



**Memorialization as a Strategy to  
Tackle Antigypsyism in the Americas**

**17-18 MAY 2023**  
Hybrid format  
(online and in person)

Registration  
details:



## Roundtable

# Memorialization as a Strategy to Tackle Anti-Gypsyism in the Americas

17-18 May 2023

UPEACE, Costa Rica

This event aims to follow up global efforts to strengthen Roma and memorialization, by taking action to examine in particular anti-Gypsyism in the Americas, its historical roots, and its impact on the present. The roundtable also aims to take stock of the current state-of-play of Roma inclusion policies in the Americas, and in particular to recognize and tackle anti-Gypsyism.

## Objectives

- a. Promoting awareness and recognition in the inter-American space of anti-Gypsyism as a specific form of racism against Roma.
- b. Advancing recognition of past violations of the human rights of Roma and their impact on the present in the Americas, with particular focus on Latin America.
- c. Examining states-of-play of Roma inclusion policy, with a view to advancing such policies at national level in Latin America.
- d. Advocating the recognition and remembrance of the Roma Holocaust (Samudaripen), including in the context of 27 January International Holocaust Commemoration Day and 2 August Roma Holocaust Memorial Day, as well as on national-level commemoration days.
- e. Mapping spaces for Roma memorialization in the Americas. Promoting initiatives to ensure the recovery of Roma memory in public and private spaces, such as: creating documentary archive on Roma, rewriting history textbooks used in schools; changing the names of localities, streets and parks; marking sites of terror with plaques that explain the past; erecting new memorials and statues to change the “memoryscape”; organizing official and unofficial commemorations of various historical events and figures; establishing on-site, itinerant and online museums and exhibitions; delivering official apologies for and condemnations of the past; as well as initiating unofficial truth projects that might rely on oral history and other documentation method; encouraging and financing artistic projects related to the Romani memory. Advancing recognition in education and public memorialization of the affirmative contributions of Roma to all societies. Strengthening the Romani voice in education and in public life.
- f. Advancing national recognition of April 8 as International Roma Day.

## Expected outcomes

- a. Specific recommendations for advancing transitional justice and, in particular, memorialization processes in the Americas.
- b. Identifying the next steps to be taken by National States to establish processes of transitional justice and, in particular, memorialization regarding the Roma.
- c. Recognizing historical cases of human rights violations related to the Roma in the Americas.
- d. Mapping of some sites of memory in the Americas that should be preserved or should be built.

## Background

Immediately after the first reports of the arrival of Roma in Europe, at the end of the 15th century, we find evidence of their arrival in the Americas as early as the beginning of the 16th century. In Brazil, for example, several Roma women were summoned to testify before the first visit of the Holy Office in the country in 1591. During the colonial period, Portugal had a policy of deporting Roma to the Americas and sometimes to African territories. In the meanwhile, the Spanish crown preferred to keep the Roma in its territory to perform forced labor. However, the large migration of Roma people mainly from Eastern Europe occurred only in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. At this time, several Latin American countries encouraged the migration of Europeans to their territories, aiming mainly to obtain workforce and the awful policy of "whitewashing" the local population. Therefore, numerous migration laws defined, at that time, which migrant was desired and which was undesired. The Roma were, once again, in the category of the "unwanted" because they were considered people with questionable habits and not fit for work. Along with these migration laws, numerous anti-Roma decrees also appeared throughout the Americas.

The little existing research shows that the Roma have faced discrimination since their arrival in the Americas and that transcontinental racism continues to affect the lives of these people. This violent past is reflected in the level of exclusion they still face today and in all areas of social life. In addition, the lack of information, the absence of statistical data, and the scarcity of academic research on these people transforms them into "invisible peoples". On the one hand, Roma are invisibilized/ignored by the states. On the other hand, many of these families have preferred to hide their identities, paying a high price for it in order not to suffer discrimination. However, some studies show that this invisibilization on both sides has not meant greater inclusion of Roma in the wider society.

The Harvard University Study 2020 [Romani Realities in the United States: breaking the silence, challenging the stereotypes](#) revealed, for example, that although Roma identity is less visible in the United States than in Europe, as many members of this community hide their identities and may pass themselves off as other ethnicities, anti-Roma racism affecting this group to a similar extent. According to the study, the most alarming data relates to the educational level of the interviewees: "two-thirds of the interviewees attended day care, nursery or kindergarten; 8% finished 8th grade; 10% have a high school degree; 2% trade/technical/vocational training; 2% associate degree, 5% bachelor's degree, 3% master's

degree, and 0.3% doctoral degree." Therefore, it is necessary to highlight that this invisibility, in reality, hides violence and neglect. It also denies the needs and the existence of the Roma as subjects of rights. The invisibility of the Roma allows us to understand how anti-Gypsyism has acted and continues to act in American societies. It is necessary to understand this mechanism of oppression in order to be able to break it once and for all.

This event is part of the UN's efforts to tackle anti-Gypsyism and the invisibilization of Roma people in the Americas. In 2015, under the leadership of the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, the OHCHR published a [Global Study on the Human Rights Situation of Roma Worldwide](#) (A/HRC/45/45), focusing in particular on human rights abuses driven by anti-Gypsyism. The report was undertaken as a result of the UN Human Rights Council [Resolution 26/4](#) adopted on 14 July 2014. Also under the leadership of the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, the UN human rights system held two editions of the "Roma in the Americas" event, together with civil society and different state representatives, with the aim of highlighted the human rights situation of Roma in the Americas and encouraged action for equality . The first was in Brazil, in 2015, and generated the report of the "Regional Workshop on the Situation of Roma in the Americas" [A/HRC/31/CRP.2](#). In 2017, a second "Roma in the Americas" meeting was held. The main results and recommendations of the meeting were published in the [annual report of the Special Rapporteur on Minorities Issues in 2017](#).

In September 2022, OHCHR held the event [Roma and Memorialization: Advancing Recognition and Remedy for the Dark Chapters of the Past and their Impact on the Present](#) in Geneva, with the participation of Roma activists and representatives from American and European states. The objective was to examine the current state of recognition of the dark chapters of history related to racism and discrimination against Roma, the impact of these legacies on the present and the continuing legacies of anti-Gypsyism/anti-Roma racism in impeding the right to know and the right to truth and justice. The outcome document of the event can be consulted here.

In the same year, OHCHR convened, together with the Government of Argentina, the webinar [Anti-Gypsyism and Memory of the Roma people in Argentina: challenges for the creation of an anti-racist archival collection](#). The main goal of the event was to discuss methods of building anti-racist archives and how they can be used in transitional justice processes.

In all these events, participants emphasized the difficulty of creating public policies for Roma inclusion in American countries, since there is little data and little research on them. This allows states to act as if Roma do not exist as a people. To reverse this situation, the United Nations and its partners decided to invest in memorialization, understood as the fifth pillar of transitional justice and which crosses all the other four pillars, they are: truth, justice, reparations, guarantees of non-recurrence. As the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence stated during the Roma and Memorialization event, all these pillars must go together. If one fails, all the others fail equally.

The promotion of research, the production of data, the collection of testimonies, and the creation of documentary archives on human rights violations is the first step in reconstructing the truth and calling for justice. At the same time, the dissemination of this information in a critical way is also fundamental to ensure that the evils of the past are not repeated, and to claim reparation and compensation policies.