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From Margins to Memory and Education: Unforgetting the Roma Holocaust

‘Silence is not accidental — it’s a choice.’

— Dr Raul Cârstocea

United for Remembrance and Action

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The training on Roma Holocaust Remembrance and Education was organised by the [European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture \(ERIAC\)](#) in the framework of the EU-CoE Joint Programme of the European Commission and the Council of Europe “RomaMemory”. The training and commemoration programme in Kraków and Auschwitz-Birkenau brought together educators, researchers, Roma activists, public officials and policymakers from 12 EU Member States. Marking the 10th anniversary of the EU’s recognition of 2 August as [European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day](#)—which honours the thousands of Roma and Sinti murdered during the liquidation of the ‘Gypsy Family Camp’ at Auschwitz-Birkenau on the night of 2–3 August 1944 and all Roma victims of Nazi persecution—the event aimed to embed this history as an integral part of Europe’s memory and education.

The programme unfolded in four parts: a preparatory online training session in late July, followed by an in-person training day on 1 August in Kraków organised by ERIAC as part of the joint programme 'Roma Memory'. Participants of the training as well as parliamentarians and international representatives also attended the official commemoration event on 2 August at the Auschwitz Birkenau Memorial Site, organised by the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma. The commemoration included a visit to the Roma Holocaust exhibition at Block 13 of the Auschwitz Museum, candle-laying at the Black Wall, the official ceremony at the Roma and Sinti Memorial in Birkenau and a concluding meeting at the International Youth Meeting Centre in Oświęcim, where survivors shared their testimonies with Dikh He Na Bister youth initiative participants.

'The Forgotten Holocaust'

Dr Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, Deputy Director of the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERAC), a Roma activist and anthropologist, explained why the term 'Forgotten Holocaust' remains painfully accurate. 'For a long time, the Roma Holocaust was not recognised at all. Roma were seen as collateral victims, sometimes even as people who somehow deserved their fate. These perceptions carried old stereotypes into the post-war era and beyond.'

Mirga traced a stark continuity: 'Even after 1945, racist policies didn't vanish. Forced sterilisation of Roma women continued in parts of Europe into the 1970s, and in the Czech Republic into the 1990s. Today, in 2025, we still hear hate speech, scapegoating and violence with disturbing parallels to the 1930s. The rhetoric hasn't disappeared—it's just wearing new clothes.'

Recognition came late: Germany only formally acknowledged its responsibility in 1982; Berlin's national memorial was unveiled in 2012. 'We are still fighting to make it an inseparable part of European history, not a paragraph in brackets.'

The Council of Europe's 2020 recommendation on Roma history in curricula and the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's 2023 guidelines are steps forward, but she stressed the gap between policy and classroom practice. 'Despite symbolic progress, the Roma Holocaust is still not properly incorporated into national curricula. ERAC has already developed several initiatives in this field, such as the [Barvalipe Academy masterclass](#) recordings and the [Re-thinking Romani Resistance](#) project, and this training session partly built on those foundations. The aim was to bridge the gap by connecting research, resources, and methodologies directly to the people who can bring them into classrooms.'

Reclaiming History

Caroline Helene Martin, Project Manager of the EU–Council of Europe Joint Programme Roma Memory outlined the issue clearly: 'The Roma community is the most significant minority in many European countries, yet the Roma Holocaust has been largely absent from curricula. Until now, it has only been minimally addressed, almost as if it were a side note.'

For the Project Manager, the urgency goes beyond setting the historical record straight. 'We know there is a rise of hate speech and populist politics across Europe. Restoring facts and strengthening history teaching—especially about the Roma Holocaust—is part of defending democratic societies. It's also about educating for openness, empathy and a basic respect for others.'

She reminded participants that the Council of Europe's mission is rooted in shared values. 'We fight antigypsyism, we promote inclusive education and inclusive teaching of Roma history and culture, we support local participation and we preserve the memory of the Roma Holocaust. This programme is part of that mission.'

The Project Manager presented the Council of Europe's two key policy recommendations to member states: one on [including Roma and Traveller history in school curricula and materials](#), and another on [remembrance and the prevention of crimes against humanity](#). To support these recommendations, the Council offers freely available online resources—fact-sheets, infographics, teaching activities, and methodologies for reviewing and improving educational materials. 'These resources go beyond technical documents. They aim to profoundly transform how we teach history and inclusion—making Roma voices visible as full participants in our shared history, not as marginal figures or only as victims.'

She also pointed out that unlike Jewish communities, Roma lacked strong international representation after the war, leaving their stories largely untold in post-war trials and commemorations. 'A lot of witnesses came from the Jewish community, whereas Roma were absent. Documentation was scarce and existing stereotypes made it even easier to ignore their suffering. This silence went on for decades.'

She closed with a call to action: 'These two days are not only to share knowledge but to plan concrete actions. Governments may make statements, but implementation is another matter. Our role is to provide the tools, the networks, and the technical cooperation so that real change happens.'

