

TEACHING ABOUT THE ROMA GENOCIDE

PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

International Workshop
Summary Report
26–27 September 2024, Vienna





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On 26 and 27 September, participants from the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Hungary, Germany, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Switzerland, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and Austria shared their experiences and challenges in educating about the Roma Genocide. They discussed the potential of the learning platform romasintigenocide.eu to promote education of the persecution of Roma and Sinti during the Holocaust in the European classroom and shared local good practices and challenges. The relevance of teaching about the Roma Genocide to address current forms of antigypsyism, anti-Roma racism and existing challenges was also a topic of the meeting.

DAY ONE

Opening

Jochen Böhrer (Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies) opened the event with a welcome speech, emphasising the mission of the VWI to promote Holocaust research about all victim groups, in alignment with Simon Wiesenthal's work to investigate Nazi crimes against all people who suffered under the NS regime.

Helmut Böck (Austrian IHRA Co-Chair and Special Envoy) highlighted the commitment of the Austrian IHRA Delegation to promote education about the Roma Genocide. The increasing attention of IHRA member states to the topic has been documented with the creation of a Committee of the Genocide of the Roma, the adoption of a [non-legally binding working definition on antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination](#), and

the ongoing work to develop *Recommendations for Teaching and Learning about the Persecution and Genocide of the Roma during the Nazi Era*. The Republic of Austria supports these initiatives, and has adopted the [working definition of antigypsyism](#) in 2021 and a [National Commemoration Day on the Genocide of Roma and Sinti](#) on the 2nd of August this year (2024). In addition, an important step forward was a new law adopted in 2023 to erect a memorial in the Viennese capital for Roma and Sinti victims of NS-persecution.

Mirjam Karoly (Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies) outlined efforts of international human rights organisations and European institutions to foster the recognition and education about the NS-persecution of Roma. In 2015, the European Parliament urged the European Union Member States to undertake more efforts to end antigypsyism, and to establish the [2nd August as Roma Holocaust Memorial Day](#). The [OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights](#) and the [Council of Europe](#) have done profound work to promote the recognition of the Roma Genocide. Yet, more still needs to be done to get education and remembrance about the experience of Roma during the Holocaust realised at national and local level and promote human rights and non-discrimination of Roma.


Patrick Siegele (OeAD_ERINNERN:AT) informed about the most recent relaunch of the learning platform romasintigenocide.eu and its new chapter on Romani resistance, technical features and country pages. Soon, a new teacher manual will enhance its implementation in the learning environment.

“An important step forward was a new law adopted in 2023 to erect a memorial in the Viennese capital for the Roma and Sinti victims of NS-persecution.”

ROMASINTI GENOCIDE.EU

ENGLISH

The genocide committed against European Roma and Sinti during the National Socialist era



What was life like for Roma and Sinti before the Second World War?

L.Nr.	Vermögens-Eigentümer	Art des Vermögens	Verkaufspreis in Reichsmark	Vorkaufspreis in Reichsmark	Gläubiger	Anmerkung
1	Ujvary Stefana, geb. 16.11.1895 u. Sinti Keth, geb. Rodosch, geb. am 11.08.1903	1 Wohnhütte	270.-	25.-	Steuerschuld Kaufm. Rupp	261.- 53.-50 107.-40
2	Ujvary Georg, geb. 4.11.1902 u. Sinti Katharina, geb. Ujvary, geb. am 17.1.1903	Div. Einrichtungsgegenst. 70-kg Schwein, ca. 80.-kg () 1 Schaf	170.- 18.-04	35.- 17.-90	Juliana Kiss Kaufm. Rupp	159.-54 60.-90 108.-64
3	Ujvary Elisabeth, geb. am 12.7. 1874 in Halbturm	1 Wohnhütte	74.-	12.-15	Kaufm. Rupp	74.- 12.-15 73.-99
4	Ujvary Juliana, geb. am 3. April 1884 in Halbturm	1 Wohnhütte	---	---	---	350.-
5	Ujvary Rezsund, geb. 20.7.1900 u. Sinti Barbara, geb. Borvath, geb. am 04.11.1910 in Hinder	1 Wohnhütte	170.-	19.-20	---	170.- 19.-20 151.-00
6	Eigentümer unbekannt	1 Wohnwagen	---	---	---	85.-
7	Eigentümer unbekannt	2 Wohnwagen	---	---	---	100.-
Gesamt 1885			---	---	---	1164.-69 RM

What do we know about the genocide inflicted on the Roma and Sinti?

