

Foundation



Remembrance  
Responsibility  
Future



# Thematic Dossier

Support for Roma and Sinti  
and their Self-Organizations  
& Combating Antigypsyism



## 1. EVZ Mandate and Mission

In commemoration of the victims of National Socialist injustice, the EVZ Foundation has, for more than 20 years now, been supporting civil society players who stand up for democracy, human rights and international understanding in accordance with the Foundation's legal mandate. The EVZ Foundation is committed to equal dignity and equal rights for all people and opposes antisemitism, antigypsyism, racism as well as all forms of discrimination, enables effective action by self-organizations as well as being a strategic partner and promoter of civil society. Its main activities are focused on Central and Eastern Europe, Israel and Germany.

In recognition of the genocide of the Roma and Sinti during the time of National Socialism and in the knowledge of the ongoing structural discrimination and marginalization of Europe's biggest ethnic minority, the EVZ Foundation supports the strengthening of Roma and Sinti and their self-organizations in Germany and in Europe, in particular as a partner in educational awakening and social participation; it is also committed to combating antigypsyism in the digital and analog space.

## 2. IHRA Definition of Antigypsyism

On October 26, 2020 the Board of Trustees of the EVZ Foundation decided to be guided by the working definition of antigypsyism<sup>1</sup> of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). The Foundation had already adopted the IHRA's working definition of antisemitism in 2017. Both definitions make it possible to identify the specifics and the commonalities of the two phenomena in order to develop effective, targeted programmatic approaches.

In particular, the definition highlights the historical continuity of antigypsyism:

*Antigypsyism has been around for centuries. It was a central element of the policy of persecution and extermination directed against Sinti and Roma; it was carried out by National Socialist Germany and by the fascist and extreme nationalist partners and other collaborators who took part in these crimes. Antigypsyism didn't start in the time of National Socialism, and it didn't stop afterwards; it continues to be a central element of crimes committed against Sinti and Roma.*

## 3. Unrecognized and Persistently Marginalized: Sinti and Roma in Germany and Europe

Structural and state discrimination, delayed recognition or even non-recognition of persecution during the National Socialist era, ongoing discrimination and racism in everyday life as well as widespread indifference and ignorance on the part of the majority society – this description of reality, which is not conclusive but continues to this day, illustrates the precarious social situation of Roma and Sinti and the antigypsy structures which still prevails in Germany.<sup>2</sup>

The social and political climate in relation to Roma is becoming noticeably more acute in Central and Eastern Europe. Discrimination is "legitimized" by racism, coupled with nationalism and wide-ranging ignorance concerning genocide. 41% of Roma have experienced discrimination in the last five years. The socioeconomic situation of the minority is extremely precarious (high unemployment, displacement or segregation of places of residence, the lack of access to healthcare and the school system), for example in Slovakia, Hungary or Serbia. The risk of child poverty among the Roma minority is 85% in contrast to the risk of 20% among

<sup>1</sup> Working Definition of Antigypsyism/Anti-Roma Discrimination – Federal Foreign Office (diplo.de)

<sup>2</sup> Report by the Independent Commission on Antigypsyism, see Chapter 3. Hinterlassenschaften des NSVölkermordes [Legacies of National Socialist Genocide], pp. 64–99) [https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/veroeffentlichungen/themen/heimatintegration/bericht-unabhaengige-kommissionantiziganismus.pdf;jsessionid=F3F6BA29A-9098C9EF35866D9DEF83118.2\\_cid364?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=5](https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/veroeffentlichungen/themen/heimatintegration/bericht-unabhaengige-kommissionantiziganismus.pdf;jsessionid=F3F6BA29A-9098C9EF35866D9DEF83118.2_cid364?__blob=publicationFile&v=5)

children in the majority society. 62% of Roma youth are neither in education nor employed; this is true for just 10% of youth in Europe.<sup>3</sup> Despite political initiatives at European level to improve the situation of the minority, very little progress has been made so far.

