



**KULTUSMINISTER
KONFERENZ**

Joint Declaration

**of the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education with
the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma
and the Alliance for Solidarity with the Sinti and Roma of Europe**

**to convey the history and present
of Sinti and Roma in schools**

(Resolution of the KMK of 08.12.2022)

1. Introduction

Both Sinti and Roma have lived in Europe for about 1,000 years and are an integral part of German and European societies. They have been citizens of their respective home countries for many generations and have made important contributions to German and European cultures. Sinti and Roma are umbrella terms for a variety of other group designations.

The groups of Sinti and Roma living in Germany include the Sinti, who have been resident in Germany for about 600 years, and the Roma, who immigrated over the course of the 19th century. These two groups receive protection and support as an autochthonous national minority. In the 1960s, Roma came to Germany as "gastarbeiter", mainly from the former Yugoslavia. Today, many of them and their families have German citizenship. Others have been seeking asylum since the beginning of the 1990s as refugees from the Yugoslav wars. Some of them still live with an uncertain residence status, which has an impact on the right of residence of the next generation(s). Other members of the Roma communities have moved here in the course of EU freedom of movement. The Romani language is an important cultural resource for many Sinti and Roma and is cultivated in many families as a mother tongue alongside the various respective national languages. The many different variants and dialects provide information about how diverse and heterogeneous the Sinti and Roma minorities were and are.

Regardless of the heterogeneity of the Sinti and Roma, the image of the "Gypsies" was already constructed in the early modern period as a discriminatory ascription of otherness. This was fundamental for the stigmatisation of Sinti and Roma and also for the racist image of the enemy that provided the basis for the murder of several hundred thousand Sinti and Roma under National Socialism. After the end of the war, this genocide, the Holocaust against the Sinti and Roma, was denied, and discrimination continued unabated with the continued use of the data collections from National Socialism. It was not until 1982, under chancellor Helmut Schmidt, that the Nazi genocide was recognised; many of the victims and survivors have not received "reparation" due to them to this day.

Antigypsyism research is concerned with the social aspects of antigypsyism, its genesis and its various manifestations. Because of antigypsyism, people become the projection surface of enemy stereotypes. Both negative narratives and romanticising ascriptions constitute as antigypsyist. Antigypsyism is part of social and partially still institutional practices and thus - intentionally or not - structural. The narratives attributed from outside are still effective today. This is why Sinti and Roma are often not understood as part of German and European history and culture. A corresponding intercession has so far taken place only inadequately.

The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany, the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, and the Alliance for Solidarity with the Sinti and Roma of Europe would like to use this declaration to encourage schools to intensify their efforts to cover the history and present of the Sinti and Roma in the classroom and in extracurricular activities. In particular, the goal is to raise awareness of antigypsyism in the classroom and also during teacher training.

2. Objectives and principles

The aim of this joint declaration is to ensure that information on Sinti and Roma as members of German and European societies, as citizens of Germany and other European states, and as an integral part of German and European history and cultural history is included and addressed in school lessons. Pupils should be given an authentic and differentiated picture of the multi-layered realities of life of the members of the minority. This includes the Holocaust of the European Sinti and Roma. However, school education must not be limited to this issue.

To achieve this goal, the following principles must be observed:

- An essential prerequisite is the communication of authentic information and knowledge about the history and present of Sinti and Roma. This is an important step towards correcting prejudiced everyday knowledge and would contribute to fulfilling the historical-political and human rights-oriented educational mandate of schools.
- Dealing with minorities is a benchmark for democratic understanding in politics and society as well as for the observance of human rights. Due to its history, Germany bears a great responsibility. Its educational institutions should name antigypsyism as a phenomenon in society, sensitise young people to its various forms, teach them to recognise antigypsyist structures and empower them to oppose discrimination and exclusion. This is also of great importance for teacher training.
- Sinti and Roma must be made visible as a genuine part of German and European history, so that they are understood as self-determined and reflectively acting people with equal rights, and must not be reduced to their history of persecution and victimisation.
- The civil rights movement of the Sinti and Roma, which emerged in the post-war period, points to the political will of the minority. Their political successes can be seen in the recognition of the Nazi genocide, the erection of the memorial in Berlin and the state treaties negotiated at Länder level.