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© Gemeindeforschung Halbturm, Dr. Herbert Brettl

An estimated 500,000 European Roma and Sinti were murdered during the Holocaust - victims of racist persecution by the German Nazis and their fascist allies. But this genocide is still largely unknown. Roma and Sinti were murdered in extermination camps and died of hunger and disease in forced labour and concentration camps. Many more were deported and exploited as forced labour on farms, construction sites and in industry. For decades after the war the survivors were not recognised as victims of the Nazi persecution and received little or no compensation or restitution for their lost property. This site provides basic information on the genocide of European Roma and Sinti for teachers and students.

EXCEPT FROM THE IHRA WORKING DEFINITION OF "ANTIGYPSISM"

Antigypsyism neither began with the Nazi era nor ended thereafter, but continues to be a theme underpinning many of the crimes committed against Sinti and Roma.

The digital tool romasintigenocide.eu includes a chapter on Romani resistance and is available in twelve languages: German, English, French, Croatian, Hungarian, Czech, Slovakian, Polish, Romanian, Swedish, Calderas-Romani and Burgenland-Romani.

Gerhard Baumgartner (Historian, former Director DÖW) recounted the development of the learning platform in consultation with Roma civil society. For example, the Roma and Sinti community of Linz demanded to cover the pre-war situation of Roma and Sinti, and to represent who Roma are. The authors aimed to deconstruct stereotypes against Roma and to illustrate that persecution did not start nor end with National Socialism. The history of the persecution of Roma is based on individual stories of Romani people, illustrating their lives under the Nazi rule, their survival and the different contexts leading to persecution and killing of Roma and Sinti. The latest update on Roma resistance aims to demonstrate that Roma were not only victims but resisted by various means, e.g. letters of protest, political interventions, hiding people from the Nazis or by joining partisan organisations such as the Red Army or Allied forces.

The mini workshops had participants explore different educational approaches to the Roma Genocide. Participants found the use of photo-

graphs and biographies to be particularly effective teaching tools, agreeing that individual stories humanise victims. By illustrating that victims had common dreams and visions of life, it helps students connect and give concreteness to what otherwise might be abstract and inconceivable, and shows that those who were persecuted by the Nazis were far more than just victims. As well, these biographies showcase a diversity of expe-

Participants explore how to work with photographs in one of the mini workshops.



riences and represent the narrative of the affected individual, in contrast to the perspective of the persecutor and the state history, which often does not account for Romani voices.

Regarding diverse classroom practices, teachers need to adhere to a cautious and sensitive approach to create a safe space for Romani pupils. Teachers need to understand the historical and social context, as well as that of the learning environment, which can be hostile and discriminatory towards Roma, to be able to draw references between past and present.

Regarding the importance of Romani voices in Austria, the example of Ceija Stojka was brought forward. Ceija Stojka was a Romani survivor who wrote the book *We Live in Secrecy*; this book was proposed as a powerful tool to engage wider discussion on the persecution of Roma during the Holocaust. The biography can be introduced to educate across several subjects (history, literature, civic and/or political education).

With reference to using photographs in education, participants underlined the need to con-

textualise the pictures and discuss who took the photos, as they were often taken by perpetrators. It is important to be cautious about perpetuating biases and avoid exoticising Roma.

Practices and Challenges: Roma Testimonies

Kateřina Čapková (Institute of Contemporary History, CZ) presented the project romatestimonies.com. Launched in 2023 and developed in close cooperation with Romani civil society organisations and activists, the website purposely focuses on Roma and Sinti sources. The database includes 200 testimonies drawn from texts authored by Roma during the communist period and the 1990ies. In the future, it will also include photos, which have been selected by Roma to ensure that Roma are seen as they want to be seen. Additionally, a glossary emphasises the testimonial narratives, and an interactive map allows to see the locations from testimonies, including places of resistance, hiding places, and sites of massacres. Teachers commend the website and

Kateřina Čapková
(Institute of Contemporary History, CZ).



photos as they contradict the exoticised pictures of Roma, which are dominant in mainstream media. The website is planned to be finalised in 2025 for the region of Czech Republic and Slovakia and further enlargement has been planned in cooperation with other countries.