#### 4. Awareness and Countermeasures: Political, Social and Structural Approaches to Equality and Inclusion of the Minority

In 2005, for example, twelve European countries signed the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015 (“Roma Decade”). They pledged to initiate stronger action to counter discrimination against Roma and were supported by the European Commission, the Open Society Institute, the World Bank as well as the Council of Europe, among others.

Through the EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2020–2030<sup>4</sup> presented by the European Commission, EU member states are required to initiate and implement national strategies and action plans.<sup>5</sup>

Not least as a result of the Black Lives Matter movement in the U.S., there is a growing social sensitivity to issues of racism at the same time and in particular to the racism which is reproduced again every day in state and social structures. Consequently, the realization is gaining ground that individually designed support for Sinti and Roma cannot be sufficiently effective because of this structural racism (see also 5.1). The reality is that these structures need to be changed. To this end, minority self-organizations are crucial players that need to be strengthened.

For Germany, the 2021 report “Perspektivwechsel-Nachholende Gerechtigkeit-Partizipation” [Change of Perspective, Justice, Participation] by the Independent Commission on Antigypsyism<sup>6</sup> appointed by the federal government is an important milestone. It offers a comprehensive, well-founded empirical basis on the situa-

tion of Roma and Sinti and the problem of antigypsyism in German society. In 2022, the office of a Federal Government Officer against Antigypsyism and for the Life of Sinti as well as Roma in Germany [Beauftragter der Bundesregierung gegen Antiziganismus und für das Leben von Sinti:ze sowie Rom:nja in Deutschland] was established.

There is therefore, on many levels, a serious need for action in Germany and in the Foundation’s priority countries. The Foundation has been involved in this area since its establishment, acquiring important experience that allows it to profile and advance its commitment for the coming years.

#### 5. Two Decades, One Special Funding Portfolio: The EVZ Foundation’s Commitment to Sinti and Roma

##### 5.1. Start 2002: More than 2,000 scholarships for young Roma

Already 20 years ago, at the 11th meeting of the Board of Trustees in December 2002, the Foundation initiated for the first time a multi-year EVZ scholarship program for 50 Roma to study law in their home countries in Central and Southeastern Europe. It was later extended to include the humanities and other areas of study. The partner was initially the Open Society Institute (OSI) Budapest, and from 2008 the Roma Education Fund (REF).

The scholarship program made higher education available to qualified and socially engaged Roma students. It was intended to empower them to strengthen their communities and effectively represent Roma interests in society. The selection of the scholarship holders took place with leading representatives of the Sinti/Roma community. In the last ten years, the priority countries were Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Russia. A total of 2,000 scholarships were awarded with a funding of EUR 3 million.

3 [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/factsheet\\_a\\_new\\_eu\\_roma\\_strategic\\_framework\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/factsheet_a_new_eu_roma_strategic_framework_en.pdf)

4 [The new EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation \(full package\) | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

5 [National Strategy „Antiziganismus bekämpfen, Teilhabe sichern!“ \[Combating antigypsyism, securing participation!\] for the implementation of the EU Roma strategy 2030 in Germany \(bund.de\)](#)

6 [Document 19/30310 \(bundestag.de\)](#)

*I found myself in the social and legal sphere, which is currently helping me to understand vital needs of Roma and how to improve their living conditions. I want to use my personal experience to motivate them and change their vision for education! I can show that education is the key to a better, dignified future employment, changing the perception of Ukrainian society!*

*(survey respondent from Ukraine)*

## 5.2. Latcho Dives – 77 Projects for Survivors of the Genocide Against the Roma

Since 2016, the EVZ Foundation has been funding Roma self-organizations in its program “Latcho Dives” (“Good Morning”) to support elderly survivors of National Socialist persecution in their communities in Central Eastern, Eastern and Southeastern Europe. The focus is on immediate provision of material, medical or social assistance to survivors who often live in poverty and without sufficient medical care. Further training in social professions or activities for documenting memories are also supported in the case of their relatives. The Foundation has provided approximately EUR 3,240,000 for a total of 77 projects in the context of this unique program to date.



