



Teaching the history of Roma and Travellers

Towards a better understanding of our common history and cultural heritage in Europe



“Knowledge of the history and culture of Roma, which constitute the largest ethnic minority in Europe, is still marginal or inexistent among the general public. On the other hand, national governments and international organisations are trying to overcome segregation, stigmatisation and marginalisation of Roma and Travellers and to fully integrate them into society. **Key to integration is education of both Roma and non-Roma. An integral part of this educational process is mutual knowledge about the common history that Roma and Travellers share with all non-Roma in Europe.**”

A little bit of history ...

Roma¹ are originally from central/northern India, from where they started migrating westward some 1000 years ago. Their language, Romani, belongs to the Indo-Arian language family and is similar to Sanskrit. The first Roma groups arrived in Europe around the 14th century, possibly earlier. Initial enthusiasm about their arrival, when they were taken for pilgrims or their skilled craftsmanship was appreciated, was followed by a long period of rejection, discrimination, deportation, internment and persecution, culminating in the Roma Holocaust during the Second World War, when some 500000 Roma and Travellers were murdered in extermination camps and elsewhere. Contrary to common belief, almost all Roma are sedentary, whereas Travellers are a traditionally itinerant ethnic group not genetically related to Roma.

Why teach the history of Roma and/or Travellers?

Teaching the history of Roma and/or Travellers, including remembrance of the Roma Holocaust, is an important contribution to building and strengthening the:

- ▶ Culture of tolerance and respect at school,
- ▶ Development of historical awareness and consciousness of all pupils
- ▶ Contribution to the assertion of Roma and/or Travellers' identity, and
- ▶ Understanding that Roma and/or Travellers have been present in Europe for centuries and are an integral part of society

1. The term "Roma and Travellers" is used at the Council of Europe to encompass the wide diversity of the groups covered by the work of the Council of Europe in this field: on the one hand a) Roma, Sinti/Manush, Calé, Kaale, Romanichals, Boyash/Rudari; b) Balkan Egyptians (Egyptians and Ashkali); c) Eastern groups (Dom, Lom and Abdal); and, on the other hand, groups such as Travellers, Yenish, and the populations designated under the administrative term "Gens du voyage", as well as persons who identify themselves as Gypsies. The present is an explanatory footnote, not a definition of Roma and/or Travellers

Bias in the historical narrative ²

- ▶ History can be taught in a way which promotes prejudice, stereotypes, biased thinking, xenophobia, nationalism and racism. It can ultimately fuel conflict and violence
- ▶ History teaching which defines other nationalities and cultures as strangers or even enemies helps perpetuate divisions and conflicts
- ▶ History teaching which focuses only on the political or military exploits of "great men" implies that nothing or no-one else was or is important. It warps pupils' understanding of the role, contribution and importance of civic movements or groups, such as women, children and less privileged and minority groups. This, in turn, reinforces existing inequalities



2. Excerpt from "Tackling today's challenges together: Biased history teaching"

What can we do?

- ▶ Teach the history of Roma and/or Travellers, reflecting both their national presence and historical context and their common history as a people present in Europe for centuries
- ▶ Refer to positive narratives about Roma and/or Traveller history, such as their contribution to the local, national and European cultural heritage or to the national economies, in particular through trade, metalworks and other handicrafts
- ▶ Develop flexible curricula and interactive pedagogies which acknowledge cultural differences and promote diversity
- ▶ Include a multi-perspective approach showing the full complexity of history and ensure a shared history approach
- ▶ Analyse and revise school curricula, with a focus on history curricula, in order to include content related to the history and culture of Roma and/or Travellers in general history teaching
- ▶ Analyse and revise current textbooks in order to eliminate and counter stereotyping related to Roma and Travellers
- ▶ Ensure that history or civil education curricula in particular reflect the way in which the activities and attitudes of ordinary individuals and groups of people have shaped the history of European societies
- ▶ Pay attention to historical sources with a view to combating antigypsyism, hate speech, propaganda and fake information
- ▶ Give an opportunity to representatives of Roma and/or Traveller organisations and communities to meet pupils/students in order to discuss and illustrate certain aspects of Roma and/or Traveller history, and to provide testimonies
- ▶ Integrate activities related to the remembrance of the Roma Holocaust into formal and non-formal education

Council of Europe teaching materials



- ▶ Factsheets on Roma History
- ▶ Handbook for Education on Roma Genocide
- ▶ Analytical Report on the Representation of Roma in European Curricula and Textbooks
- ▶ The presentation of Roma in Major European Museum Collections - Volume 1: the Louvre
- ▶ The presentation of Roma in Major European Museum Collections - Volume 2: the Prado



▶ www.coe.int/roma

Council of Europe Standards



- ▶ **The European Cultural Convention** (1954) (ETS No. 18) – ratified by 50 states, including the Council of Europe's 47 member states – advocates the study of the languages, history and civilisation of others and of the civilisation which is common to them all.

Committee of Ministers recommendations

- ▶ **Rec. CM/Rec(2020)2** on the inclusion of the history of Roma and/or Travellers in school curricula and teaching materials
- ▶ **Rec. CM/Rec(2011)6** on intercultural dialogue and the image of the other in history teaching
- ▶ **Rec. CM/Rec(2009)4** on the education of Roma and Travellers in Europe
- ▶ **Rec. CM(2001)15** on history teaching in twenty-first-century Europe
- ▶ **Rec. CM(2000)4** on the education of Roma/Gypsy children in Europe

Parliamentary Assembly resolutions and recommendations

- ▶ **Resolution 2153(2017)** on "Promoting the inclusion of Roma and Travellers"
- ▶ **Resolution 2106 (2016)** on "Renewed commitment in the fight against antisemitism in Europe"
- ▶ **Resolution 1927(2013)** on "Ending discrimination against Roma children"
- ▶ **Rec.1880 (2009)** on "History teaching in conflict and post-conflict areas"
- ▶ **Recommendation 1283 (1996)** on "History and the learning of history in Europe"

European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) policy recommendations

- ▶ **GPR No. 3** on combating racism and intolerance against Roma/Gypsies
- ▶ **GPR No. 10** on combating racism and racial discrimination in and through school education
- ▶ **GPR No. 13** on combating antigypsyism and discrimination against Roma
- ▶ **GPR No. 15** on combating hate speech

Useful Council of Europe websites



www.coe.int/roma
www.coe.int/roma-genocide
www.coe.int/inschool
www.coe.int/historyteaching
<http://shared-histories.coe.int>
<https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth-roma/coe-and-roma-youth>
www.coe.int/education

