Right to Remember

A Handbook for Education with Young People on the Roma Genocide

Second edition
2017

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
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www.coe.int/youth/roma

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Photo: Eukalyptus (Pixabay)

Printed in Hungary

ISBN: 978-92-871-8396-5

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our gratitude to all those who contributed to this publication, with their suggestions and feedback, in particular:

- The participants in the consultative meeting held in Strasbourg in December 2013, for their invaluable contribution to making this a useful tool for educators and youth organisations: Gerhard Baumgartner (Austrian initiative for educational materials on Roma Genocide); Nathan Chicheportiche (European Union of Jewish Students); Maryana Borisova, Vicente Rodríguez Fernández, Alexandra Jach, Rebekah Ward (ternYpe, International Roma Youth Network); Angel Ivanov (Forum of European Roma Young People); Zuzana Brodilová (Konexe); Robert Sigel (Bavarian State Center for Civic Education); Simona Vannini (Pestalozzi Programme); Dzafer Buzoli (Docba); Nicolae Radiţa (Council of Europe Ad hoc Committee of Experts on Roma Issues /CAHROM); Piotr Trojanski (Krakow Pedagogical University); Felicia Waldman (Romanian Delegation to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, Member of the Committee on the Roma Genocide); Alina Onchis (Ruhama Foundation)

- Zara Lavchyan, who acted as a consultant for collecting information for the handbook from different organisations and institutions

- Aurora Ailincăi, Ana Rozanova, Michael Guet (Support Team for the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues, Council of Europe)

- Clémentine Trolong-Bailly, Robert Rustem (European Roma and Travellers Forum)

- Users of the first edition, for their feedback and suggestions

- Nina Kapoor (Youth Department, Council of Europe), for helping to find a title for this handbook

- Mara Georgescu (Youth Department, Council of Europe), for the project coordination.

We have made all possible efforts to trace references of texts and activities to their authors and give them the necessary credits. We apologise for any omissions and will be pleased to correct them in the next edition.

More than a right

The youth policy of the Council of Europe aims at providing young people – girls and boys, young women and young men – with equal opportunities and experience which enable them to develop the knowledge, skills and competences to play a full part in all aspects of society. This definition acknowledges that not all young people enjoy the same opportunities, notably because they are the subject of discrimination. The priorities of the Council of Europe youth policy include therefore measures for "preventing and counteracting all forms of racism and discrimination on any ground", ensuring young people's full enjoyment of human rights and human dignity, and encouraging their commitment in this respect. The adoption of the Roma Youth Action Plan as part of the programme of activities of the Council of Europe is a political and practical consequence of the need to secure equality of opportunities in participation of all young people, Roma included.

The Roma youth taking part in the elaboration of the Roma Youth Action Plan identified the *strengthening of Roma youth identity* as the first priority of the plan. The work on identity was perceived by them as necessary, in view of creating an environment where "Roma young people can grow free from discrimination and confident about their identity and future perspectives while appreciating their history, plural cultural backgrounds and affiliations as young people, as Roma, as citizens of their countries and as active Europeans"[1].

The personal need to understand one's past and history is understandably more important in the case of a community, the Roma, whose history is largely ignored and generally side-lined by mainstream history. That Roma young people acknowledge the importance of learning about their history in order to grow up confidently as young Europeans is evidence that identities do not have to be constructed in opposition to other identities or in self-defence. A community that is aware of its history is more likely to look at the future with confidence. More importantly, a sense of history is necessary in order to restore dignity and to empower the victims of massive human rights violations into actors for the struggle of securing human rights and dignity for everyone.

The work on remembrance of the Roma Genocide has been actively pursued by Roma youth organisations and movements, notably through activities commemorating 2 August as International Day of Remembrance of the Roma Holocaust. The Roma Youth Action Plan could not ignore the calls for learning about the Genocide by both Roma and non-Roma youth.

The need for education for remembrance is seen as both a tool for strengthening the identity of the Roma young people and a tool for fighting for human rights and against discrimination. Moreover, the need for these types of educational tools can also be seen in the growing amount of hate speech towards Roma people, much of which refers also to the Genocide! Hate speech and abuse threatens the fundamental values and principles of democracy and human rights and it is unacceptable. The No Hate Speech Movement youth campaign of the Council of Europe has collected numerous examples of hate speech targeting Roma. Combined with the persistence – and sometimes impunity – of racist violence and discrimination,

they provide sufficient evidence on why remembrance of the Roma Genocide is so important in Europe today.

