

Roma and Sinti Victims of the Holocaust

The Roma and Sinti have lived in Europe for over 800 years, and are today the largest **minority** group in Europe (with about 10 to 15 million people). This minority is made up of cultural groups called “tribes” or “nations.” The groups were historically grouped together under the title “gypsies,” but many find this title impolite because it is incorrect and the name often carries many negative stereotypes attached to it.

In the early 1900’s, various Roma and Sinti tribes lived and worked in diverse fields—as farmers, artisans and craftworkers, musicians, business people, merchants, and many other careers. In the early 1930’s, between 11,000 and 12,000 Roma and Sinti lived in Austria, and the majority had settled in Burgenland—more than 8,000 Roma and Sinti lived in 130 villages and settlements throughout the region.

Roma and Sinti have long faced discrimination in Europe, and during the economic stresses of the interwar period this **persecution** increased. As the economy became worse, people began moving back from the city to their smaller hometowns to take the jobs that Roma had been performing, and they resented the competition for work. Roma and Sinti were forced to have a special **permit** to work and to have special registration papers in European countries, and scientists promoted racist theories that Roma and Sinti were lesser humans and “genetically criminal”.

When the Nazis came into power, the same racist **restrictions** that they made against Jews were also made against Roma and Sinti, even if their case was more complex since Nazis believed they had “Aryan” origins. Furthermore, the National Socialists believed that Roma and Sinti were biologically “born criminals” and passed laws regarding “**crime prevention**”: the laws stated that since Roma, Sinti, and other “asocial” people were genetically **predisposed** to be criminals, they could be arrested even if they had not committed a crime. They also **forcibly sterilized** thousands of Roma and Sinti to prevent them from having children.

Immediately after Hitler **annexed** Austria in 1938, they began **arresting** thousands of Roma and Sinti and **deporting** them to concentration camps. In 1939, they imprisoned all remaining free Roma and Sinti in labor camps and ghettos in Austria. In 1942, the National Socialists officially began the “Final Solution,” their plan to kill all of the Jews, Roma, and Sinti in the Third Reich. They sent all of the Roma and Sinti in Austria and other Nazi ghettos to extermination and concentration camps.

Out of the approximately 11,000 Roma and Sinti living in Austria before 1938, around 1,500 survived Nazi persecution, by far the victim group suffering the highest percentage of loss of life. . After the war, it was nearly impossible for surviving Roma and Sinti to get **restitution** from the Austrian government—since their property had not been necessarily listed in official paperwork, they were unable to prove that their homes and belongings had been stolen by the Nazis. Roma and Sinti survivors did not receive any individual aid from the Austrian State until 1961.

The Romani have their own name for the Roma Genocide—the Porojamos (the Devouring) or Samudaripen (“Mass Killing”). It is also often referred to as “The Forgotten Genocide”—it took decades for Roma and Sinti across Europe to gain restitution and **recognition**. In fact, the Austrian concentration camp of Lackenbach where Roma were imprisoned during the war was not even listed as an official concentration camp until 1988. Even today there is much less research and fewer memorials to the murdered Roma and Sinti than there are for other victim groups.

minority—die Minderheit
persecution—die Verfolgung
permit—die Zulassung
restriction—die Beschränkung
crime prevention—die Kriminalitätsverhütung
predisposed-- prädisponiert

forced sterilization—Zwangssterilisation
annexation-- der Anschluss
to arrest—jmd. Verhaften
restitution-- die Entschädigung
recognition—die Anerkennung