Photo: Predrag Momčilović

## „Act – Because you Care!“

### Advocacy Coalition for the Rights of Elderly Roma in Serbia

They are not just the “forgotten victims” of National Socialist persecution, but also the invisible ones: elderly Roma in Serbia. Although very little can be said about the socioeconomic status of these people because of the poor data – this in itself is actually a statement – there are many indications that they on average have a lower life expectancy, have had less education and are less likely to be covered by pension schemes.<sup>7</sup> This is where the “Act – Because you Care!” project comes in: Together with Roma self-organizations, it aims to improve the living situation of elderly Roma in Serbia. The objectives and concerns of the project, supported by a specially prepared status report, are presented to the relevant bodies in government and society in the target countries.



#### BRIEF INFORMATION:

- Project partner: Forum Roma Serbia
- Target country: Serbia
- Period: 2020-2022
- Funding amount: EUR 92,920
- Website: [Elderly Roma between transitional and social justice | Forum Roma Srbije \(frs.org.rs\)](https://www.elderlyroma.org.rs/) and [Latcho Dives – On which areas does the EVZ Foundation work \(stiftung-evz.de\)](https://www.latchodives.org/)

<sup>7</sup> [Elderly-Roma\\_ENG-web.pdf \(frs.org.rs\)](https://www.elderly-roma.org.rs/), pages 32–35.

### 5.3. EVZ as a Partner and Player of the Educational Awakening for Sinti and Roma in Germany

The ongoing effects of National Socialist persecution and the persistent discrimination against Sinti and Roma in Germany are especially evident in relation to educational matters. The right to education is the key factor for equal participation in all areas of life. Therefore, more than ten years ago, Sinti and Roma in Germany initiated an educational awakening in their communities. The Foundation supports this initiative and has made it the main focus of its support and action. Between 2008 and 2021, the Foundation funded 55 projects with EUR 2 million.

#### “Studie zur aktuellen Bildungssituation deutscher Sinti und Roma” [Study on the Current Educational Situation of German Sinti and Roma], 2011<sup>8</sup>

Sinti and Roma from RomnoKher, a self-organization in Germany, produced a scientifically based study on the educational situation for the first time in 2009. The EVZ Foundation has supported and funded this project. A key finding was that educational disadvantages persist from generation to generation, despite the individual efforts.



*No help at all from home because my mother couldn't read and write, my grandmother couldn't read and write either. They weren't allowed to go to school, and I was sent to an after-school program. At school, my mother signed me up to go to an after-school program so that I would get help with homework there. (...) They were very much in favor of me going to school. So that I could have something better and do everything better and have an opportunity, not like it was with them.*

*My mother grew up without education, and without a profession; she only managed to be a 'cleaner' throughout her entire life, i.e. for as long as she worked.*

*(K.L., woman, Sinti, 62, grew up in the GDR, completed 8th class, and moved to West Germany in the 1970s)*



Another finding was that the National Socialist policy of persecution and extermination traumatized families so severely that many still mistrust state institutions, including educational institutions.

#### The EVZ Foundation as an Initiator of the Nationwide Working Group and the Recommendations on Equal Participation of Sinti and Roma in Education in Germany<sup>9</sup>

Taking up a corresponding recommendation of the study, the EVZ Foundation initiated and also coordinated the “Nationwide working group to improve participation in education and educational success of Sinti and Roma in Germany” [Bundesweiter Arbeitskreis zur Verbesserung der Bildungsbeteiligung und des Bildungserfolgs von Sinti und Roma in Deutschland] from 2013 to 2015. For the first time, experts from self-organizations and from the federal states, municipalities, foundations and academia held joint consultations. They shared their various perspectives and jointly developed recommendations in a process facilitated by the EVZ Foundation. These were published in 2015. They guided the Foundation's further program development.