This task is particularly difficult for the Council of Europe's youth sector because our tradition of working with non-formal education principles does not pre-dispose us to work on history matters. Other Council of Europe sectors have considerably more expertise and credibility, as attested by the recently published book, *Shared histories for a Europe without dividing lines*. Working on remembrance, however, is more than just history. As practised in human rights education and in education about the Holocaust, remembrance is more than just learning about the past: it is learning from the past so that it is not repeated. Furthermore, it is about restoring a sense of dignity and justice to the victims and to their families and communities.

Education for remembrance is therefore fully pertinent to the work on empowerment of young people and in facilitating the access of vulnerable youth groups to their rights. Involving young people, including Roma youth, in researching, discussing and discovering the meanings of the Roma Genocide before 1945 and today is also a way to involve them as agents and actors in their own understanding of human rights and of history.

This handbook is a self-contained educational resource that does not replace the work of historians; on the contrary, it aims to make history accessible, expose its complexity and link it with the situation today in order to pursue the long-term goal of human rights for all. This handbook is now here to serve both teachers as well as NGOs and youth organisations, to work with young people on the remembrance of the Roma Genocide.

It is based on the principles of human rights education and places remembrance as an aspect of *learning about, through* and *for* human rights. The handbook itself includes educational activities, detailed explanations of how to prepare and run them, as well as commemoration events and information about the Genocide and its relevance to the situation of the Roma people today.

This handbook also takes a clearly anti-racist approach and expresses the need for learning about the past as a necessary step in order never again to reach any kind of situation as the ones during the Second World War. If it is true that "race has been semantically conquered, but remains deeply ingrained in the political imaginaries, structures and practices"[2], young people ought to have opportunities to understand the consequences of racism and their prevalence today so that the eradication of racism can begin. This is certainly a task for education everywhere: in the formal and non-formal settings and additionally taking advantage of informal education.

This is a modest contribution to this process, but one that we hope will inspire others to do better and to do more for the present and the future of human rights in our societies.

[1] Roma Youth Action Plan presentation, Council of Europe, 2013

[2] Alana Lentin and Gavan Titley, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism – Racism in a Neoliberal Age*, Zed Books, London, 2011

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A note on terminology

The term 'Roma' is used throughout this publication to refer to Roma, Sinti, Kale and related groups in Europe, including Travellers and the Eastern groups (Dom and Lom). It should be understood to cover the wide diversity of the groups concerned, including persons who identify themselves as Gypsies.

The term 'Rom' is also used to refer to a person of Roma origin.

Both 'Roma' and 'Romani' are used as adjectives: a 'Roma(ni) woman', 'Roma(ni) communities'.

A note on the second edition

The second edition of *Right to Remember* incorporates some small revisions into the original publication. Since it was first published (in 2014), *Right to Remember* has been widely used, by both Roma and non-Roma youth groups. The response has been almost overwhelmingly positive, but inevitably there have been some suggestions for clarification, amendments, or inclusion of additional material. Certain groups or individuals working on the Roma Genocide have also been kind enough to respond to a call for feedback on the publication.

We have tried to respond to as many of these comments as possible, without altering the general aims and tenor, and without adding too much to the length. We recognise that a publication that seeks to be concise on such a complex subject will always involve some compromise, and will always be, to some extent, incomplete. It may also be controversial. However, our original purpose was to introduce the topic to an audience largely unaware of the worst aspects of the Genocide, to stimulate debate, and to prompt young people to look further into the subject. Feedback from youth groups has confirmed that, in these respects, the publication has served its purpose. We hope that the second edition will be equally successful.

The main changes in the second edition concern the introductory chapters, where more information was added regarding the Genocide. We also updated, to the extent that it was possible, the information about the recognition and commemorations of the Genocide.

1. Introduction

> In November, 1942, the pogrom against the Jews and Gypsies began, and they were shot on a mass scale in street executions … . It was cold, and the Gypsy women were weeping loudly. They had all their possessions on their backs, including eiderdowns; everything that they had, but all of that was taken away from them later… . They were taken to the station and loaded into goods wagons, which were sealed and taken to stations beyond Chelm, to Sobibor, where they were burnt in the ovens.
>
> *Camp survivor B. Stawska describing the transportation of Romanies to Sobibor (Fickowski, The Gypsies in Poland. History and Customs)*

1.1 A forgotten genocide

Much has been written about the importance of Holocaust education. Work on this theme is already supported by numerous handbooks and other educational resources. However, among all these resources, only a very small proportion is directed specifically towards the way the Roma population was targeted for systematic murder. Where Roma victims do deserve a mention, it is generally no more than a side-note: the Roma are seen as one of the "additional groups" that suffered at the time.

