

Strasbourg, 13 June 2024

**17TH MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE
DIALOGUE WITH ROMA AND TRAVELLER¹ CIVIL SOCIETY**

**"TEACHING ROMA AND TRAVELLER HISTORY: ROMA HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE,
RECOGNITION AND EDUCATION"**

**Strasbourg, 11-12 June 2024
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MEETING REPORT

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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.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Introduction	4
Why Roma Holocaust Remembrance and Education?	4
Background on the Institutional Efforts.....	5
Importance of CSO Involvement in Roma Holocaust Remembrance and Education	5
Purpose of the 17 th Dialogue Meeting.....	6
Key Themes.....	7
Addressing Antigypsyism Through Holocaust Education and Remembrance	7
Challenges in Holocaust Remembrance and Education	7
Recommendations.....	9
Conclusions	12

Executive Summary

The 17th Dialogue Meeting of the Council of Europe with Roma and Traveller Civil Society (The Dialogue Meeting) focused on reviewing and advancing Roma Holocaust remembrance and education to combat antigypsyism in Europe. The meeting included stakeholders from Roma civil society organisations (CSOs), representatives from Roma grassroots organisations, and international bodies such as the European Commission (EC), and OSCE Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). The Dialogue Meeting served as a platform to share insights on challenges and gaps in current frameworks and activities.

Key recommendations from the meeting include strengthening accountability mechanisms for member states' implementation of Roma Holocaust education, supporting the creation of central memorials in major cities, and providing hands-on support to ministries of education to guide the integration of Roma history into mainstream curricula. The Dialogue Meeting also emphasized the need for consistent, long-term funding for advocacy and research, as well as the necessity of trauma-informed practices to ensure that educational efforts do not replicate historical harms.

A highlight of The Dialogue Meeting was the kick-off of the CoE and EC Joint Programme RomaMemory (Roma Holocaust Remembrance and Education). RomaMemory aims to advance the fight against antigypsyism by raising awareness to a broad audience on Roma history and culture and the Roma Holocaust. The 17th Dialogue Meeting provided a platform for stakeholders from international organisations, Roma civil society organisations, and academic institutions to share insights on the current state of Roma Holocaust remembrance and education, the challenges and successes, and, more importantly, feedback on how the CoE, the EC, and other institutions can better address antigypsyism through Roma Holocaust remembrance and education.

In conclusion, the 17th Dialogue Meeting highlighted that, while progress has been made, especially in the development and agreement on frameworks and recommendations, significant challenges remain. To bridge the gap between policy and practice, international institutions and member states must commit to more coordinated, inclusive, and genuinely impactful efforts to promote Roma Holocaust education and remembrance.

Introduction

Why Roma Holocaust Remembrance and Education?

The Roma Holocaust, or Samudaripen, is under and inadequately represented in European education and consciousness. The Council of Europe (CoE), European Commission (EC), and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) have made concerted efforts to promote the recognition of the Roma Holocaust and integrate Roma history into national education systems. These international bodies and their respective initiatives are part of a combined strategy to confront the ongoing and increasing antigypsyism in Europe. The two-day dialogue meeting addressed the challenges in formal and informal recognition of the Roma Holocaust by European states and their integration of Roma history, including the Roma Holocaust, into educational systems that reach students from the national majority.

It is important to understand why the recognition and education of Europe's atrocities against Roma is necessary to reduce antigypsyism. Education, including textbooks, is important in building narratives defining a society and nation^{2 3}. In particular, the representations of ethnic groups, including Roma, in school education promote the creation of a common identity with characteristics shared among the groups.⁴ This line of reasoning continues in the space of public recognition of past atrocities. Thus, ensuring the Roma Holocaust is represented as a European experience, where the majority population develops a sense of responsibility for the past, and Roma a sense of resistance to persecution and hatred, can bring the respective groups closer together around the idea of addressing the past to make the future better.

With anti-Roma sentiment and prejudice on the rise, it is not only important to expand Roma Holocaust education and remembrance, but also to critically think about not only if, but also how, education and remembrance are implemented to have the envisioned impact. The increase in far-right populist parties gaining representation through narratives to capture votes is related to attitudes on cultural issues.⁵ The years of surging far-right populist sentiment has or can lead to a normalisation of anti-immigration and Roma inclusion rhetoric in social and political spaces. Additionally, the misrepresentation, distortion, and denial of the Roma Holocaust are present in European societies, scholarships, and political speeches.⁶ International bodies and CSOs acknowledged the current state of European society's level of antigypsyism and the threats to integrating and the success of Roma Holocaust remembrance and education. Thus, the CoE, EU, and ODIHR must be devoted to their efforts and upholding their values.