#### “Ungleiche Teilhabe. Zur Lage der Sinti:ze und Rom:nja in Deutschland” [Unequal participation. On the Situation of the Sinti and Roma in Germany], 2021<sup>10</sup>

In 2021, ten years after the first educational study, RomnoKher conducted a further study with support from the EVZ Foundation. It examines the improvements and the needs in education and training in Germany, which are still urgent. Their results show that the edu-

<sup>8</sup> [www.stiftung-evz.de/assets/4\\_Service/Infothek/Publikationen/EVZ-Studie-Bildungssituation-Sinti-Roma.pdf](http://www.stiftung-evz.de/assets/4_Service/Infothek/Publikationen/EVZ-Studie-Bildungssituation-Sinti-Roma.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> [www.stiftung-evz.de/assets/4\\_Service/Infothek/Publikationen/EVZ\\_Studie\\_Bildungsteilhabe\\_Sinti\\_Roma.pdf](http://www.stiftung-evz.de/assets/4_Service/Infothek/Publikationen/EVZ_Studie_Bildungsteilhabe_Sinti_Roma.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> [www.stiftung-evz.de/assets/4\\_Service/Infothek/Publikationen/RomnoKher-Studie-2021.-Ungleiche-Teilhabe.-Zur-Lage-der-Sinti-und-Roma-in-Deutschland.pdf](http://www.stiftung-evz.de/assets/4_Service/Infothek/Publikationen/RomnoKher-Studie-2021.-Ungleiche-Teilhabe.-Zur-Lage-der-Sinti-und-Roma-in-Deutschland.pdf)

cational situation of Roma and Sinti has improved substantially in the school sector, but only marginally in the training sector. The study clearly shows that a structural approach is necessary to achieve educational equality – moving away from individual deficit-oriented support and toward a change in the system of educational institutions and educational research.

In parallel with these studies, the Foundation has continuously funded a wide range of projects by self-organizations to strengthen participation in education. For example, educational mediators, materials giving information on the history of the Sinti and Roma, or initiating a framework curriculum for the participatory professionalization of learning Romanes. The Foundation has been cooperating very successfully with the Freudenberg Foundation for many years.

Through its funding, the EVZ Foundation also supports the self-organizations in their processes of organization, self-empowerment and strengthens their ability to operate in local political processes. In the case of many organizations, this funding was the first project funding they received from a public institution in Germany.

#### 5.4. Projects with an 'Impact' Against Antigypsyism

Since 2004, the EVZ Foundation has supported projects that counter antigypsyism as a cross-sectional theme in various programs. Addressing antigypsyism is, among other things, an important element in the numerous international youth exchange projects in the Europeans for Peace program. As part of the program "History and Human Rights", for example, Roma assistants and teachers have conducted joint training in a multi-year project of the Angelus Silesius House in Wrocław, developed standards for the Roma assistants' work and were able to reduce mutual prejudices. Projects to counter antigypsyism have also been funded in the STOP HATE CRIME program in 2011–2015. For example, the work of Roma mentors in Roma communities in the Czech Republic focusing on hate crime monitoring of the "Sdružení pro probaci a mediaci v justici, o.s. – SPJ" (Association for Probation and Mediation in Justice) was supported. With the project in the region of North Bohemia, it was achieved that corresponding incidents were reported to the police and that the project sponsor

was able to obtain necessary qualifications and build up its capacities.

Since 2013, another program facing Antisemitism and Antigypsyism has been testing different approaches in dealing with antigypsyism. In particular, the formation of alliances between Roma self-organizations and Jewish organizations or organizations of the majority society has proven to be a successful approach for developing effective strategies to address discrimination, marginalization and hate. Pilot projects for such alliances have been promoted in Germany, Lithuania, Poland and the Czech Republic. The projects were qualified on the basis of the OSCE practice guide "Coalition Building for Tolerance and Non-Discrimination: A Practical Guide".

