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**Concept Note**

**Romani Memory Map in the Americas**

**Background**

The troubled situation of Romani people is at the heart of human rights review of States in Europe, as well as increasingly outside Europe. Discrimination against Roma communities has been the subject of a specific CERD General Recommendation 27 of 2000, as well as a 2014 Human Rights Council Resolution 26/4, recognizing that Roma have faced, for centuries, widespread and enduring human rights violations, discrimination, rejection, social exclusion and marginalisation all over the world and in all areas of life. The situation of Roma has been a focus of extensive commitments during the World Conference against Racism and its 2009 follow-up conference.[[1]](#footnote-1)

An increasing focus on stigma as a driver of human rights abuse is increasingly seen in a number of human rights areas.[[2]](#footnote-2) Where Roma and related groups[[3]](#footnote-3) are concerned, this specific form of racism is referred to as “antigypsyism”.[[4]](#footnote-4) In 2015, the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues published a *[Global Study on the Human Rights Situation of Roma Worldwide](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Minorities/SRMinorities/Pages/GlobalStudyonRomaworldwide.aspx),* focusing in particular on human rights abuses driven by antigypsyism. A number of Governments, civil society actors, National Human Rights Institutions and equality bodies have in recent years devoted efforts to tackling discrimination and other human rights abuse against Roma, including by endeavoring to address the underlying causes of these abuses.

In the recent period, OHCHR has dedicated extensive efforts to strengthening attention to the need to address antigypsyism, as well as to strengthening Roma rights in the Americas. The Americas have been in particular focus in OHCHR’s recent programming for reasons including the comparatively lower attention to date by public institutions to the situation of Roma in the Americas, as well as due to calls by Romani civil society in the Americas drawing attention to the relative exclusion of Romani people in the Americas to global developments in the field of Romani rights. Under the leadership of the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, OHCHR produced two documents to highlight the human rights situation of the Romani community and encourage countries in the Americas to take action for equality. The first, from 2015, was the report of the "Regional Workshop on the Situation of Roma in the Americas" produced after the "Roma in the Americas" meeting held in Brasilia, Brazil.[[5]](#footnote-5) In 2017, the second "Roma in the Americas" meeting was held and its main results and recommendations to the states were published in the annual report of the Special Rapporteurs on Minorities Issues (2017). In September 2022 and May 2023, OHCHR convened a global meeting on [Roma and memorialization](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/minorities/RomaMemorializationSeptember2022-GenevaRoundtableOutcomeReport.pdf), as well as a follow-up meeting on [Memorialization as a Strategy to Tackle Antigypsyism in the Americas](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/minorities/issues-focus/Concept-Note-Memorialization-anti-Gypsyism-in-the-Americas.pdf), respectively[[6]](#footnote-6).

**Roma and Memorialization**

Antigypsyism has contributed to the history and memory of the Romani people to be erased from public spaces and/or misrepresented by collective memory. This phenomenon has had strong negative implications on the life and dynamics of Romani people and communities.

The history and memory of Romani communities around the world are almost fully absent from official narratives and rarely a part of the official histories of their countries. Where Roma appears in official history, in most cases information is partial, and may be distorted by stereotypes and bias. Periods of slavery, the Holocaust, evictions and expulsion, coercive sterilization of Romani women, and other episodes of persecution have not yet been properly recognized or memorialized. At the same time, the positive contributions of Romani communities to societies have also been erased from official history.

In the recent period, this situation has begun slowly to change, as a result of the dedicated efforts of new generations of Romani civil society and human rights defenders. The recent removal of a pig farm at the site of the World War II-era concentration camp for Roma at Lety u Pisku is a sign of changing times, although a victory which took close to three decades to achieve.[[7]](#footnote-7)

The UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence has dedicated increasing attention to questions of memorialization, in which he observed:

“… the crucial role played by memorialization processes in the context of transitional justice, which is fully recognized by the rules and standards of contemporary international law. The work carried out on these past violations serves as a basis for reflection on the present and identification of contemporary issues related to exclusion, discrimination, marginalization and abuses of power, which are often linked to toxic political cultures. Positive work in the area of memory not only helps to build democratic cultures in which human rights are respected but also fulfils the legal obligation of States to guarantee human rights.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

