



## Keeping the Memory Alive: the Roma and Sinti Holocaust

TMAF

National Workshop Report

The national workshop is part of the MemoROM project supported by the European Commission's Europe for Citizens programme. The project is about remembering the Roma Holocaust and is carried out by five partners.

The aims of the project are:

- raising awareness across Europe about Roma persecution during the Nazi period and killing of millions of Roma as well as other minorities during the Holocaust;
- discussing the history with key stakeholders in the society and reflecting the impact of the genocide on the current situation of Roma, particularly the consequences of the Holocaust on discrimination and hostile attitude towards Roma;
- transferring information and knowledge about unknown facts and statistics to the young generation;
- developing instruments for breaking prejudices against Roma;
- preventing the repetition of the Holocaust in the future.

Another project aim is to create an International Remembrance Network involving experts, activists, academia and museums and through this initiative raise awareness about Roma Holocaust and fight against discrimination and prejudices.

The two days national workshop gathered more than 80 participants from different regions of the country representing non-governmental organisations, school teachers, experts working in museums, local authorities, media, students and Roma NGOs. About 30 active Roma and non-Roma organisations in this field from the capital participated in the workshop. The audience was quite diverse in terms of ethnicity, gender, age and professional background.

The programme of the national workshop included four questions for discussion.

First question was "What do we know about the Holocaust - facts and numbers, particular cases and stories, names of survivals?"

Second questions was "How and where is this information available to the public?", "Is it visible in museums and covered by school books or other sources?" and "What should be done to find and disseminate this information?"

Third question was “How do different stakeholders cooperate on the issues related to Roma and in general related to the Holocaust?” and “How do they raise awareness and distribute information?”

Forth topic was “How NGOs, media and local authorities could use the Holocaust to change perceptions and fight prejudices?”

**Discussion first session:** Participants discussed lack of sources and information about the Roma Holocaust. International Holocaust remembrance events do not mention Roma as victims of the genocide; there is no information in books and publications dealing with the Holocaust. The facts and numbers, in particular their validity are often questioned what makes experts hesitant to use them. Experts pointed out that there are many stories, pictures and information which are not published in books, but they remain in some not officially published researches. Participants discussed that Nazi laws were referring explicitly to gypsies forbidding their entrance to Germany and their participation in the public life. There are many facts and laws which are not known and which clearly shows that Roma have been discriminated against not only during the Holocaust but far before that. Participants raised the issue of the number of Roma killed during the Holocaust; not all experts agreed that it was 1, 5 million. Some referred to the number 500.000. Participants discussed gathering and publishing of survivals’ stories. Anthropologists explained that Roma experience during the Holocaust differed from other groups’; many Roma were killed in their countries without being sent to camps, but this remains unknown by public. Different treatment of Roma even in the camps and many other facts could help in better understanding of what happened with Roma during this period. There is not enough evidence on the exact number of the Roma victims during the Nazi genocide.

**Discussion second session:** All participants expressed their concerns about lack of information on the Roma Holocaust and that official ceremonies do not mention Roma as victims. There is no official recognition of the Roma Holocaust. Some of the experts mentioned that there is lot of information in the Holocaust museum in Washington in the USA and that this information is not well disseminated and presented in Europe. Participants agreed that all possible stories, pictures and publications should be made available in museums or books and presented to the public in Europe. Schools should be one of the targets. Organisations should lobby before Ministries of Education to publish information in school books and to organise open discussions with secondary, high school and university students. Academics should encourage young Roma and non-Roma to do post-graduate doctorates and researches in the topic of the Roma Holocaust. People involved in the field should gather information and publish it in a way available to the public. ERIOs website was given as an example as well as the bibliography developed as a good source of information to be disseminated as widely

as possible. Roma participants suggested that media should play a role in publishing articles on the Roma Holocaust and inform the society about the Roma Holocaust.

**The third session** focused on the importance of different stakeholders' unification in the work of dissemination and awareness raising. Participants discussed the importance of joint work with Jewish and other organisations or institutions focusing on Holocaust. All participants agreed that media has a key role in informing the society. Historians and teachers should be targeted as experts to provide information on the Holocaust and to teach in schools and universities. Participants discussed the importance of advocacy before the Ministry on Education to include lessons about the Holocaust in school books and with academics to include the topic in university programmes concerning subjects like history, human rights and anti-discrimination. Cooperation of the network ERIO promoted with this project and the value they could add to the process of recognition of the Holocaust were found very important by participants.

**Fourth session** discussed how to fight against the consequences of the Holocaust on the life of the Roma today. Participants agreed that first of all, it should be officially recognized that Roma have been victims of the Holocaust and this needs to be published in books, laws and decrees. On the official day of the Holocaust, on the 27<sup>th</sup> January, Roma should be mentioned as victims, but also the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August should be marked as a day when many Roma have been killed by Nazis. Taking into consideration the historical consequences of the Holocaust, local authorities should include this issue in their local Roma integration action plans together with activities for tolerance raising, breaking prejudices and anti-discrimination. Participants agreed that fighting discrimination should be the main aim of each local action plan acknowledging that today's discrimination is a result of the prejudices introduced during the Holocaust about Roma as sub-humans. The core of such integration plans should be fighting against prejudices in the society using all possible means including lessons in school about Roma history and culture. Participants suggested that action plans should include activities of teaching non-Roma people about the role of the Holocaust and the situation of Roma today. Media was suggested as the main partner in the fight against stereotypes and prejudices. Participants underlined the role of the media in raising awareness about the Roma Holocaust, presenting correctly the facts and stories told by historians and survivors, trying to break prejudices that Roma are not different race and that they belong to Europe as people who migrated centuries ago, far before many Europeans were formed into nations. Media representatives expressed their will to cooperate if information is made available to them.

**Recommendations to NGOs:**

- Search for more information related to the Roma Holocaust and make it available to all relevant actors;
- Raise awareness about Roma Holocaust among Roma communities and general society;
- Lobby with important institutions to include the Roma Holocaust in important books, school books and school programmes;
- Work closely with local authorities, media, historians and other experts to collect and disseminate information on the Roma Holocaust and fight prejudices and stereotypes;
- Organise local and national debates on Roma Holocaust on the 27<sup>th</sup> January and 2<sup>nd</sup> August;
- Organise community information meetings to talk to young Roma about the Roma Holocaust.

**Recommendations to local authorities and experts:**

- Include in local action plans activities promoting Roma Holocaust and fighting discrimination and prejudices;
- Organise events focusing on informing about Roma Holocaust, discussions, exhibitions, screening movies;
- Promote the Roma Holocaust in schools through regional education inspectorates.

**Recommendation to media:**

- Refer to Roma victims during the Nazi period when publishing articles on the Holocaust;
- Promote Roma culture and history;
- Work in cooperation with Roma civil society to get the right information about Roma situation;



- Avoid stereotypes when writing or broadcasting on Roma topics;
- Promote tolerant and non-hate speech presentation of Roma in media.

**Recommendations to national authorities:**

- Ministries on Education and Culture should include Roma Holocaust in their political agenda;
- Ministries should encourage schools, cultural institutes and museums to present the Roma Holocaust in their work, programmes and publications;
- The ministry responsible for media and communications should promote the idea of popularizing the Roma Holocaust through their entities;
- Work closely with Roma civil society;
- Support/fund civil society actions related to the Roma Holocaust.