Delia Grigore (President of the Association Roma Center Amare Rromentza, RO) discussed Romania's belated recognition of the Roma victims of the Antonescu regime. In the beginning of the 1940s, Roma were deported to Transnistria: around 38,000 – among them 6,714 children – had died due to diseases and hunger. It was only in 2004 that Romania had officially recognised the Holocaust and in 2005 established a National Institute for the Holocaust. So far, there has been little research conducted about the Romani victims. On 8 October 2009, a Memorial for the Jewish and Roma victims was inaugurated, but the plate has not been translated into the Romani language (only Romanian, English and Hebrew), despite pleas from the Roma community. Since 2019, commemoration ceremonies take place on the Roma Holocaust Memorial Day on 2 August and on 16 May to remember the Roma Resistance Day. Grigore underlined that the Roma community has an oral culture, therefore within communities the history is transmitted orally. In general, in Romanian education, teach-



Delia Grigore (President of the Association Roma Center Amare Rromentza, RO).

ing about the Roma Genocide is practically inexistent. Even the history of centuries of Romani chattel slavery (Robia) in Romania has scarcely been recorded; more research is necessary to change this. The subject of Roma persecution should be an objective of mandatory school curricula. Furthermore, museums on Roma history must be established, and mass media attention is necessary for a wider awareness on the history of Roma in Romania.

Ildikó Török (Manager, Roma Rights and Citizenship Programme Tom Lantos Institute, HU) recounted how in 2017 the Tom Lantos Institute had developed a two-day long teacher training



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Ildikó Török (Programme Manager, Roma Rights and Citizenship Programme Tom Lantos Institute, HU).



Participants at the workshop discuss experiences and challenges in teaching about the NS-Genocide of the Roma.

about the Roma Holocaust. The methodology was conceptualised around understanding freedom and fundamental rights by following six children and the successive stages of how they were stripped of their rights, and became targets of: hatred, humiliation, enemy, exclusion from society, deportation, degradation, and murder or survival. However, in 2023 the training had to stop due to two main challenges: the strict syllabus of the centralised education curriculum in Hungary, and the difficulty of recruiting teachers for the training, as teachers had limited motivation because they could not use the gained knowledge in the classroom.

Joanna Talewicz (Foundation Towards Dialogue, PL) pointed out that in Poland, theoretically Roma history is included in the educational curricula for primary and secondary schools, however, in practice the subject is not covered. Teachers have neither the educational nor temporal resources to educate about the Roma Holocaust in the classroom. Another challenge is the existing stereotype of the Roma being outsiders and thus ‘outside of history’. Despite living in Europe for centuries, the Roma are not considered to be part of the general European history. Moreover, it may be difficult to reach young people as they lack a nuanced understanding of the historical context of the Roma. Thus, teaching the youth requires creative methodologies: examples suggested included a youth conference at Auschwitz to discuss anti-Roma stereotypes and prejudices, and the use of modern technology such as websites and movies to engage the younger audience. Finally, Talewicz emphasised that it is crucial to get media attention on educa-

tion and commemoration efforts. For example, when US Senator Jesse L. Jackson attended the European Holocaust Memorial Day for Sinti and Roma at Auschwitz in 2019, not a single Polish media publication covered the event.

Discussion: Anti-Roma Language and Pedagogy

In this discussion it was agreed that the “G-word” is too often heard and the methodology of how the Romani Holocaust is taught needs to change. Using testimonies and centering Roma voices must be the priority of teachers. Furthermore, participants agreed that there is a crucial need for collaboration with all relevant stakeholders in order to integrate the history of the Roma into the narrative of European history. Collaboration should include among others academia, Roma civil society, Jewish communities or people in power positions. Also, the importance of greater visibility of Roma in public spaces was underlined to combat anti-Roma sentiment. The unfortunate recent example of Czech textbooks removing content on the Roma and Sinti Holocaust was discussed: what was once two pages on the subject will now be covered by a mere paragraph.