According to the Special Rapporteur on cultural rights,

“In many societies, history teaching either altogether ignores or carries, validates or strengthens stereotypes about marginalized groups, especially minorities and indigenous peoples, in addition to women and the poor. The dominant homogenizing narrative blanches out diversity, ignoring the cultural heritage of everyone outside the group in power, simultaneously depriving the majority of the opportunity to understand the complexity of their country”.[[9]](#footnote-9)

As a result of racism and the dearth of official memory where Roma are concerned, legacies of antigypsyism continue to be a vivid and powerful force today in societies throughout the world.

**Romani Memory Map in the Americas**

To tackle this aspect of antigypsyism and promote the inclusion of Roma, the creation of a Romani Memory Map in the Americas is proposed. The main goals of this project are:

1. Encouraging the emergence of public and private spaces of memory or the promotion of those that already exist, *inter alia* in order to reconstruct and give new meaning to erased memory;
2. Valorizing the participation of Romani people in national histories and in the history of human civilization worldwide;
3. Promoting the improvement of public information about Roma, including the improvement of data tracking the implementation of the SDGs where Roma are concerned, and the effective realization of human rights by Roma, including gendered and intersectional aspects.
4. Promoting academic or informal research on the Roma in the Americas, with the participation and leadership of Romani scholars and experts.
5. Promoting awareness and recognition in the inter-American space of antigypsyism /anti-Roma racism as a specific form of racism against Roma.
6. Encouraging public memory policies for the Romani people in the Americas, guaranteed by resolution 3/2019 of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, in the document entitled “[Principles on Public Policies on Memory in the Americas](https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/decisions/pdf/Resolution-3-19-en.pdf)”.
7. Promoting the official recognition of specific dates for the Romani people and their respective commemoration at the national level, such as April 8 International Roma Day, and August 2 International Roma Holocaust Memorial Day (Samudaripen).

The Romani Memory Map initiative also aims to contribute to the upcoming 80th anniversary commemorations of International Roma Holocaust Memorial Day on 2 August 2024, which commemorates the anniversary of the August 2-3 liquidation of the “Zigeunerlager” in Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, and the killing by the Nazis of several thousand Roma over the course of one night.

**How to contribute to the elaboration of the Romani Memory Map?**

The Romani Memory Map is a collective, crowd-sourced project. Anyone can join the initiative through a call for contributions open to the public. To contribute, participants need to fill out a Outlook form, proposing a **Romani Memory Point.** On the forms, participants can also add links to photos and videos to be added to the map.

The form is available [here](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=2zWeD09UYE-9zF6kFubccMd3MfXVjXJBiPsyuXS3Q85UQ0ZRMEcwN1NKVVgyR1JUMEhTOUswRktNOC4u)

Information published on the map will provide due recognition to the person or entity submitting the information. The person suggesting a Romani Memory Point of interest needs to have the right to post that information, i.e. information should not be copyrighted, confidential or legally privileged. Persons submitting information will also be asked to affirm that, to the best of their knowledge, no person is put at risk of harm or other detriment through the submission of materials, or through proposing their publication.

Submission of proposals or materials does not mean automatic publication. Texts, images and other material submitted will be evaluated by a scientific committee. The committee reserves the right to reject submissions not deemed relevant or appropriate for this project.

**What should the proposal consist?**

A **Romani Memory Point** is a place of memory relevant to Romani history or culture that will figure on the map. The applicant may submit places of memory of different purposes: documentary archive on Roma; localities, streets and parks; cemeteries, home, city or birthplace of some Romani personality; place where some tragic event in Romani history took place; neighborhood characterized by past Romani presence; Romani cultural centers, etc.