² Schissler, Hanna, and Yasemin Nuhoğlu Soysal, eds. 2005. *The Nation, Europe, And The World: Textbooks And Curricula In Transition*. New York: Berghahn Books. <http://books.google.com/books?id=B72a3qJIn20C&pgis=1>

³ Williams, James H., ed. 2014. *(Re)Constructing Memory: School Textbooks and the Imagination of the Nation*. Rotterdam: SensePublishers. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6209-656-1>

⁴ Fuchs, Eckhardt, and Annekatrin Bock, eds. 2018. *The Palgrave Handbook of Textbook Studies*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-53142-1>

⁵ <https://iep.unibocconi.eu/why-european-far-right-parties-are-poised-continue-rising>

⁶ <https://old.auschwitzinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/The-Roma-Holocaust-Roma-Genocide-in-Southeastern-Europe-Report.pdf>

Background on the Institutional Efforts

The foundation for the CoE's support for Roma Holocaust recognition stems from the 2012 Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on the Rise of Anti-Gypsyism and Racist Violence against Roma in Europe.⁷ The Declaration outlines that violence towards Roma is "not a new phenomenon and has been prevalent in Europe for centuries".⁸ The declaration made it clear that addressing the historical injustices Roma communities have faced is critical in confronting today's anti-Roma rhetoric, prejudice, and violence. As such, it laid the groundwork for future CoE and member states' efforts to promote Roma Holocaust remembrance and education. Important efforts since then include a 2020 study on the representation of Roma in European textbooks and a 2020 Committee of Ministers Recommendation to Member States on the inclusion of the history of Roma and/or Travellers in school curricula and teaching materials. The latter included multiple recommendations on what and how to include the Roma Holocaust in curricula, textbooks, and teaching materials.

A 2015 EP Resolution entitled "International Roma Day – anti-Gypsyism in Europe and EU recognition of the Memorial Day of the Roma genocide during World War II" was a significant agenda-setting mechanism in the recognition of the Roma Holocaust through officially recognising 8 April as International Roma Day, calling for the recognition of 2 August as European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day, and utilising the recognition and remembrance of the Roma Holocaust as a tool in addressing antigypsyism. This call for acknowledgment of the Roma Holocaust highlights the importance of commemorating Europe's historical persecution of Roma to promote the Roma Holocaust education and reduce prejudice. The EU's role in this area is complemented by its funding mechanisms such as the Citizens, Equality, Rights, and Values (CERV) programme, which supports projects and activities designed to promote Roma Holocaust remembrance.

The opening session provided additional context and purpose for this year's meeting. Eleni Tsetsekou⁹ (CoE), and Szabolcs Schmidt¹⁰ (EC) kicked off the Joint Programme "Equality and Freedom from Discrimination for Roma: Roma Holocaust Remembrance and Education (RomaMemory)." The programme aims to foster an understanding of Roma history and culture emphasizing Roma Holocaust education and remembrance. Specific objectives are to encourage member states and public authorities to work with civil society organisations in implementing activities to raise awareness and ensure accurate representations of Roma history in the educational systems and media.

Importance of CSO Involvement in Roma Holocaust Remembrance and Education

This report and all efforts in Roma Holocaust remembrance and education need to be grounded in the historical community efforts for recognition and the calls for addressing the roots of antigypsyism. Furthermore, Roma must be at the forefront when designing and implementing any efforts for recognition, remembrance, and education, and not be merely consulted during the process.

The 2 August, Roma Holocaust Memorial Day, has its beginning as a family and community-driven event. Roma survivors and their families started this grassroots occasion to

⁷ <https://rm.coe.int/16800c0adc>

⁸ <https://rm.coe.int/16800c0adc>

⁹ Head of the Roma and Travellers Division of the Council of Europe

¹⁰ Head of Unit of the Non-Discrimination: Anti-Racism and Roma Coordination from the European Commission

commemorate the genocide of their people during the Second World War. The intimate gathering expanded into a larger commemoration, gaining recognition across Europe through the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma advocacy efforts. The Central Council's persistent activism and the political influence of Soraya Post during her time as a Member of the European Parliament helped this significant day of remembrance evolve into an official European day of recognition that highlights not only the historical persecution committed against Roma communities but also the ongoing struggle against antigypsyism.