Breaking the Silence

Dr Raul Cârstocea, historian, lecturer at Maynooth University in Ireland and member of ERIAC's Barvalipe Academy, combined professional expertise with family memory. Of Roma background himself, he recalled how his grandmother, a nomadic Roma from the Szatmár (Satu Mare, Transylvania, Romania) region narrowly escaped deportation to Transnistria under Ion Antonescu's regime.

For him, Romania bears a dual historical responsibility. The first is for the centuries-long enslavement of Roma — a uniquely Romanian institution that lasted nearly 500 years, until 1856. 'Even educated Romanians often assume it was a European phenomenon, but it was specific to the Romanian principalities. We need more research and above all, an official acknowledgement that this was our history,' he said.

The second responsibility lies in the Holocaust. Romania, like Croatia, carried out deportations and killings of Roma independently of Nazi Germany. 'These were national decisions, not

orders from Berlin,' he stressed. While Antonescu is sometimes praised for later refusing Hitler's request to deport Romania's remaining Jews to Auschwitz, the historian was blunt: 'Refusing to kill is not the same as saving.'

For him, these legacies remain largely absent from public awareness. In today's Romanian curriculum, the compulsory course is titled History of the Jews and the Holocaust; Roma are briefly noted as 'also victims', and slavery is not mentioned at all. 'If a teacher doesn't see it as important, they can skip the Roma lesson entirely. This silence is not accidental — it's a choice.'

Change Starts – One Classroom, One Conversation at a Time

Cârstocea also reflected on the absence of Roma history in schools, and how this silence is reinforced by prejudice. 'Anti-Roma racism is completely mainstream in Romania — the last acceptable form of hatred. Teachers may lack knowledge, but nationalist pride also discourages confronting state-led crimes,' he said. For decades after the war, Roma testimonies were dismissed as unreliable, feeding the long delay in recognition and reparations.

He also warned against creating hierarchies of suffering by separating 'genocide' from 'Holocaust'. 'Jews and Roma are brothers and sisters in suffering. Both were targeted for who they were, not what they did. If they were murdered on those grounds, they are Holocaust victims, full stop.'

For him, the Kraków training was a vital link between research, recommendations, and classroom realities. 'We have the materials, the pedagogy, the experience. Now it's about empowering those who shape curricula and train teachers, so that Roma Holocaust history is taught with sensitivity, depth and accuracy.'

The training also highlighted examples of good practice. **Dr Jozef Jožko Facuna**, senior state counsellor in the Office of the Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities in Slovakia traced the country's long path towards introducing Roma history into schools. The first attempt came in 2002–2003, when an experimental subject called Roma Reality was tested in selected primary and secondary schools. This pilot phase produced the first curricula, publications and teacher training. Over nearly a decade, these materials evolved through collaboration with Czech colleagues at Charles University and with Roma and non-Roma educators across Slovakia.

'We developed methodological materials on Romani language, literature, and history, and trained teachers to use them in classrooms,' Facuna explained. Today, only a handful of schools—perhaps five or six—teach Roma history, often in areas with larger Roma populations such as Zlaté Kľasy and Košice. In these schools, trained teachers pass knowledge on to pupils, supported by parents and Roma community feedback.

He highlighted the importance of international cooperation, pointing to a Council of Europe resource on Roma history, now translated into Slovak, as well as national projects like Together with Roma We Will Achieve More, funded by Norway Grants. 'Teaching tolerance and mutual respect in the classroom is essential. Cooperation between Roma and non-Roma

experts is the best practice for creating curricula and publications. Roma voices must be part of the process.'

For Facuna, remembering the Roma Holocaust is inseparable from this effort. 'The Holocaust was a tragedy for humanity that must not be forgotten. Around 500,000 Roma—men, women, and children—did not survive this cruel and horrible period. We must ensure that the Roma Holocaust does not become the forgotten Holocaust.'

From France, **Nicolas Davieau**, senior official with the French Ministry of National Education described recent initiatives to strengthen remembrance and education. One of the key measures is a new national plan requiring every student to visit a memorial site related to racism, antisemitism or antigypsyism. 'Including a topic in the curriculum doesn't guarantee it will be taught,' he explained. 'Teachers must feel prepared and that means proper training and accessible resources in their own language.'

He underlined that while Holocaust education is mandatory in France, the Roma Holocaust still remains in the shadows. 'It is mentioned but without the same depth as the Jewish Holocaust. Too often it is reduced to a sentence or two,' he said. The problem, as he sees it, is not only about content but also about teachers' confidence. 'There are teachers who don't feel equipped, who don't know where to find materials or who are afraid of saying something wrong.'

For Davieau, this is part of a wider structural issue: in public discourse 'Holocaust' often continues to mean only the Jewish Holocaust, while Roma persecution remains marginal. That is why, in his view, remembrance must move beyond symbolic gestures. 'When students visit memorial sites, when they meet witnesses or read testimonies, history becomes real. It is no longer abstract. That is when learning truly happens.'