Practices and Challenges: Issues in Current Education

Jane Weiss (Private lecturer at Humboldt University, GER) addressed the lack of suitable evaluations of the practices in teaching about the Roma Genocide in the German education system. Extant textbooks and teaching practices are unsatisfying. For example, a 2021 analysis of schoolbooks and antigypsyism, covering 379

“Teachers have neither the educational nor temporal resources to educate about the Roma Holocaust in the classroom.”



textbooks and 201 curricula on history, geography politics, social studies and civil education, showed that the topic of National Socialism, remembrance, Genocide of Roma is taught historically isolated without pre- or post-war history. Further, the current terminology is a subject of concern, as terms like Genocide (*Völkermord* in German) or racism, antigypsyism (*Antiziganismus* in German) are not used. On the contrary, racist stereotypes are reproduced without questioning them. Often there is a perpetrator-victim guilt reversal and the role of perpetrators are ignored. There are no reports from contemporary witnesses or survivors, and the written and image sources are not analysed or classified in a critical manner. Racial slurs for Roma and Sinti people are used and the significance of the “G-word” is not questioned. Narratives of resistance and survival are not discussed, and Sinti and Roma are not mentioned as belonging to German or European society. The responsibility of education has been dismissed by institutions and thus placed on families.

On a positive note, there are satisfactory materials available from civil society aiming to put the issue on the scholastic agenda. Regarding their content, it is important to strike a balance between victimisation and agency.

Ruth-Anne Lenga (Associate Professor at UCL’s Centre for Holocaust Education, UK) stressed the importance of empowering teachers for the challenging task of teaching about the

Holocaust, and communicating to the teachers why teaching about the Genocide of the Roma matters. Teaching and learning can be an act of resistance against hate, marginalisation, and disregard of Roma. Challenges in teaching include changing entrenched biases, improper textbooks, terminology, addressing inadequate understanding and prejudices, teaching sensitive materials about traumatic history, and communicating that the Roma are not defined by victimhood. The current lack of specific training for teachers and interest of legislators and school leaders adds to these observed challenges. Enhancing teaching about Roma Holocaust requires advocacy, educational research, teacher training, resource development, and Roma engagement. The pedagogical approach should value the human story and dignified memory of victims, providing context and emphasising the Roma agency. To have a contextualised history means to address questions, including: “Who are these people? How do you think they are related to each other? When was this? Who took the picture?” and so on.

Discussion: Training Teachers

This discussion focused on challenges participants have experienced, such as: lack of interest of teachers (cancellation of teacher trainings) and school leadership, lack of resources, and marginal time-space in history classes. It was agreed that the topic of the Genocide of the Ro-

Participants discuss in the focus group how the educational tool can be used in their national context.

“Teaching and learning can be an act of resistance against hate, marginalisation, and disregard of Roma.”



Vera Laková documents in her debut film *How I Became a Partisan* her search for the fate of forgotten Roma partisans in Slovakia by following the life of her great-grandfather Ján Lacko.

ma needs to be integrated in the teacher training at university and pre-service training. Further, it was agreed that decision makers play a crucial role in ensuring that teaching about the Roma Genocide is integrated into the education curricula.

DAY TWO

Karen Polak (Anne Frank House, NL) drew from points raised during the discussion and identified the following as key to promote education about the Roma Genocide. The history of the Genocide of the Roma must:

- be recognised in all countries as a part of history
- be integrated into mandatory school curricula
- be taught as part of the initial teacher training
- be educated ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’
- become standardised and accredited training.

Polak again emphasised the importance of biographies and working critically with sources, to develop critical thinking skills in students and teach an inclusive history.

It is crucial to raise greater awareness by advocating with the media by sharing existing

knowledge and materials or information about events such as this one. In this regard, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) was highlighted as a potential forum to spread information, in addition to other mainstream networks (e.g. EUROCLIO or the Association of History Teaching in Europe), or social media networks (including networks of teachers).

It is key to bring the Roma Agency and Roma perspectives into education about the Genocide of the Roma. This has the potential to empower Roma, support their organisations, and promote

Podium discussion with the film director Vera Laková and Maria Bogdan (moderator).



a diverse and constructive learning environment for both teachers and students. It is also of great importance to tackle anti-Roma prejudice among teachers and students, and to create a safe space to confront this through critical reflection.