During The Dialogue Meeting, several speakers emphasized the importance of community-led initiatives. Such initiatives underlined how 2 August and other acts of commemoration are more than a day of remembrance, but rather a testament to Roma resilience and agency. The speakers discussed how Roma CSOs have consistently reminded international bodies like the CoE, EC, and OSCE that this commemoration is deeply rooted in Roma community efforts. These organisations emphasized that Roma communities themselves initiated and continue to lead these memorial activities, driving the expansion of the event into a broader European recognition. It was noted that the Roma community's determination to honour their ancestors has played a crucial role in pushing European institutions to formally recognise the significance of this day.

Roma communities, CSOs, and individuals in places of influence play a pivotal role and have genuine agency in ensuring if and how historical and modern Roma persecution and prejudice are recognised and addressed.

Purpose of the 17th Dialogue Meeting

Taking into account the historical and current efforts of the CoE, the main objectives of the 17th Council of Europe Dialogue Meeting with Roma and Traveller Civil Society were to advance Roma Holocaust remembrance, recognition and education in efforts to challenge ongoing antigypsyism. The meeting focused on receiving feedback from Roma civil society organisations on the past and current initiatives of the CoE and member states. An additional objective of the meeting was to obtain feedback and start partnerships with Roma civil society for the RomaMemory Joint Programme. It also sought to evaluate member states' progress in incorporating Roma Holocaust education into their curricula and to emphasize the importance of Roma-led commemoration activities in fostering reconciliation and combating discrimination.

Key Themes

Addressing Antigypsyism Through Holocaust Education and Remembrance

Jeroen Schokkenbroek, Director of the Directorate of Equal Rights and Dignity of the CoE, opened the meeting by promoting Holocaust remembrance and education as a powerful tool to combat present day antigypsyism. Participants echoed that, through the recognition and reconciliation of past atrocities against Roma, societies can highlight the continuity of these injustices and challenge the denial and distortion of the Roma Holocaust and current-day anti-Roma sentiment. Educating the public about historical events, as emphasized by speakers Georgios Tsiakalos¹¹ and Raul Carstocea¹², can play a part in breaking the cycle of anti-Roma attitudes and prejudice that persists in public institutions. Additionally, there was a common sentiment that incorporating stories of Roma resistance, culture, contributions to European society, and remembrance is a required tool for reconciliation. This broader narrative, as advocated by Saimir Mile¹³ and Dezso Mate¹⁴, ensures that Roma history is not reduced to victimhood but instead reflects the full scope of their agency and resilience. Such an approach promotes a more nuanced understanding of Roma experiences, fostering respect and inclusivity. In this way, Holocaust remembrance becomes not only a means of honouring past tragedies but also a catalyst for dismantling contemporary anti-Gypsyism and building a more equitable society.

Challenges in Holocaust Remembrance and Education

One of the major challenges in Holocaust remembrance and education is the historical omission and marginalisation of Roma victims from European narratives. For decades, the suffering of Roma during the Holocaust was ignored or denied, as highlighted by Dotschy Michaela Reinhardt¹⁵. Despite efforts to recognise the genocide of Roma, such as the European Parliament's 2015 resolution calling for the recognition of 2 August as European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day, many European nations have yet to fully integrate this history into their national consciousness. As a result, the Roma Holocaust is not widely commemorated, leaving a gap in the collective memory of Europe. Mirjam Karoly¹⁶ discussed the necessity for remembrance and commemoration to be public and supported by public officials to tap into society's collective memory.

CoE monitoring, confirmed by Roma Civil Society, reveals that the current state of Roma Holocaust education across European states is deficient and that the CoE recommendation has been poorly adopted. While some states have made progress in integrating Roma history into their educational curricula and holding commemorative events, these efforts often fail to reach a broad audience. For instance, Roma history may be included in national curriculum, although it is typically presented in classes where the students are predominantly Roma, thus having no impact on the wider population. Ensuring that Holocaust education reaches all students requires coordination across all levels of the education system. From the development of national curricula to its implementation in classrooms, educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders must be aligned. Without this unified approach, the material often fails to reach

¹¹ Executive Director, Pro Bono Publico, Greece

¹² Researcher, Scientific Advisory Council of the Observatory on History Teaching in Europe

¹³ Director, La Voix des Roms, France

¹⁴ Coordinator for the Academic and Knowledge Production Section of the ERIAC Membership, European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture

¹⁵ Vice-chair of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, Germany

¹⁶ Board Member, Romano Centre, Austria

the students from the majority population, leaving large gaps in knowledge and understanding about the Roma Holocaust and perpetuating existing prejudices.

