

# ROMANI | HISTORY

## Factsheets on Romani History: General Introduction

Factsheets on Romani History: Content Structure | Factsheets on Roma | Literature, Acknowledgements, The History Factsheets' Team

➤ *These factsheets deal with the history of the Roma, an European nation with Indian roots. The Indian origin and affiliation of the Roma is most obvious linguistically, by the language still spoken by many members of this heterogeneous ethnicity. The Roma consist of various groups, which are labelled with different ethnonymes – self designations as well as external designations: Arlije, Calé, Gurbet, Kaale, Kalderaš, Lovara, Manuš, Sepečides, Sinti, Ursari, etc.; many groups also use the self-designation Roma. Usually all these groups are summarised – sometimes even together with population groups of non Indian origin – by the pejorative denomination “Gypsies”, which – out of descriptive reasons and without negative connotations – is sometimes also used in the factsheets.*

THE OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN THIS WORK ARE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE AUTHORS AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REFLECT THE OFFICIAL POLICY OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE.

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➤ *As Roma were and still are marginalised in society, Romani history was and still is sidelined in mainstream history. It is known and proven since the eighteenth century that Romani, the language of the Roma, is a New-Indo-Aryan language and that its speakers are of Indian origin. However, public knowledge about the history and culture of this nation, which numerically is the largest minority in Europe, is still marginal or inexistent among ordinary people. On the other hand, national governments*

## FACTSHEETS ON ROMANI HISTORY: CONTENT STRUCTURE

### TIMELINE OF ROMANI HISTORY IN SEVEN PHASES

III. 1

Pre-European History: “First Migration” from Central India to Byzantium | 250 BCE - 1400 CE **1**

250 BCE	0 BCE	250 CE	500 CE	750 CE
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It is impossible to cover all aspects of Romani history properly in one step and to make up for everything missed in the past. Although the factsheets cover the most important phases and events in Romani history, they have to be seen as a first step which hopefully will be followed by further amendments. To allow a step by step completion an open

approach for the presentation was chosen: the format of single factsheets and content organisation through open lists, which easily allow the inclusion of future extensions. This open content organisation affects the numbering system of the factsheets which also tentatively organises Romani history into seven phases:

#### **1** PRE-EUROPEAN HISTORY: “FIRST MIGRATION” FROM CENTRAL INDIA TO BYZANTIUM

The Indian origin and the “road to Europe” via Persia, Armenia and Asia Minor as part of the Byzantine empire is undisputed, primarily because of linguistic evidence. Due to the lack of

documents and “hard facts” and the importance of origin in any emancipation process, this is a field of discussions ranging from scientifically based theories to weird speculations.

#### **2** EARLY EUROPEAN HISTORY & FIRST DISCRIMINATION

This second period in Romani history covers the time from the “Arrival in Europe” in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the situation of the Roma in various European regions in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>

centuries: their situation in the Ottoman Empire and Central Europe, bondage and slavery in Wallachia and Moldavia, marginalisation and persecution in Western Europe.

#### **3** STATE POLICIES: INTEGRATION, FORCED ASSIMILATION, DEPORTATION

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the “Age of Enlightenment” in European history, Roma were exposed to “new methods” of discrimination: internment in Spain and forced assimilation laws in the

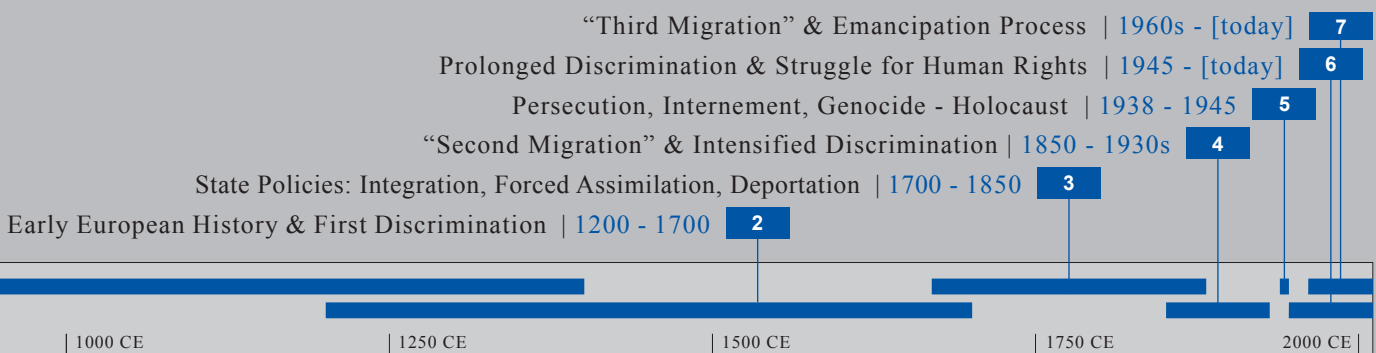
Austro-Hungarian Empire; methods which are opposed by the treatment as – in principal – equal subjects with the respective full civil rights in the Russian Empire.