Discussion and Feedback from Focus Groups

Assessing how the website can be utilised in a national context, participants agreed that for practical use, it needs to be amended to connect the larger European and global history to the local context of the learner, teacher. This would require more resources: increased website infrastructure, reliable translators in local languages, and information on local history.

Regarding required adaptations to use the website in the national context, the website was commended for its clarity with its focus on images, accessibility and available translations. However, the literature and country context need to be updated, and it was suggested that travelers (UK context) be added to the glossary. For promoting its local implementation, the Roma civil society should be brought into the process, and stronger use of social media should be explored.

Participants agreed that the website can be integrated in various subjects at schools. Its content allows for an intersectional approach with-



in subjects of ethics, social science, language, political and citizenship education. The visual design of the website is good, but it needs more Roma testimonies and memories added. In Austria it could be applied in trans-curricular learning. The method of open curricula and offering learning clusters was recommended as an option for practical implementation of the website, together with liaising with civil society actors for collaborative projects and including, for example, theater projects, living libraries, or walking tours.

Participants concluded that education focusing on the intergenerational connection is crucial to demonstrate the impact of the Holocaust on

Szilvia Szénási, Director of the UCCU Foundation, HU, underlines the role of Roma civil society promoting dialogue among Roma and non-Roma youth.



“It is also of great importance to tackle anti-Roma prejudice among teachers and students, and to create a safe space to confront this through critical reflection.”

Participants discussing practices to address anti-gypsyism, anti-Roma racism in the classroom.

following generations. Furthermore, participants agreed that the website needs pedagogical-methodological guidance to support its implementation.

Role and Commitment of IHRA

Stéphane Laederich (Roma Foundation, CH, Chair of the IHRA Committee of the Roma Genocide) presented the work of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) and its Committee on the Genocide of the Roma to promote recognition, education and research about the Genocide of the Roma and to combat anti-gypsyism. Currently the IHRA is developing guidelines on education about the Roma genocide which are aimed at policy makers, curricula designers and teachers to guide them on the 'why, what and how' to teach about the Nazi persecution of the Roma. The drafting process included participants from the IHRA delegation and Roma civil society. Roma voices have been integrated to illustrate the significance of the Roma Genocide to the Roma people, and why it is important to teach about it. The recommendations are a starting point, set to be implemented in November. National delegations, policy makers, and educational ministries must implement them.

Educational Practices to Counter Antigypsyism/Anti-Roma Racism

Tamara Pomoriški (Memory of Nations Theatre, Post Bellum, CZ) illustrated how art can help young people in their understanding of historical processes and human rights, specifically through youth theater. The Czech organisation Post Bellum (Memories of the Nations) runs projects (including dance performances, interviews with Roma survivors, stories of neighbours, etc.), which provoke young students to explore and critically reflect upon the experiences of Roma during the Holocaust.

Miroslav Zubaj (Museum of Romani Culture, CZ) introduced the work of the Brno Museum of Romani Culture. The institution was founded in 1991 by Romani intellectuals to preserve and promote Romani history and culture. The museum runs exhibits which include the history of Romani freedom fighters and antifascists, as well as an exhibition covering World War II and its af-



Stéphane Laederich (Roma Foundation, CH, Chair of the IHRA Committee of the Roma Genocide).

termath. It runs educational programmes in cooperation with the Jewish Museum in Prague with a focus on the history of stereotypes and oppression. The museum intends to bring these testimonies and historical materials to schools with the aim of organising youth and awareness-raising through projects with teachers and students.

Kristína Grečková (Milena Simecka Foundation, SK) presented the MSF oral history educational programme *The fate of Holocaust survivors*, drawing from the Fortunoff Video Archive collection of Holocaust testimonies, which includes 150 Jewish and 70 Romani testimonies (some were unable to be shown due to data protection issues). The long-term goal of the programme is to use these testimonies in schools.

A recent conference in August in 2024 highlighted the urgency of educating about the Roma Genocide, as their findings showed that around 50 teachers had not learned about the Roma Holocaust until university. The main obstacles to educate about the Roma Genocide include prejudice from teachers, lack of support from government and lack of commitment to coming to terms with the past.

