of crimes". Others label genocide as the ultimate crime against humanity because the genocide aims to eradicate a part of humanity.

Genocide is defined in the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. In this, acts constitute genocide if they are committed "with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such". Whereas this is the legally applicable definition of genocide, the term genocide predates the 1948 Convention and few scholars are wholly satisfied with this definition, partly because of the practical difficulties in proving "intent". Scholars have for decades presented and debated a series of alternative definitions of what constitutes "genocide", often wanting to expand the list of groups contained in the UN definition.

The **Holocaust**, the Nazi program to murder all European Jews during the Second World War, is today defined as genocide. However, during the Nuremberg trials in the immediate post-war period, perpetrators were not indicted for the crime of genocide but instead for aggression, war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide aims and other offenses (the reason being that the crime of genocide was not introduced into international law until the UN Genocide Convention of 1948).

The term "genocide" was coined during the Second World War by the lawyer Raphael Lemkin to mean the intentional destruction of national groups based on their collective

identity. Lemkin's purpose was to use this term to bring about a framework of international law with which to prevent and punish what the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill had described as "a crime without a name". In this, Lemkin was extraordinarily successful: by 1948 the new United Nations had been persuaded to draft the UN Convention on Genocide.

The international legal definition of the crime of genocide is found in Article II of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide.

Article II: In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

While it must be stressed that this remains as the only legal definition of genocide, still it should also be noted that many scholars disagree with this definition, finding the list of possible victim groups too narrow or that the need to prove intent is too demanding.

<https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/educational-materials/holocaust-and-other-genocides>

**Labor camps:** also called slave labor camps. a penal colony where inmates are forced to work. Nazis established specific *Arbeitslager* (labor camps) which housed *Ostarbeiter* (eastern workers), *Fremdarbeiter* (foreign workers), and other forced laborers who were forcibly rounded up and brought in from the east. These were separate from the SS-run concentration camps, where prisoners were also forced to perform labor.

**Porajmos:** Cutting up/ Fragmentation was the attempt made by Nazi Germany and its allies to exterminate the Romani people of Europe during World War II. Under Hitler's rule, both Roma and Jews were defined as "enemies of the race-based state" by the Nuremberg laws; the two groups were targeted by similar policies and persecution,

culminating in the near annihilation of both populations within Nazi-occupied countries. Estimates of the death toll of Romanies in World War II range from 220,000 to 1,500,000. West Germany formally recognized the genocide of the Roma in 1982.

**Prejudice:** Any attitude held towards a person or group that is not justified by the facts. Prejudice includes negative and positive attitudes towards people solely based on their race, ethnicity, gender, or sex.

**Racial laws:** legal provisions directed against Jews and Roma passed immediately after the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia, following the example of Nazi Germany, ie

Nuremberg Laws, the influence of which is visible especially in the definition of Aryan origin. Racial laws, which declared that only persons of Aryan blood could be Croatian citizens, were the mainstay of the policy of extermination of Jews and Roma.

**Racism:** institutional and/or individual prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's race is superior.

**Roma:** members of the Indo-European people of Indian origin, migrated from India and settled around the world. In European countries, they were given different names, e.g. Gypsy, germ. Zigeuner, Spanish. Gitanos, franc. Bohemians, ital. Zingari. In Croatia, until the second half of the 20th century, they were called Gypsies, Jedupi, and other names. At the First Roma Congress, held in April 1971 in London, wishing to warn of the need to improve their social position, the name Roma (in the Romani language "man") was accepted as a common name for all Roma groups.

**Romani** is a member of a traditionally itinerant people who originated in northern India and now live chiefly in south and southwest Asia, Europe, and North America.

**Romani-chib or Romance** is a language whose ramifications date back to the early Middle Ages. It belongs to the medieval Greek world. It is codified and has teaching and literature (in Latin). Today it has around 1.5 million speakers mainly in Europe. The main element of this language is Indo-Aryan (with 900 roots) with Persian, Armenian and Greek roots. There are three sub-groups in this language: that of the Kale of Spain and of the English-speaking Romanichels (where there are around a hundred Romani terms), that of the Sinto-Manouches (with borrowings from the Germanic and Baltic languages with 1,500 Romani terms) and that of from the Roma of the Balkans, common Romani or Kelderari (with borrowings from Romanian, Slavic languages and all the languages of the Balkans).

**Samudaripen:** The term was first used in the 1970s in Yugoslavia in the context of Auschwitz and Jasenovac. It is a neologism of (Romani for 'all') and *Samudaripen* (murder) and can be translated as 'murder of all' or 'mass murder'. Using the term Samudaripen to denote genocide over Roma is based on the decision of the 9th Congress of the International Roma Union, held in Riga 2016. year, in which it was concluded that the term Porajmos and its other variants are inappropriate for marking the genocide of the Roma.

**Sinti:** a subgroup of the Roma people; Sinti mostly live in Central Europe and their name comes from the Indian province of Sindh. It is believed that this group separated from other Roma groups in the 16th century in the area of the German states, where it was only in the 19th century that it mostly adopted a sedentary lifestyle.