

Who are the Roma?

- Roma are the biggest ethnic minority in Europe, with an estimated population of up to 15 million.
- Roma have been a part of European civilization for hundreds of years.
- You may have heard the Roma referred to as “gypsies”, but many consider this to be a derogatory term.
- Roma have the same rights as any other European citizen, yet they continually face discrimination and are frequently prevented from equal access to housing, education, employment, healthcare and social protection.
- Roma migrated from the Indian subcontinent to Europe and other regions. However, the Roma do not have an independent national homeland state to provide authority over a certain geographic area. This means that the Roma do not have a unified political body to look after and advocate for their best interests.

- European member states recently developed national strategies for Roma inclusion. Unfortunately, Roma still remain victims of discrimination, segregation and deep-rooted social exclusion.

Porajmos: The Roma Holocaust

August 2 is International Roma Holocaust Memorial Day, a day to commemorate the loss of Romani life during Porajmos.

What is Porajmos, and what does it mean?

During the period of 1939-1945, European Roma were persecuted and killed under Nazi Germany’s attempt to rid the country of “racial inferiority”.

This period is known as “Porajmos” – sometimes spelled Porrajmos or Pharrajimos – which means ‘devouring’ or ‘destruction’ in some dialects of the Romani language.

What happened to Roma during Porajmos?

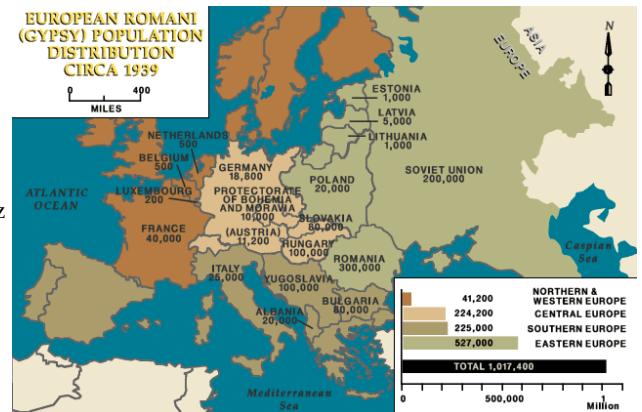
Roma, along with other minority groups, were systematically murdered and mistreated during the Holocaust. They were forced into concentration camps, abused in “medical” experiments, shot or mass murdered by other means.

The genocide of European Roma was systematically forgotten after 1945. Though it often goes unacknowledged, this genocide was the most significant destruction of Roma society in history.

How many Roma were killed during Porajmos and where did it all take place?

Estimates on the total number of Roma lives taken during Porajmos are up to 500,000.

According to estimates by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, about 23,000 Roma, Sinti and Lalleri were deported to Auschwitz altogether. About 3,500 Roma were sent to other Nazi concentration camps, and an estimated 30,000 Roma were killed in the Baltic States and other areas of the occupied Soviet Union.



Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Available at: http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media_nm.php?ModuleId=10007333&MediaId=359.

What have been the long-lasting effects of Porajmos?

The Roma have never fully recovered from Porajmos; family, social structures and the transmission of culture and history were all lost in concentration camps through the murder of hundreds of thousands of Roma. The few structures which remained after the Nazi era were destroyed by the governments of the Communist block. In Western Europe, Roma also continued to face prejudice and discrimination.

Unfortunately, many Nazi prejudices and stereotypes have survived to this day. To be a Roma in present-day Europe means that you’re more likely to face violent crime and abuse because of your ethnicity, you may live in a precarious living situation without access to proper resources, you may be stopped from travelling to other countries and politicians may try to use you as a scapegoat for their own political ends.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum writes that the West German Federal Parliament only recognised the Nazi persecution of Roma as racially motivated in 1979. As a result, most Roma became eligible to apply for compensation for their suffering and loss. However, by this time, many of these eligible people had already died.

In October 2012, German Chancellor Angela Merkel opened a memorial to Roma Holocaust victims in Berlin, which around 100 Roma survivors attended. The memorial represents an important step towards remembering the past in order to combat discrimination from continuing in the future.