> The genocide of the Sinti and Roma was carried out from the same motive of racial mania, with the same premeditation, with the same wish for the systematic and total extermination as the genocide of the Jews. Complete families from the very young to the very old were systematically murdered within the entire sphere of influence of the National Socialists.
>
> *Roman Herzog, Federal President of Germany, 16 March 1997*

The Roma were not an "additional group". They were one of the key groups targeted for complete elimination by the Nazis. It is hard to know exactly how many were killed. At the beginning of the War, the Roma population in Europe was estimated to be about 1 million people. By the end of the War, the size of the Roma population was believed to be just 20% - 30% of what it had been at the start. That means that 80% may have been killed, amounting to at least half a million people.

> Within the [Łódż] ghetto, the Roma were confined to a *Zigeunerlager*, separated from the rest of the ghetto by barbed wire. Living conditions were even more wretched than in the rest of the ghetto. In late 1941, in a few weeks' time approximately 700 Roma – mainly children – died in Łódż of an infectious epidemic disease.
>
> *www.romasinti.eu*

The thoroughness with which the Genocide was carried out varied from country to country: in some countries, there were almost no Roma remaining when the War came to a close. In others, where part of the Roma population survived, most would have spent the wartime years in labour camps, in forced exile, or hiding underground. Many are likely to have witnessed mass deaths, often of their closest family.

For a Roma person during the war years, "surviving" would have meant a state of bare existence, on the edges of starvation or disease, in constant fear for one's life.

The Roma Genocide was wholly European. Across the continent, throughout the period of the Second World War, Roma in mass numbers were vilified, targeted and killed, for nothing more than being Roma. Whole families were rounded up, torn from their homes, herded into camps or segregated areas, threatened, beaten, mutilated, starved; and then, in very significant numbers, deliberately killed off. The victims were parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, infants, toddlers and teenagers: no-one was too young or too old.

> When I went in [to the camp hospital], the children cried and asked, 'Uncle, give bread, give sugar' … . For me those were the most difficult moments I experienced in the camp. Not the beating, not the interrogation, but those children.
>
> *Dr Frantisek Janouch, a Czech prisoner employed as a doctor in the ' Gypsy' camp at Auschwitz-Berkenau*

Today, despite the frequent calls to 'remember' the Holocaust, the Roma plight has all but been forgotten. In truth, it has never been fully acknowledged. One indication of that failure is the state of almost total ignorance: among young people in Europe, perhaps the majority are unaware of the terrible crimes and suffering that the Roma people had to endure.

There are important reasons why this lack of attention and lack of balance need to be addressed. Some of the reasons are to do with the historical record and the extreme nature of the crimes against the Roma people; some are to do with the need for *any* past victim to feel that crimes against them have been acknowledged – and remedied; and some are to do with how the majority non-Roma population continues to view and treat representatives of this community today.

The crimes of the past have not been laid to rest for the Roma. They have barely even been recognised and there has never been a common reckoning of their significance and impact

for the Roma population, let alone a re-evaluation of the way society behaves towards this minority. In fact, in many ways, the behaviour of the non-Roma population today recalls and repeats some of the patterns which allowed those crimes to happen.

This handbook is an attempt to redress this balance.

> I walked around the camp and tried to keep busy. That was why I walked up to the barbed wire on the crematorium side. I saw a long line of people there, wandering towards the crematorium… . At first I could not understand what I was seeing: there were corpses sprinkled with white lye, and they were all jumbled up. As a child, I could not imagine what they were. Later, when I was about twenty, that scene began coming back to me in nightmares… . As a child, I was completely unaware of how many terrible things I had to look at in the camp.
>
> *Else Baker, who was deported to Auschwitz as a child in May 1944. Her mother was half-Roma.*

1.2 About the handbook

The handbook is intended as a self-contained resource for those wishing to promote a deeper understanding and awareness of the Roma Genocide. It has been designed primarily for youth workers in non-formal settings, but it will be useful for anyone working in education, including in the formal sector. The activities provided in the final section are aimed at a target audience of young people from 15 to 30 years old.

A springboard for learning and action

The handbook does not attempt to offer a complete historical account of the Roma Genocide. We have based the information on generally accepted existing historical sources and research but these are still thin on the ground, and some may be disputed, or subject to different interpretations. When working on this topic, you should remember that the Roma Genocide is an area which has not yet been as well studied as the Jewish Holocaust: some facts or issues are still controversial, and all are highly sensitive.