Regarding the assessment and release of memory points, please kindly note:

* The boundaries of accepted entries is physical memory points. Thus, for example, educational curriculums recognizing Romani history, language and/or culture have not been accepted for inclusion. Similarly, where a national truth and reconciliation process has explicitly recognized Romani victims (in Colombia for example), this has not been included in the Map. However, physical memory points (statues, plaques, etc.) established to memorialize such a truth and reconciliation process and/or victims would be included in the Map.
* In the cases of Holocaust memorials or monuments commemorating slavery and/or the slave trade, these are not included if they do not explicitly recognize Romani victims of these practices, whereas they are included if they do provide such explicit recognition.
* In certain cases, memory points commemorating fictional characters have been included. The two review bodies proceeded on a case-by-case basis in the assessment of such submissions.
* In general, the review bodies accept places memorializing publicly recognized personalities.
* For reasons of safety, security and privacy, it was decided to exclude any currently inhabited house, community, settlement or similar place;

To propose a Romani Memory Point, it is recommended that the applicant submit documents that prove and strengthen the proposal. These documents can be newspaper articles, transcribed or recorded oral testimonies, official documents, etc.

Proposals are accepted in English, Spanish and Portuguese.

**Review Bodies**

Review bodies involving Roma human rights defenders from the Americas and academic institutions have been convened to review the materials submitted in response to the call for inputs. The following independent and voluntary review bodies will review and assess submissions for the Romani Memory Map in the Americas

1. **Expert Panel**

The role of the Expert Panel is to ensure academic rigor, historical accuracy, and proper ethics in the review of the entries submitted. The Expert Panel work on the basis of decisional consensus.

1. **Review Board**

The role of the Review Board is to ensure Romani community involvement and oversight in the assessment of materials submitted for inclusion in the Romani Memory Map for the Americas, as well as to complement the work of the Expert Panel in assessing academic rigor, historical accuracy, and proper ethics in the entries submitted. The Expert Panel similarly work on the basis of decisional consensus.

**A Note on Terminology**

**Ethnonym Follows Self-Identification in the National Language**

Terminology related to Roma is a complex and often fraught matter, due especially to divergent and complex self-identification in Romani and related communities. Terminology also has varying levels of pejorativity depending on the national language in which it is used. To make matters even more complicated, views on particular words are shifting, with words which until recently were not pejorative becoming more and more so as a result of a changing social environment and social mobilization.

At the centre of this problematic is the term “Gypsy”, which is pejorative for many Roma, but a term of self-identification for some. The term is also very strongly pejorative in some national languages, while less so in others. In United Nations documents, the term most frequently used is “Roma”, following the usage most strongly articulated at international level. In the Americas, it is not possible to use “Roma” as an overarching ethnonym, because some people in the Americas explicitly reject this term.

This mapping proceeds by using the terminology of self-identification used by the person or group in question, in the relevant national language, such as *Romanichal, Ludar, Kalderash, Machwaya, Bashaldey, Boyash, Sa Roma, Rom*, *Calon, Calo, Sinti* (in all cases spelled upper-case in English, and lower-case in Portuguese and Spanish)and others,depending on context. Finally, in some entries in English the term *Gypsy* appears because it is part of the name of an archive or public space, as is the case with the "Carlos de Wendler-Funaro Gypsy Research Collection" archive. *Gypsy* or *Bohemian* is also used when setting out how a person was recognized in society locally or nationally. For example, Jimmy Marks was known as an eccentric "Gypsy". Similarly, in the Calvary Cemetery there is a well-known tomb of George Adams, remembered as the "Gypsy King”. Regarding the term *ciganos* in Portuguese or *gitanos* in Spanish, the map uses these terminologies because it corresponds to those used by groups that self-identify as such, which is the case of the *calos* in Argentina who self-identify as *calos* and/or *gitanos*, or the case of the *calons* in Brazil who self-identify as *calons* and/or *ciganos*.

**“Roma” and “Romani” in English**

In this mapping, “Roma” is the plural noun. “Romani” is the adjective form. Thus, for example: “The Romani people”, “Romani communities”, “a Romani woman”, etc.

“Romani” is also the name of the language: “He was speaking Romani”. This usage slightly follows the grammatical logic of Romani itself, where an adverb is used: “Vo del duma romanes”. Approximately: “He is speaking in the Romani way.”