3. Measures taken by the education administration and education policy

In some Länder, the lesson curricula of history, social studies and other socio-scientific subjects stipulate the inclusion of the topic of Sinti and Roma - mostly in the context of Nazi persecution. Occasionally, reference is made to Sinti and Roma with regard to the protection of minorities. Some Länder, however, choose to forgo content guidelines in the curricula altogether. Additions to or concretisation of curricula for all school levels and types of school are therefore strongly recommended in order to anchor the history and present of Sinti and Roma in school education, thus making the topic relevant for examination.

The competent authorities in ministries and school administrations shall ensure that

- the teaching of knowledge about the history and present of Sinti and Roma from an antigypsyism-critical perspective is given adequate space in the training and further education of teachers;
- school headmasters be made aware of the importance of this issue.

Anchoring this in the programmes of state training institutes, also in cooperation with training programmes of civil society and universities, has proven effective. Existing training programmes on democracy, human rights, or on prevention of and intervention against discrimination could be used and expanded as needed. This applies equally to the training of teachers and other educational professionals.

Textbook publishers and authors of other educational media should be persuaded to critically analyse their previous contributions on the topic of Sinti and Roma, to review their quantity and quality, and to edit them accordingly for new editions. Sinti and Roma should be represented as a natural part of German society in textbooks and other materials across all subjects and grades, including at primary level (e.g. in first reading texts). Furthermore, publishers should be won over for the development of corresponding digital training and teaching materials (tutorials, webinars, etc.).

4. Implementation in school

4.1 Inclusion of the history and cultures of Sinti and Roma in the classroom

Studying the history and present of the Sinti and Roma in Germany and Europe offers numerous interdisciplinary and cross-curricular starting points. Political and

historical disciplines as well as religion and ethics classes offer opportunities to incorporate the topic, as do language, literary, and arts classes. Possible synergies should be taken into account when expanding the curricula as well as in the development of handouts. Some elements of the topic can also be incorporated into primary school, the place where children gain their first experiences in learning to deal with themselves and others.

Knowledge about Sinti and Roma should be taught in the context of German and European history and culture. It should become clear that Sinti and Roma, like other minorities, are an integral part of the history and present of the countries and societies in which they live. Germany, for example, is the home of the Sinti and Roma living here. Like the Sorbian people, the Frisian ethnic group and the Danish minority, the German Sinti and Roma are a recognised national minority.

The history of the Sinti and Roma must not be treated exclusively as one of exclusion and persecution. It is important to address their cultural contributions, e.g. in music, visual and performing arts, literature and film, giving the pupils the opportunity of empathetic experience and appreciation. Likewise, the political contributions of the Sinti and Roma and the civil rights movement should also be addressed in their significance for the history of democracy. Often, a regional and local historical approach is suitable for this, as that would allow the pupils to include their own everyday experiences.

Of central importance is the confrontation with antigypsyism, which continues to be virulent in Germany and other countries and manifests itself in different forms that adapt to current societal dialogue.¹ In recent years, for example, debates about migration or homelessness and poverty were thusly charged.

Several State Agencies for Civic Education and some state institutes for teacher training and school development offer information and organise events on the history and present of the Sinti and Roma. They are important partners of schools and should be encouraged to explore the topic in greater depth. Schools should be encouraged to make active use of these offers in the classroom and in extracurricular activities.

4.2 Encounters with Sinti and Roma perspectives

Few know Sinti or Roma personally. Nevertheless, many have an opinion shaped by resentment. Members of the minority, their organisations and networks are competent partners for pupils as well as for their teachers and educators when dealing with the topic in class. For example, Sinti and Roma could be invited as experts to give talks at schools or during advanced education courses and be

¹ The authors aim to dedicate a separate recommendation to dealing with and addressing antigypsyism in schools, its origins, forms and manifestations.

significantly involved in their conception. The establishment of encounter programmes is also desirable.

Visits to extracurricular places of learning, meeting places, documentation centres, archives, exhibitions, museums, and memorials also contribute to a comprehensive examination of the topic. Offers by Sinti and Roma organisations should be given special attention here. Subsequently, video interviews with survivors as well as encounters with their children and grandchildren would offer important insights, and so would reading or attending readings of life stories.