### Project in Portrait

#### Coalition building by Ten Organizations at Local Level in Brno with Participation of the Roma Community for Dialog, Solidarity and Diversity – Against Discrimination and Hate

The project "Coalition Building for Dialog, Solidarity and Diversity" was launched in a socially deprived district of Brno. NGOs, public institutions, members of the Roma community, local players as well as young people forged an alliance with the aim of empowering the local population and combating prejudice and discrimination. Through festivals, events, information material and a web presence, the alliance made its agenda public and initiated a dialog.



#### BRIEF INFORMATION:

- Project partner: Ratolest Brno and others
- Target country: Czech Republic
- Period: 2019–2020
- Funding amount: EUR 41,958
- Website: [PREVENT NET BRNO – LOCAL COALITION BUILDING FOR SOLIDARITY AND DIVERSITY – Ratolest Brno and Manuša of Cejl \(manusaofcejil.cz\)](https://www.preventnetbrno.cz/)



Another approach is to adopt a defensive approach in response to hate speech against Roma in social media. The successful project “Don’t let the hoax being spread” of the Czech self-organization ROMEA included monitoring of antigypsy posts as well as publication of counter posts, as well as webinars and educational videos.

A third approach was used in Poland to sensitize police trainees to the experiences of discrimination in Jewish and Roma communities. (POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw with the Auschwitz Jewish Center in Oswiecim).

## 6. The EVZ Foundation’s Agenda for the Future – New and Effective Approaches

With the Agenda for the Future adopted in June 2021, the EVZ Foundation continues to develop its long-standing commitment in a targeted way. In so doing, it takes into account the fact that individual support for Sinti and Roma or educational projects against antigypsyism alone is not sufficiently effective in overcoming social discrimination against Sinti and Roma and antigypsy behavior. The Foundation is therefore increasingly promoting structural approaches in the fight against antigypsyism and focusing its future funding on strengthening Sinti and Roma self-organizations as the agents of effective social change.

This structural approach is also one of the focal points of the Education Agenda NS-Injustice which is coordinated with the EVZ funding portfolio and has been implemented by the EVZ Foundation since 2021 on the initiative of, and with funding from, the Federal Ministry of Finance (BMF). Funding is also provided for projects which combat antigypsyism, publicize the fates of Roma and Sinti persecuted by the National Socialists, and self-organizations that introduce the perspectives of Roma and Sinti into today’s debates throughout Europe.

### 6.1. Structural Action Against Antigypsyism

Various institutional precautions are needed to clearly and effectively combat antigypsy agitation where it occurs, despite all the educational efforts. For this purpose, the EVZ Foundation works with partners in Central and Eastern Europe to develop longer-term model projects which will lead to lasting structural changes, for example the establishment of reporting centers to make the extent of antigypsyism visible, development of supporting structures for those affected or projects to strengthen defensiveness, on- and offline resistance, as well as law enforcement.



Graphic: European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC)



## Project in Portrait

### Online Hate Speech Against Roma

#### Strategic Litigation and Capacity Building in the Czech Republic and Ukraine

Actions are normally preceded by words. The fact that hate speech poses a danger to democracies as well as human lives is widely recognized. However, little attention is given to the blatant extent to which Roma in particular are subject to hate and agitation – especially in the digital space.<sup>11</sup> To address this problem, the Foundation has identified the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) as the sponsor of a model project and is funding the project “Online Hate Speech Against Roma: Strategic Litigation and Capacity Building in the Czech Republic and Ukraine.” In addition to 15 high-profile lawsuits and complaints against online hate speech, the initiative plans to create a network where activists can take action against hate speech through strategic monitoring, reporting and counter-speech.