This mapping does not use “Romany” with a “y” at the end, due to the association of that spelling with 19th century Romantic literature and its stereotyped portrayals of Roma. The “I” at the end of the word “Romani” places Romani correctly in the family of Indic languages.

**Holocaust/Samudaripen**

This mapping uses the terms “Holocaust” and “Samudaripen” as the legitimate terms for the events of World War II. The mapping’s use of “Holocaust” appropriately recognizes Nazi targeting of Roma as similar to that of other groups targeted for mass killing by the Nazis, including above all Jews, as well as homosexuals and people with disabilities. “Samudaripen” is an accepted term in Romani, meaning “The Mass Killing”.

This mapping does not use “genocide” to speak about Holocaust/Samudaripen, because the use of that term appears to be part of an effort to construe the events befalling Roma in World War II as different from that of other groups targeted by the Nazis and their allies for mass killing. This mapping also does not use the term “Porrajmos”, a that term is highly offensive in some Romani dialects.

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**Expert Panel:**

Ann Ostendorf – Gonzaga University, United States

Martin Fotta – Czech Academy of Sciences, Czechia

Marcos Toyansk – Universidade de São Paulo, Brazil

**Review Body**

Matias Dominguez - Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina
Javier Jimenez-Royo – Postdoctoral Conahcyt at El Colef, Mexico
Elisa Costa - President of AMSK/Brazil and vice-president IRU/South America, Brazil

Mariana Sabino, University of New Mexico, United States

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**Consultation and partnership**

OHCHR has advanced efforts in different projects together with civil society, researchers and institutions interested in tackling anti-Gypsyism. Included to date have been Roma organizations such as the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC), Documentation and Cultural Center of German Sinti and Roma (Germany), Dikh he na Bister! (Europe); Mayle Sara Kali International Association (Brazil), Zor - Asociación para los derechos del Pueblo gitano/romani (Argentina), Instituto PluriBrasil (Brasil), PRORROM (Colombia), World Roma Federation, Asociatia Fast Forward (Romania), European Roma Grassroots Organizations Network (Europe), Federación de Asociaciones Gitanas de Cataluña (Spain) and others. In addition, with the support of OHCHR, the Roma Advisory Council (RAC) North America was created in 2021. In 2023, during the Costa Rica event, RAC Latin America was initiated, with commitments among the participants to try to develop the initiative further. Both groups are made up of Roma activists from the Americas. Also involved to date in the development of this action are UNESCO Costa Rica, UNESCO Mexico, as well as Gonzaga University (USA), Universidade de São Paulo (Brazil), Czech Academy of Sciences (Czechia) and the Universidad de Buenos Aires (Argentina).

**Disclaimer**

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For further information on the Map of Romani Memory in the Americas, click [here](https://www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/2023/call-inputs-romani-memory-map-americas).

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1. See: http://www.un.org/en/durbanreview2009/ddpa.shtml [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A 2013 report of United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture Juan Mendez on torture in health care settings examines in particular “Stigmatized identities” as a driver of human rights abuse, noting that “Many policies and practices that lead to abuse in health-care settings are due to discrimination targeted at persons who are marginalized. Discrimination plays a prominent role because “bias commonly underlie[s] such violations” (A/HRC/22/33, paras. 36-38). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Including, in the Americas context, Calon, Ciganos, Gitanos, Travellers, Sinti and others. Hereafter simply “Roma” or “Romani”. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Alliance against Antigypsyism defines antigypsyism as follows: “**Antigypsyism is the specific racism towards Roma, Sinti, Travellers and others who are stigmatized as ‘gypsies’ in the public imagination**.” (http://antigypsyism.eu/) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. A/HRC/31/CRP.2 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For more information on OHCHR's work on Roma rights: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/minorities/advancing-roma-inclusion> . [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://www.rommuz.cz/en/lety-u-pisku/present-days/opening-ceremony-of-the-demolition-of-the-former-pig-farm/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. [A/HRC/45/45](https://www.undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FHRC%2F45%2F45&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. [A/68/296](https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2F68%2F296&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)