The purpose of such encounters is to talk to Sinti and Roma, to get to know their perspectives and to hear their voices first hand.

The use of all these offers requires qualified and thorough preparation and follow-up-sessions.

5. Conclusions

The Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs, the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma and the Alliance for Solidarity with the Sinti and Roma of Europe

- work together to ensure that the diversity Sinti and Roma becomes visible in the classroom and in extracurricular activities, and that a vivid and differentiated picture of their diverse realities of life and their cultural, social and political contributions is conveyed,
- consider it indispensable to deal with the different forms of antigypsyism in schools and agree to develop a joint recommendation on how to deal with antigypsyism in schools,
- call for personal encounters with Sinti and Roma to be sought and made possible in the school context,
- recommend visiting extracurricular places of learning and offers that make it possible to experience the realities of life of Sinti and Roma in the past and present,
- advocate for the appropriate teaching of knowledge about Sinti and Roma, their history and diversity as well as about the different forms of antigypsyism in the training and further education of teachers and other educational professionals working in schools,
- welcome and support the participation of members of the minority in the design of information events and further training seminars in the training and further training of teachers and other educational specialists working in schools,
- support the creation of materials and teaching units for different grades and for a different number of lessons in cooperation with educators and will ensure their dissemination,

- demand and promote a systematic exchange between the responsible authorities of the Länder on the implementation of this declaration,
- will present this declaration to the professional public at a joint conference.

6. References

Some relevant recommendations, publications and websites:

Recommendations and publications of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs

[Intercultural education and upbringing at school](#) (KMK resolution of 25.10.1996 in the version of 05.12.2013)

[Democracy as a Goal, Object and Practice of Historical-Political Education and Upbringing in Schools](#) (KMK resolution of 06.03.2009 in the version of 11.10.2018) (also available in [English](#))

[Human rights education in schools](#) (KMK resolution of 04.12.1980 as amended on 11.10.2018)

[Remembering for the Future - Recommendations on Remembrance Culture as a Subject of Historical-Political Education in Schools](#) (KMK resolution of 11.12.2014) (also available in [English](#))

International and national reference documents:

[Council of Europe, Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, Strasbourg 01.02.1995 - Official Translation of Germany](#)

[Combating Antigypsyism - Resolution of the German Bundestag of 19.10.2019](#)

Studies:

[Change of perspective - catching up justice - participation, Report of the Independent Commission on Antigypsyism](#), 2021 (*here especially chapters 8.1 and 8.2*)

[Spielhaus, Riem; Szakács-Behling, Simona; Ailincăi, Aurora; Hopson, Victoria; Pecak, Marko, The Representation of Roma in European Curricula and Textbooks. Analytical Report](#) Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2020.

[Rath, Imke; Spielhaus, Riem, Schulbücher und Antiziganismus: Zur Darstellung von Sinti und Roma in aktuellen deutschen Lehrplänen und Schulbüchern, Dossier 3 \(2021\), Braunschweig \(GEI\) 2021](#)

Monographs:

Fings, Karola, Sinti und Roma. Geschichte einer Minderheit, Beck, 2nd ed. Munich 2019

Jonuz, Elizabeta; Weiß, Jane, (In)Visible Successes. Educational paths of Romnja and Sintize in Germany, Springer, Wiesbaden 2020

Opfermann, Ulrich F. Seye kein Ziegeuner, sondern kayserlicher Cornet. Sinti in the 17th and 18th centuries. An investigation based on archival sources, Metropol, Berlin 2007

Sinti and Roma. Eine deutsche Minderheit zwischen Diskriminierung und Emanzipation, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, Schriftenreihe Bd. 1573 / Bayerische Landeszentrale für politische Bildungsarbeit, Bonn/München 2015.

Widmann, Peter, An den Rändern der Städte. Sinti und Jenische in der deutschen Kommunalpolitik, Metropol, Berlin 2001

Materials:

International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)/Fondation pour la Memoire de le Shoa/Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, The Fate of the European Sinti and Roma during the Holocaust, materials translated into twelve languages (for German version see <https://www.romasintigenocide.eu/de/home>)