Larysa Michalska (Humanity in Action Poland Foundation, PL) introduced into the programme Humanity in Action's "Break the Vicious Circle" project, which includes a mobile app designed

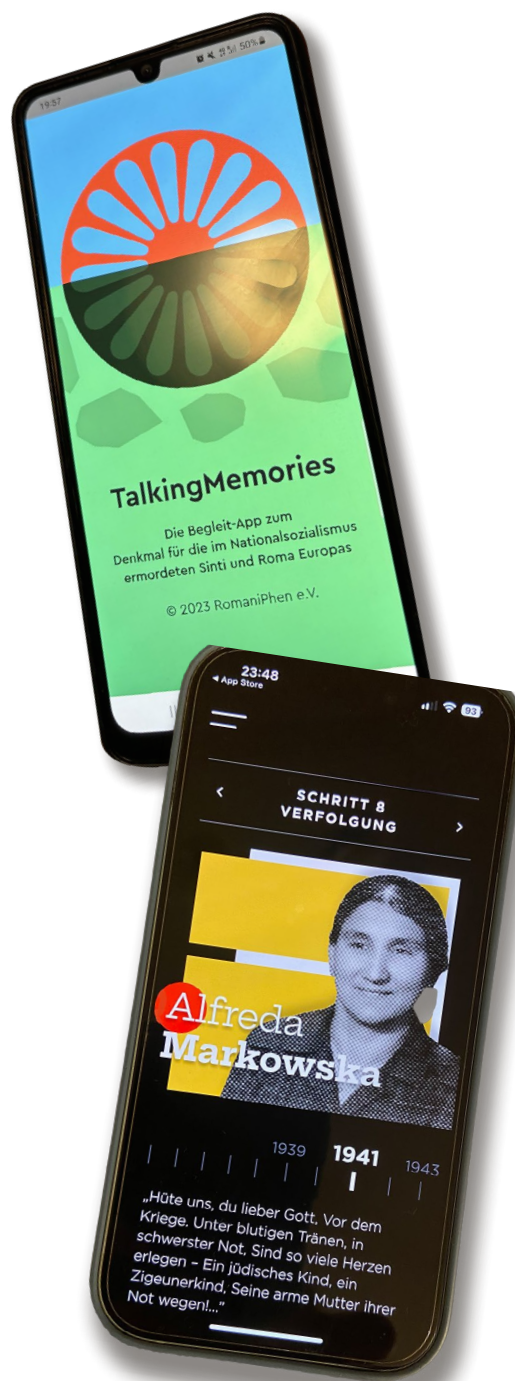
“The main obstacles to educate about the Roma Genocide include prejudice from teachers, lack of support from government and lack of commitment to coming to terms with the past.”

during the pandemic to appeal to the younger audience. The app, which is free to download in three languages (Polish, English and German), demonstrates the ten stages leading to the genocide (Gregory Stanton), using original biographies and testimonies of survivors to illustrate each stage. The project also highlights the Roma context of the Holocaust, including the testimonies of Polish Roma women Alfreda Markowska and Krystyna Gil.

Urs Urecht (Foundation Education for Tolerance, CH) presented educational material on the history and culture of Roma, Sinti and Yenish peoples in Switzerland, which was developed following a recommendation of the Council of Europe in 2020. The material is based on biographies and testimonies intended for lower secondary school audiences and the general public. It was designed in an active and inclusive manner, following the principle *nothing about us, without us* to support the affected communities.

Conclusion

The workshop concluded that recognition of the Genocide of the Roma is the foremost precondition required for education about the Roma Holocaust. It demonstrated that existing challenges need to be addressed by working and advocating together with policy makers. To influence change, collaboration from all possible stakeholders (academia, practitioners, teachers and educators, Roma civil society, etc.) is required. The workshop underlined the importance of including Roma testimonies into education to engage, integrate and empower Roma voices and agencies.



The mobile apps *Talking Memories* and *Breaking the Vicious Circle* offer digital and interactive learning about the Roma and Sinti Genocide.

“The workshop concluded that recognition of the Genocide of the Roma is the foremost precondition required for education about the Roma Holocaust.”

Agenda of the Workshop: <https://bit.ly/TeachingRomaGenocideProgramme>

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