#### **4** “SECOND MIGRATION” & INTENSIFIED DISCRIMINATION

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a second migratory movement took place: Romani groups from Central and South-Eastern

Europe moved to all other regions of Europe, some of them even overseas. Political processes and changes around the brink

*and international organisations are trying to overcome segregation, stigmatisation and marginalisation of the Roma and try to fully integrate Roma into society. One of the keys for integration is education of both Roma and non-Roma. An integral part of this educational process is mutual knowledge about the common history of Roma and non-Roma in Europe. The factsheets on Romani history are intended to support this process of integration via education.*



of the century (19/20) also affected the Roma. These changes are exemplified by the intensified discrimination in a former

Austro-Hungarian region and the treatment of Roma as separate people but integral part of society in the early Soviet Union.

## 5 PERSECUTION, INTERNMENT, GENOCIDE - HOLOCAUST

The Nazi genocide stands as caesura in recent Romani history. It has been the negative climax of centuries of discrimination, stigmatisation and persecution. Many groups have not overcome the Holocaust until today. The Holocaust can't be treated as past, it is still an integral part of the life of the Roma

and therefore non-Roma have to be made aware of this phase of Romani history as well. Maybe this chapter shows best the preliminary and open character of the factsheets. Although this heading subsumes the largest number of individual factsheets so far, there still remains a lot to be written.

## 6 PROLONGED DISCRIMINATION & STRUGGLE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

After WW II Romani concentration camp survivors were refused help and compensation and for many of them the recognition as victims came too late. Stigmatisation and discrimination did not come to an end after the Holocaust.

Roma always have been and still are marginalised in European society. This situation finally led to self-organisation for emancipation and the struggle for human rights at an international level.

## 7 “THIRD MIGRATION” & EMANCIPATION PROCESS

The recent east-west migration of the Roma started in the course of the working migrations from South-East Europe to Western Europe and intensified with the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellites and the breakup of the Socialist Fe-

deral Republic of Yugoslavia. Processes that also resulted in armed conflicts, which hit Roma, multiply: as victims of war, as marginalised ethnic group, branded as “only” economic refugees in the target countries, etc.

Again, the last point of the listing demonstrates the organisation of the content as an open list. It only consists of one article which outlines the recent east-west migrations and

offers the possibility to include sub-articles dealing with details of this global development.

➤ *The factsheets target teachers, pupils, decision makers, experts working with or about Roma and all people interested in Romani history. Although based on the best scientific expertise available, the factsheets do not aim to be an overall scientific and critical description of Romani history; this opus still has to be written by the appropriate authors. The factsheets aim to provide basic information on Romani history for a wider audience which can be used in all teaching contexts.*

## FACTSHEETS ON ROMA

The factsheets on Romani history at hand are part of a series of factsheets on Roma which again conform to the open lists' organisation described above. Apart from this first delivery of history factsheets the final product will also comprise of cultural factsheets on ethnoculture, language, literature, music, dance, and the arts. As is the case

with the history factsheets, the information given for Romani culture also has to be seen as an introductory step. Although the most important facts on Romani culture will be covered by these factsheets in the best way possible, they have to be seen as a first step which hopefully will be followed by further amendments. The final goal of all the factsheets produced in the framework of this project and beyond, is to produce comprehensive and multifunctional materials on Romani history and culture for educational purposes as well as the general public.

## LITERATURE

*Two books available in English which offer an overview of Romani History are proposed for further reading: **Fraser, Angus (1992) The Gypsies.** Oxford/Cambridge: Blackwell. | **Tcherenkov, Lev / Laederich, Stéphane (2004) The Rroma. Vol 1: History, Language and Groups.** Basel: Schwabe.*

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## THE HISTORY FACTSHEETS' TEAM

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\*RomBase is a web based resource which offers didactically edited information on Roma (<http://romani.uni-graz.at/rombase/>) and was used as background for the factsheets.