The specific session on “Teaching Roma Holocaust Education” revealed the persistent gaps between policy recommendations and their actual implementation. Elise Cornu¹⁷ underlined the necessity of including Roma history in national curricula since such education can address the root cause of ongoing discrimination. While the CoE has agreed on, created guidelines and emphasized the significance of Roma history, including Roma Holocaust education, in national curricula, the implementation is uneven: states with larger proportions of the Roma population are inadequately following the guidelines, especially when it comes to the Roma Holocaust. Participants, including NGO representatives, raised concerns about the quality of educational materials, the training of teachers, and the limited awareness among the public. This session also highlighted the ongoing struggle to create a comprehensive and inclusive educational narrative that not only addresses historical injustices but also actively combats contemporary prejudice.

Monitoring the progress of Holocaust remembrance and education is vital for institutions like the CoE, EU, and OSCE in evaluating the progress of their member states in adopting their agreements. While the CoE and EU stated that they have monitoring mechanisms, the OSCE is the only one to have institutionalised an evaluation and publication of their participating states’ commitments to Roma Holocaust commemoration and education. The OSCE has played a crucial role in promoting Roma Holocaust remembrance through its Roma and Sinti Action Plan. Their report, “Holocaust Memorial Days: An overview of remembrance and education in the OSCE region”, is a biannual publication that provides information on how OSCE participating states’ efforts in promoting the commemoration and study of the Holocaust are in line with their OSCE commitments, including specific findings on the genocide of Roma and Sinti. As highlighted by Beata Bislim Olahova and the 2024 report, data collected by the OSCE shows an increase in participating states’ official and unofficial commemoration of the Roma Holocaust. However, Roma civil society participants highlighted the slow nature of the commemoration and questioned how genuine these efforts have been, as well as the level of influence on politics and society. The OSCE’s regular reporting serves as a key advocacy tool and mechanism for holding states accountable to their commitments. Its findings emphasize the need for not only multinational commitments but also a strong public commitment to expedite remembrance, reconciliation, and educational efforts.

¹⁷ Head of Division of National Minorities and Minority Languages, Council of Europe

Recommendations

1. Strengthen reporting and accountability mechanisms:

- I. ODIHR incorporates a biannual report on Holocaust commemoration and research, which is valuable in tracking participating states' commitments. In addition, the reporting is valuable in evaluating government funding for commemoration and research, as well as seeing how participating states implement their Roma Holocaust commemoration and research commitments. A more robust reporting structure including a mechanism that is not self-reported by governments would be welcome.
- II. All international bodies, specifically the CoE and EC, should implement more thorough reporting and assessment mechanisms to monitor member states' efforts in the remembrance and education of the Roma Holocaust that are in line with the agreements, recommendations, and other binding and non-binding mechanisms.
- III. Reporting should include detailed tracking of funding, events, state participation, an evaluation of the content and its quality, the potential reach and impact, and if and how Roma CSOs are involved. All results should be validated by Roma CSOs who can provide context and evaluate the efforts based on a set of agreed criteria.
- IV. The Roma Civil Monitor or the follow-up from the project should analyse national governmental commitments to the inclusion of history and Roma in school curricula and teaching materials.

2. Revise and follow up the 2020 Roma Representation in European Curriculum and Textbooks Study:

- I. The 2020 Analytical report "The Representation of Roma in European Curricula and Textbooks" would benefit from a revisit to evaluate the progress made by member states since the 2020 Council of Europe Recommendation on the inclusion of the history of Roma and/or Travellers in school curricula and teaching materials.

3. Create and support Roma-led decision-making structures:

- I. In projects such as "RomaMemory", there should be a consortium of Roma CSOs with decision-making power to develop strategies, ensuring that they are not only providing input and feedback, but are also actively shaping the direction and implementation of the project. This will lead to authentic participation and agency which is especially important in Roma Holocaust remembrance and education activities, as well as anti-Roma prejudice programmes.

4. Support the creation of central memorial sites:

- I. Member states should be encouraged to create central memorials dedicated to the Roma Holocaust in all major cities. These sites should be accessible to the public and serve as educational hubs, supported by CSOs, to offer programmes that promote historical awareness and reconciliation.

5. Provide hands-on support for educational reforms:

- I. Establish a dedicated team to work directly with ministries of education for 3-5 years to assist with the integration of Roma history and culture into national curricula, including Roma Holocaust education. This hands-on approach would ensure that recommendations were implemented effectively at all levels, from policymaking to classroom teaching.

