

# Never Again: Recognition, Remembrance and Reflection on the Roma Genocide



**PAVEE POINT**  
TRAVELLER AND ROMA CENTRE

A photograph of a concentration camp with barbed wire and a flag. The image is heavily tinted with a red color. In the foreground, a flag with blue, white, and green sections is draped over a barbed wire fence. The background shows a long, straight line of barbed wire stretching into the distance under a cloudy sky. The ground is dry and dusty.

**2024 marks 80 years since the Roma Genocide during the Nazi era 1939 – 1945.**

**Often referred to as Nazi Germany's "forgotten" genocide, an estimated 500,000 Roma and Sinti were murdered in concentration camps or by mobile death squads in Nazi occupied regions of Europe.**





## Background to the Roma Genocide

### The Rise of National Socialism

Roma, along with the Jews and other groups, were stripped of their citizenship and denied franchise rights under extensions to the Nuremberg Laws. As early as 1936, the Roma were transferred out of cities to internment camps and ghettos. There was debate within the Nazi government about how to solve the “Gypsy Question”.

In January 1942 at the Wannsee Conference, the “Final Solution” to the “Jewish Problem” was instigated and millions of Jews were systematically exterminated. In December 1942, Heinrich Himmler ordered the deportation of German and Austrian Sinti and Roma to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

In the extermination camp at Auschwitz II-Birkenau, section B11e was known as the *Zigeunerlager*, or “Gypsy Camp”. Men, women and children were imprisoned together, forced into slave labour and tortured. Josef Mengele took a particular interest in Roma children and made them the subject of horrific experiments.



## Roma Resistance in the Face of Nazi Evil

The Nazis planned to murder the 6,000 Roma occupants of the Zigeunerlager on 16th May, 1944. The resistance movement in the camp warned the Roma and on the morning of 16th, the Roma prisoners refused to report for roll call and ceased cooperating with the German SS.

They barricaded themselves into buildings, armed with hammers, pickaxes and stolen shovels. They made wooden stakes with the slats of their beds and the children collected rocks. The SS arrived in the afternoon to take 6,000 people to the gas chambers – but they were met with fierce resistance.

The SS had not anticipated the resistance and sustained losses in the fight. Fearful of the resistance spreading across the rest of Auschwitz, the SS retreated. The camp was placed on a harsh starvation diet as punishment.

## Fallout of the Resistance

A week later, the Nazis removed 1,500 of the strongest Roma to Auschwitz I and Buchenwald. Two days later, more Roma men and women were removed to Ravensbruck and Flossenburg. Less than 3,000 prisoners remained in the *Zigeunerlager* – many of them children.

In the middle of the night of 2nd August 1944, the SS returned. They faced resistance and needed reinforcements but eventually 2,897 Roma were loaded onto trucks, taken to gas chamber V and exterminated. Their bodies were burned in pits next to the crematorium. In total, 23,000 Roma died in Auschwitz-Birkenau.





## The Need to Remember the Roma Genocide in the Midst of Racism and Hatred



“ Roma people passed through slavery, the Holocaust, starvation and injustice. It is important for people to recognise what has happened to the Roma community. It is important for the generation coming after me to know what has happened to our people and to not allow this to happen again. It is important to live in solidarity with others and to have the courage to say we are the Roma ”

**GABI MUNTEAN, ROMA WORKER, PAVEE POINT TRAVELLER AND ROMA CENTRE.**

The current rise of populism, far right political parties and alliances in Europe is concerning for the 10 million Roma living on the continent. As of August 2024, six EU countries — Italy, Finland, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia and the Czech Republic — have hard-right parties in government. Several other countries have seen hard-right parties leading in political polls. This surge of support for right wing politics and parties has caused a further increase in the legitimisation of anti-Roma racism. This, coupled with growing anti-immigrant sentiment stirred up by far-right agitators, supported by irresponsible social media platforms, is creating more hostility. Ireland has not been immune to this as demonstrated by the far-right ignited riots that took place in Dublin in November 2023. During and after the riots, Roma, in particular Roma women, were targeted.

In 2015, the European Parliament declared 2nd August European Holocaust Memorial Day for Roma and Sinti to mark the atrocities of the Roma Genocide during the Nazi era. However, despite this, the Roma experience of the Holocaust is not widely known or accepted. Most countries do not have dedicated monuments to Roma victims, and education on the Holocaust often does not include details of the Roma story. It is important to show the truth of the Roma struggle against a backdrop of escalating racism, prejudice and discrimination against the community internationally. Today, across Europe, Roma continue to face hate speech and hate crimes, including in Ireland. A number of UN treaty-monitoring bodies, European institutions, and equality and human rights bodies have urged Ireland to address this. This includes approving and enacting strong hate crime and hate speech legislation.