#### KURZINFORMATION:

- Project partner: ERRC – European Roma Rights Centre, Romea (CZ), Arca (UA)
- Target country: Czech Republic and Ukraine
- Period: 2022–2023
- Funding amount: EUR 300,000
- Website: [www.errc.org/what-we-do/strategic-litigation](http://www.errc.org/what-we-do/strategic-litigation)

## 6.2. Strengthening of Self-Organizations

Self-organizations can be very effective agents in promoting social change. In recent years, many Sinti and Roma have organized to assert for their rights. They have had increasing success in rendering the mechanisms of marginalization and deeply rooted discrimination visible and in distinguishing themselves as players. The Foundation plans to use power-sharing to jointly develop long-term funding programs in order to strengthen self-organizations in two initial areas:

#### a. Funding program “Strengthening equal participation and self-organizations of Sinti and Roma in Germany”

The Foundation is continuing with its commitment to supporting the educational awakening of self-organizations and develops it further in cooperation with experts from the minority. The funding is aimed at the social participation of Sinti and Roma in a broader sense. Initiatives by Sinti and Roma for girls and women are especially welcome.

Self-organizations are funded with up to EUR 80,000 for a term of up to three years.<sup>12</sup> A supporting program committee, including members from this minority, assesses all project ideas and is the authoritative forum for all program development issues. This is in line with the recommendation of the Independent Commission on Antigypsyism to bring about substantial involvement of members of the minority in the program conception, design, management and decision-making processes.

- #### b. Together with partners in Central and Eastern Europe, the Foundation is now developing new funding programs to strengthen Roma self-organizations in their immediate social environment. It does this to effectively address antigypsyism in the immediate social environment, to work for the equal human rights of their communities or to tell the story of the Roma before, during, and after World War II. The objective is also to strengthen the cultural memory of their own community and to become audible as competent voices of the minority in the culture of remembrance within their societies in exchanges with museums, educational institutions and scientific institutions of the majority society.

11 „Hate Speech und Antiziganismus in den Medien“ [Hate Speech and antigypsyism in the Media] Central Council of German Sinti & Roma

12 [EVZ\\_Ausschreibung\\_Selbstorganisationen\\_2022.pdf](http://EVZ_Ausschreibung_Selbstorganisationen_2022.pdf) ([stiftung-evz.de/teilhabe](http://stiftung-evz.de/teilhabe))



At the same time, the Foundation will continue its proven “Latcho Dives” funding program for survivors of the genocide against the Roma. It will be expanded to include activities aimed at strengthening the communities in which survivors are now living. In the future, it will be merged with the new funding approach to strengthen Roma self-organizations.

All funding is also linked to the function of strengthening project planning and organizational development processes. Whereas in the past this was mainly in the context of application consultation procedures, in the future, formats will also be initiated that support the organizational development of Sinti and Roma organizations as an explicit and immediate objective.

## 7. Outlook – Sustainably Strengthening Resilience Against Hate, Discrimination and Violence

The fight against antigypsyism, marginalization and discrimination requires profound social transformation, which in turn needs long-term commitment. The Foundation therefore designs its funding with a time horizon of five to ten years.



The Foundation sees itself as a partner of all those social forces that engage to support this change, especially the self-organizations of the Sinti and Roma. This results in the need to jointly identify goals and measures and to make funding decisions on the use of resources together. In this sense, the Foundation practices power-sharing and develops suitable mechanisms.

In an increasingly dynamic world which will continue to be characterized by multiple crises and conflicts, one requirement is gaining dramatic importance: the resilience of Sinti and Roma communities. Institutional mechanisms against hatred, discrimination and violence must, by all means necessary, be strengthened in a perceptible way.

If you would like to learn more about the activities of the EVZ Foundation, its commitment to human rights and its funded projects, please visit our [website](#) or contact us directly: [kommunikation@stiftung-evz.de](mailto:kommunikation@stiftung-evz.de). Our monthly [newsletter](#) also keeps you up to date regarding news from the Foundation and our projects.

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