Perhaps more importantly, for reasons of space and in order to make the handbook useable and understandable, the picture presented is a simplified one. A large number of facts have had to be left out, particularly those relating to the different practices or circumstances across the region.

The handbook should be seen as offering a general picture, designed to prompt ideas and questions and to stimulate research and action on the part of individual youth groups. We hope that you will encourage those you work with to explore the area further, filling in the details for your country or your region. There are numerous ways of doing this: some are outlined in Chapter 6. You will also find a list of links and resources in the Appendix.

Remember that the main purpose of this manual is to lead to changes in behaviour and attitudes. Use it as a launching point for action: support the group not just in finding out about a past history, but in using it to make a better future.

Outline of chapters

- **Chapter 1, Introduction**

- **Chapter 2, The Roma Genocide**, provides some background to the Genocide for those unfamiliar with the details. Given the space available in a publication such as this, the information is necessarily selective and does not deal with all the various crimes, nor with every aspect of their impact on the people who were victimised. The quotes throughout the text and personal testimonies included at the end (page 107) complete some of the gaps.

- **Chapter 3, The Need for Remembrance**, looks at the purpose – and importance – of remembering the Roma Genocide, not only for the Roma people but also for society as a whole. The questions raised in this section are at least as important as the 'facts' about the Genocide itself: effective work on this theme needs to be more than just a lesson in history.

- **Chapter 4, A Human Rights Perspective**, provides some background on human rights, relating these both to the Genocide and to the way that the Roma community is treated today across the continent of Europe. Human rights are important because they offer a set of common standards for society. Building them into activities with young people will help them to assess the terrible events of the Holocaust according to established universal standards, and will provide important reference points for what is happening today.

> Teaching and learning practices and activities should follow and promote democratic and human rights values and principles.
>
> *Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education*

- **Chapter 5, Advice for Educators**, offers some practical guidelines for educational work on this topic. It outlines an approach to working with young people which will help to raise awareness of the Genocide but should also allow them to see its historical relevance for themselves and for today. Ideally, such work will prompt participants to take the lessons out into the world.

- **Chapter 6, Educational Activities**, includes a selection of activities which can be used with young people to explore issues around the Genocide. These activities are presented in outline form and will be greatly enhanced if they are supplemented with material from preceding sections.

- **Chapter 7** and the **Appendices** include further resources to support the activities, including a few personal testimonies from Roma survivors of the Holocaust, abbreviated versions of key human rights documents, and a number of links to useful online resources.

Although it may be tempting for educators to move straight to the activities, you are strongly encouraged to look through the other sections! These contain information and ideas which will help you in deciding on the most appropriate approach for your group. Most of the ideas can also usefully be shared with participants.

1.3 Terminology

Roma / Gypsy / Traveller

The term 'Gypsy' has traditionally been used by the 'non-Gypsy' population to refer to a number of different communities, including the Roma, Sinti, Kale and related groups in Europe, such as Travellers. Although a very few 'Gypsy' communities do self-identify using this term, in general the meaning of the word is highly derogatory and carries almost entirely negative connotations.

> The Gypsy question is for us today primarily a racial question. Thus, the national socialist state will basically have to settle the Gypsy question just as it has solved the Jewish question. We have already begun...
>
> *Adam Wurth, Racial Hygiene Research Unit at the Nazi Department of Health*

For this reason, the Council of Europe avoids the use of the term 'Gypsy' and refers to all these groups as 'Roma'. This is the terminology employed throughout the handbook. However, references to 'gypsies' in official documents or in quotations have been retained in order not to alter the (often negative) meaning intended by the authors of these quotes.

The term 'antigypsyism' refers to racism against the Roma (in the above sense). The term is addressed not at Roma, but at the majority non-Roma population. It has been included in ECRI's 2011 *General Policy Recommendation (No. 13) on combating anti-Gypsyism and discrimination against the Roma.*

> Antigypsyism is a specific form of racism, an ideology of racial superiority, a form of dehumanisation and of institutional racism […] fuelled by historical discrimination.
>
> *Valeriu Nicolae, Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe for Roma Issues*

Roma Genocide / Roma Holocaust

Since the first edition of this manual, the Council of Europe has changed the use of this terminology. Currently, 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 word 'holocaust' is derived from the Greek words *holos* (whole) and *kaustos* (burned) and has been used for many centuries to refer to large-scale massacres of populations. Since the 1960s, 'The Holocaust' has been used to refer to the mass killings of the Nazi era – often restricted to the killings of Jews. This handbook uses the term to cover all victims – including the Roma – who were deliberately targeted and murdered by the Nazi regime or by Nazi collaborators.