6. Develop a multinational education coalition:

- I. Create a coalition between member states to create and share best practices and resources in incorporating Roma history, including Roma Holocaust education, into national curricula, textbooks, and teacher training.

7. Ensure that educational efforts reach the majority population:

- I. Governments must include Roma history and culture, including the Roma Holocaust, into the mainstream educational curricula and educational materials, rather than being an optional or additional subject. Recommendations and any commitment by member/participating states must guarantee this through implementing mandatory guidelines for schools, providing standards, and assuring teacher training programmes which underline the importance of Roma history in broader European narratives.

8. Use digital media for Holocaust education:

- I. Encourage the use of social media, podcasts, and digital platforms for Holocaust education. Support initiatives like TernYpe to create online content that engages young people and broadens the reach of educational efforts on Roma history.

9. Continue and expand intergenerational dialogue on the Roma Holocaust:

- I. Strengthen and increase the number of programmes that facilitate intergenerational dialogue between Roma Holocaust survivors and young people. Such dialogue can help bridge the gap between past atrocities and present-day realities, ensuring that younger generations continue to bear witness and advocate for recognition.

10. Increase research funding for Roma histories:

- I. Appropriate additional funding for historians and researchers to document and study Roma histories, particularly in under-researched areas such as testimonies, burial sites, undocumented persecutions, and positive societal contributions.

11. Advocate for structural funding changes

- I. The CERV Holocaust Remembrance funding this year was structured only for events, limiting the ability for advocacy and research initiatives. In the future, CERV funding calls for Holocaust remembrance should not be limited to one-time events but should also support advocacy and research efforts. Budgets should include administrative and advocacy costs, allowing CSOs to effectively promote remembrance and reconciliation initiatives.

12. Develop trauma-informed practices:

- I. Trauma-informed approaches should be mandatory for departments working with Roma communities, particularly in education and social work. This includes integrating trauma awareness into Holocaust remembrance, education, and any institutional work to prevent replicating historical harms and antigypsyism.
- II. International bodies, including the CoE, should include trauma-informed training and practices in any teams working with marginalised communities to ensure sensitivities in language, approach, and perspectives that are grounded in the experiences of the people they serve.

13. Revise compensation policies for Roma Holocaust survivors:

- I. In countries where compensation efforts were delayed or inadequate, particularly where survivors passed away before receiving reparations, a revision of compensation policies is necessary.
- II. States must acknowledge their roles as perpetrators and provide fair reparations for historical injustices outside of the crimes during the Second World War. States need to reconcile the past through compensation and other reparations measures for mass crimes either supported or ignored by the states.

14. Create spaces for reconciliation

- I. Beyond remembrance and recognition, international bodies and national governments must intentionally focus on creating spaces for reconciliation. These efforts should include truth commissions that build on practices in countries like Sweden, Germany, and Spain.

Conclusions

The 17th Dialogue Meeting of the Council of Europe with Roma and Traveller Civil Society emphasized the crucial need for more effective, comprehensive, and creative approaches to advance Roma Holocaust remembrance and education as one of the tools to reduce Europe's antigypsyism. The discussions clarified that, despite existing frameworks from the Council of Europe, European Union/Commission, and OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), major gaps continue in compliance across member states and their implementation of shared agreements. The persistent gaps call for an expedited need for structural changes in how Roma history, including the Holocaust, is recognised and taught. Furthermore, the persistence in antigypsyism and poor adoption of including Roma history into national curricula and official recognition of past atrocities, call for more than remembrance and education. Alternatively, reconciliation and a revisit of reparations through the lens of a transitional justice framework are needed to have any impact on reducing antigypsyism in a sustainable way.

One of the most prominent needs identified was the inconsistency in integrating Roma Holocaust education into national curricula. Educational efforts often fail to reach the majority population, and when they do, the quality of the materials and teacher preparation is inadequate. Without comprehensive inclusion of education reforms and multilateral frameworks, they will not effectively address the root causes of antigypsyism. Furthermore, stronger accountability mechanisms are needed to monitor the implementation of guidelines to guarantee that Roma history is not neglected or treated as an optional subject. Hands-on support in guiding the implementation of educational reforms and comprehensive mainstreaming of Roma history and Holocaust curricula are vital to reach European schools and societies.

The recommendations in this report aim to bridge the gaps between policy and practice, between intention and action, and between the superficial and genuine. To close these gaps, Europe needs to come to terms with its past and purge the stubborn historic antigypsyism from its institutions, even those that are well-intended.