

## Forgotten Victims: 55% of British people surveyed unaware that over 500,000 Roma and Sinti people were killed in the Holocaust

Sarah Sweeney and Billie Dolling | 26<sup>th</sup> February 2020

To see how far Holocaust education in Britain has been successful in teaching about Roma and Sinti victims of the Holocaust, we commissioned YouGov to pose the following question to 2162 members of the British public<sup>1</sup>:

*'Sinti and Roma communities have been living in Germany for 600 or more years. They share ethnic origins in India and are Europe's largest ethnic minority group. Over 500,000 Roma and Sinti people were killed by Nazi's during the Holocaust. Before taking this survey, were you aware that these people were killed by the Nazi's during the Holocaust?'*

We found that 55% of British adults surveyed did not know that over 500,000 Roma and Sinti people were killed by Nazi's during the Holocaust.

### Background

In England, the only historical event that all children legally must learn about is the Holocaust, which takes place during Key Stage 3 History lessons<sup>2</sup>. Teaching and learning about the Holocaust is important because it helps to demonstrate the dangers of prejudice, scapegoating and dehumanisation, as well as the importance of human rights and role of leaders in safeguarding a free and just society.

According to historian Rainer Schulze, *"the Nazi persecution of the Roma has long been a 'forgotten', or rather overlooked and unacknowledged, part of the Third Reich's genocidal policy"*, with low levels of awareness that Roma people were targeted and systematically murdered by the Nazis<sup>3</sup>. In a blog for the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, Rainer describes the conditions in the Zigeunerfamilienlager (Gypsy Family Camp) at Auschwitz-Birkenau<sup>4</sup>:

*"Unlike the Jews, Roma men, women and children were not separated, which is why the camp was called Zigeunerfamilienlager (Gypsy Family Camp). There was no selection to divide those fit for work and those immediately destined for the gas chambers either, and very few were conscripted to do forced labour outside the Zigeunerfamilienlager, although some had to work in the camp itself. All arrivals were tattooed on their arms (babies on their thighs) with a number prefixed by a Z for Zigeuner, meaning Gypsy. Their hair was shorn off, but they were allowed to grow it again. Most kept their clothing, but they had to wear a black triangle (for 'asocial') attached to it, often with a 'Z' inscribed. Later, a brown triangle was introduced.*

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<sup>1</sup> All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2162 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 3rd - 4th December 2019. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.het.org.uk/about/holocaust-education-uk>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.hmd.org.uk/news/gypsy-roma-traveller-history-month-introduction/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.hmd.org.uk/news/auschwitz-birkenaus-gypsy-family-camp/>

*Living conditions in the Gypsy Camp were grim. Food supplies were totally inadequate, disease was rampant, and the inmates were subjected to serious maltreatment by the SS.*

*In May 1943, Dr Josef Mengele was posted to Auschwitz-Birkenau and became the camp doctor of the Zigeunerfamilienlager. One focus of his 'medical research' was on identical twins, and he took a particular interest in the Sinti and Roma children, subjecting his victims to ruthless experiments and horrifying torture, and killing many of them in order to dissect parts of their bodies."*

### **Anti-gypsyism today**

*"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

As we mark the 77<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first arrival of Roma and Sinti people from Germany at the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp complex, the Roma community in Britain continue to face high levels of prejudice and feel the consequences of hate every day. Research from the Equality and Human Rights Commission, published in 2018, found that 44% of the British public surveyed expressed openly negative attitudes towards Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities - more than any other protected characteristic group<sup>5</sup>. Meanwhile, across Europe, anti-Roma prejudice is on the rise with increasingly hostile Governments in Italy and Hungary in particular and regular news reports of anti-Roma attacks<sup>6</sup>.

### **Recommendations**

1. The UK Government should be vocal in condemning discrimination and prejudice against Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, as is the case for other ethnic minority groups.
2. The Department for Education should support schools to mark Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month.
3. The Department for Education should strengthen teaching on Roma and Sinti experiences of the Holocaust in the curriculum.

### **About us**

#### **Friends Families and Travellers**

Friends, Families and Travellers (FFT) is a leading national charity that works on behalf of all Gypsies, Roma and Travellers regardless of ethnicity, culture or background.

[fft@gypsy-traveller.org](mailto:fft@gypsy-traveller.org) | [www.gypsy-traveller.org](http://www.gypsy-traveller.org) | Twitter: @GypsyTravellers | Facebook: @FriendsFamiliesandTravellers | +44 (0) 1273 234 777

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/national-barometer-of-prejudice-and-discrimination-in-britain.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/roma-antiziganist-romani-discrimination-italy-matteo-salvini-ukraine-a9024196.html>