The term 'genocide' is a relatively recent one and is used almost interchangeably with 'Holocaust' throughout this handbook. The general sense of this term is given by the 1946 UN General Assembly Resolution 96 (1): "Genocide is a denial of the right of existence of entire human groups, as homicide is the denial of the right to live of individual human beings".

> [the defendants] conducted deliberate and systematic genocide … against the civilian populations of certain occupied territories in order to destroy particular races and classes of people, and national, racial or religious groups, particularly Jews, Poles, Gypsies and others.
>
> *Count 3 of the indictment of Nazi leaders at the Nuremburg Trials*

The legal definition of the crime of genocide is found in Article II of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide (see page 61 for this definition).

Some commentators use other Romani terms to refer to the Nazi attempts to eliminate the Roma population – in particular, P*orrajmos* or P*harrajimos* (devouring or destruction), S*amudaripen* (mass killing) and K*alí Traš* (black fear). Many Roma groups prefer to use one or other of these terms to refer to the events which took place during the Second World War. However, there is no general agreement even among Roma communities on a single most appropriate term. You should find out which term is preferred by Roma groups in your country or by your own participants.

Girls employed in the Wehrmacht as stenographers, OT workers, conservatory students, and other people leading a solid existence and having worked honestly for long years suddenly found themselves in the concentration camp with their hair cut off, prisoner numbers tattooed on them, and wearing blue-and-white striped uniforms. Yet there was more – the madness kept spreading in further circles. Hundreds of soldiers were brought straight from the front who had not even been aware that they were mixed-blood Gypsies, and they were ordered to take off their uniforms and shipped to the concentration camps only because they possessed 12% or even less Gypsy blood…

From the memoirs of SS-Rottenfuhrer Pery Broad, a functionary of the camp Gestapo at Auschwitz

2. The Roma Genocide

With respect to the extermination of antisocial forms of life, Dr Goebbels is of the opinion that Jews and Gypsies should simply be exterminated.

Otto Thierack, Reichsminister of Justice

We have identified the Roma as totally primitive people of ethnic origin, whose mental retardation renders them incapable of real social adaptation... The Gypsy question can only be resolved when... reproduction of this population of mixed blood is stopped once and for all.

Dr Ritter, Research Institute of Racial Hygiene

... 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

The final resolution, as formulated by Himmler in his 'Decree for Basic Regulations to Resolve the Gypsy Question as Required by the Nature of Race' of 8 December 1938, meant that preparations were to begin for the complete extermination of the Sinti and Roma.

Auschwitz Memorial Book

2.1 A European genocide

There have been genocides in history and there have been genocides perpetrated by the Europeans. The colonisation of the Americas and of the African continent, as well as other parts of the world, were often characterised by mass elimination of native peoples carried out by European powers. Even after the Holocaust, when the world was supposed to have "learned the lessons", genocides have continued, often with the active assistance or collaboration of European governments.

However, there were features of the Nazi genocides which distinguished them from others carried out by European countries. The first was the use of more advanced technologies and a systematic approach both to the rounding up of targeted populations and to their elimination. The use of gas chambers is perhaps the most obvious example – although gas had been used as a murder weapon even before the Second World War.

The second feature was that this was the first mass genocide carried out within the borders of Europe by various European powers simultaneously; and the target population in every country which participated was the same – or was perceived to be the same. This was a genocide that was both internal to Europe and was also, in many cases, internal to each country that participated.

This perhaps deserves some explanation. The Holocaust is often treated as a single genocide, carried out across much of the continent of Europe by the Nazis. In countries other than Germany, responsibility for all the crimes across the region is often laid at the door of the Nazi regime as an "outside power". But while it is true that the initial policy directive was issued by the German government, the countries which took part in the Genocide all co-operated with this policy to varying degrees. Without their co-operation, the Genocide would have been very difficult, if not impossible, to implement.

> On the road to Transnistria we were beaten, [but] beaten less by the Romanian constables. On the other hand, when we passed Bessarabia there everybody beat us. Antonescu hated the Gypsies. He was the one who hated and harmed us. When we arrived there they made fun of us and put us to hard labour, working us like animals. They kept us there for two years without us being spared any suffering.
>
> *Vasile Ioniță, a Romanian Roma*