The way forward, he argued, is clear: effective Roma Holocaust education must combine curricular inclusion with concrete tools for teachers and opportunities for students to encounter memory directly. Without this, he warned, the Roma genocide will continue to be treated as a footnote rather than an inseparable part of European history.

Julia Uchmann-Lyszcz, educator at the Pilecki Institute in Berlin, described how her personal journey led her to focus on Roma history. 'I realised I knew almost nothing about the history of Roma in Europe, despite having studied the Holocaust extensively. That recognition made me angry—at myself and at the system—and it pushed me to learn,' she said. Her research began with a thesis on Polish Roma artist Małgorzata Mirga-Tas, which opened her eyes to how absent the Roma story was from mainstream education.

For her, the issue is not abstract. 'There is still so much antigypsyism, ignorance, and lack of knowledge. Educating about Roma history, culture, and the Holocaust—about persecution past and present—is essential to what is happening now and to how we live together.' She noted how anti-Roma prejudice can be found not only in public discourse and media but even in well-educated, liberal circles. 'It is something inherited, deeply ingrained and often unnoticed. Unlike antisemitism, which has received greater awareness, antigypsyism is still overlooked.'

Reflecting on her work as a Holocaust researcher and teacher, she stressed that leaving the Roma out is unacceptable. 'When teaching about the Holocaust, concentration camps, and National Socialism, it is not acceptable to neglect the Roma Holocaust, which is usually ignored.'

She valued the Kraków training as a space to connect with others. 'It is an exceptional group of participants with diverse backgrounds—from education, academia, and social work—united by a passion for social change. The conversations after the workshops are enriching, and it is inspiring to meet people with whom we might collaborate in the future.'

Her conclusion was clear: true change in perception comes slowly, but it begins in the classroom. 'When students truly understand this history, they begin to question the stereotypes they've inherited. That's when change starts—one classroom, one conversation at a time.'

From the Classroom to the Memorial

On 2 August, the official Council of Europe and European Union delegation—composed of parliamentarians and government representatives—took part in the European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day. The day began at the Roma exhibition in Block 13 of the Auschwitz Museum, followed by candle-laying at the Black Wall, where thousands of prisoners were executed.

The commemoration continued at the Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial site, co-organised by the [Central Council of German Sinti and Roma](#) and the Association of Roma in Poland. Survivors and delegates spoke to the assembled crowd, sharing memories that cut through the abstraction of history. Their voices carried a message of warning as much as remembrance.

Later in the day, training participants joined the Dikh He Na Bister youth event and the meeting with survivors organised by TernYpe International Roma Youth Network, where survivors addressed the audience and answered questions from young people and representatives.

Since 2010, the [TernYpe International Roma Youth Network](#) has organised Dikh He Na Bister – the Roma Genocide Remembrance Initiative, which each year on 2 August brings together hundreds of Roma and non-Roma young people from across Europe to commemorate the Roma Holocaust and to promote remembrance, dialogue and solidarity.

Bringing Roma Voices to the Fore

As the project manager from the Council of Europe, Caroline Martin, put it: 'The aim is to make the Roma Holocaust an integral part of Europe's memory and education. That means giving teachers the confidence, the tools, and the resources to tell this history—and making sure Roma voices are part of the telling.'

Dr Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, deputy director at the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERAC) echoed this, emphasising that the task is far from complete: 'We are still fighting to make this history inseparable from the European narrative. It must be taught with the same depth and seriousness as other parts of Holocaust history—anything less keeps it marginal.'

In Dr Raul Cârstocea's words: 'If we don't teach it, we allow the silence to continue. And silence is dangerous—it creates space for prejudice to thrive.'

Julia Uchman-Lyszcz, educator at the Pilecki Institute in Berlin, saw the outcome in personal terms: 'When students truly understand this history, they begin to question the stereotypes they've inherited. That's when change starts—one classroom, one conversation at a time.'

The Choices We Make

Over the course of the training and commemoration, a recurring theme surfaced: the fragility of democracy and how easily prejudice can return if left unchallenged. The warning signs are clear—resurgent hate speech, scapegoating and populist politics echo patterns from the 1930s that paved the way for persecution and ultimately the murder of millions. Education was repeatedly named as the strongest tool we have: not only to restore silenced chapters of history, but to build empathy, critical thinking, and resilience against fear and division.

Participating in these events made me realise that remembrance is not only about honouring the past but also about the choices we make in the present: how we listen and give voice to those unseen on the margins, how we bring the Roma Holocaust into classrooms and how we create space for respect and inclusion. Roma Holocaust Remembrance Day underscored that it is our responsibility to 'unforget' and act on what has been left in silence for far too long.

The following album is a visual diary of the two-day programme: the training in Kraków, the visit to the Roma Holocaust Museum and candle laying at the Black Wall in Auschwitz, the commemoration with speeches at Birkenau and the meeting with survivors in Oświęcim