## Never Again – Recognition, Reflection and Remembrance

These atrocities are referred to as the Porajmos, which means the ‘Devouring’ in Romani language. Today’s national event forms part of Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre’s long standing work in this area to create a space for the Roma community to remember and reflect on the *Porajmos*. It further aims to raise awareness and recognition of the genocide in Irish society. The event is an opportunity to reflect on the situation of Roma in Ireland and beyond today as well as on the ongoing discrimination and racism faced by the community. ‘Never Again– Recognition, Remembrance and Reflection on the Roma Genocide’ is supported by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), and held in association with Cairde, Musicantia and Holocaust Education Ireland.

The event brings together Roma and Travellers, policymakers, civil society, and others, with a focus on memorialising and reflecting on the *Porajmos*. A range of speakers, including Dr Ethel Brooks, Professor of Women’s, Gender and Sexual Studies at Rutgers University, Mr. Christian Pfeil, Roma Genocide survivor, and family members of Roma Genocide victims will contribute to the event.

Never again should such an atrocity happen. By reflecting, recognising and remembering this crime against humanity we aim to keep this history alive in the public consciousness, as it reminds us of the dangers of racism and hatred. It is crucial that the rights of all minority groups, including Travellers and Roma, are respected, protected and fulfilled. The onus goes beyond remembering this crime against humanity; we must act in the face of rising racism.

“ It is so important to deliver on Never Again that we remember. We must never allow the stories to die. The challenge of remembering is all the greater today as those who survived these horrors themselves pass away. We need new ways to remember, new ways to commemorate, new ways to make sure that our children know what happened and with that sense of Never Again. ”

**MICHAEL O’FLAHERTY, COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, SPEAKING ON 2ND AUGUST 2024.**



## Dr Ethel Brooks

**Dr Ethel Brooks is a Romani Professor of Women's and Gender Studies and Sociology at Rutgers University, where she has taught since 2000. Since 2012, she has been a Tate-TrAIN Transnational Fellow at the University of the Arts London. She is currently co-Principal Investigator (PI) on the project, Divergent Fates: Travelling Circus People in Europe under National Socialism and has been awarded numerous grants and fellowships.**



Brooks is a member of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council and Chair of the Board of the European Roma Rights Centre, as well as being a member of the Barvalipe Academy of the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture. Since 2007, she is the Co-Director of the annual Feminist Critical Analysis course in Dubrovnik, Croatia. She also serves on several advisory boards.

Brooks is also an author, and her book of 'Unravelling the Garment Industry: Transnational Organizing and Women's Work' won the 2010 Outstanding Book from the Global Division of the Society for the Study of Social Problems. Her most recent book project focuses on histories of encampment and Romani and refugee futures.

## Mr. Christian Pfeil

**Mr. Christian Pfeil is a survivor of the Nazi terror. He was born in January 1944 in Lubin, a Nazi concentration camp. His family endured persecution and deportation during World War II, with some members tragically murdered in Auschwitz. Despite facing unimaginable hardships, Pfeil's resilience led him to become a successful entrepreneur in Trier.**



However, in 1993, his business was targeted in two separate attacks by unknown assailants, resulting in vandalism and death threats. Undeterred, Pfeil continues to advocate against right-wing extremism and educates younger generations about the persecution faced by Sinti and Roma during the Holocaust.

As one of the few remaining Roma survivors, Pfeil's unwavering commitment to preserving history and combating discrimination serves as a powerful testament to the resilience of the human spirit.

“ I’m afraid that Europe is forgetting its past and that Auschwitz is only sleeping.

Antigypsyist threats, policies and actions worry me greatly and make me very sad ”

CEIJA STOJKA, ROMA HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR (1933 – 2013)

To learn more about our work on the Roma Genocide during the Nazi era visit:  
[www.paveepoint.ie/commemorating-the-roma-genocide-throughout-the-years](http://www.paveepoint.ie/commemorating-the-roma-genocide-throughout-the-years)

European Holocaust Memorial Day for Roma and Sinti:  
[www.roma-sinti-holocaust-memorial-day.eu/](http://www.roma-sinti-holocaust-memorial-day.eu/)

On the Council of Europe’s website:  
[www.coe.int/en/web/roma-genocide](http://www.coe.int/en/web/roma-genocide)



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An Roinn Leanai, Comhionannais,  
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Oige  
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