

Guidelines on the Promotion of Roma Identity, History, and Culture

European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERiac)

Developed within the project *Reclaiming Past, Rebuilding Our
Future: New Approaches to Fighting Antigypsyism (JEKHIPE)*



JEKHIPE

RECLAIMING OUR PAST, REBUILDING OUR FUTURE:
NEW APPROACHES TO FIGHTING ANTIGYPSYISM

1. Introduction

Roma arts and culture are powerful tools for reconciliation, dignity, and resistance. In the face of centuries of systemic antigypsyism and ongoing structural violence, Roma cultural expressions preserve identity, challenge prejudice, reshape public narratives, and foster dialogue between Roma and non-Roma communities. These guidelines aim to support civil society organizations, cultural institutions, media, policymakers, and educators in designing communication actions that leverage Roma arts to build inclusive societies and counter systemic racism. Roma inclusion in cultural institutions must move beyond representation toward structural participation, shared authority, and long-term institutional transformation.

Roma history and cultural production must be understood as integral parts of national and European histories. Roma communities have been present across Europe for centuries and have contributed significantly to the cultural, economic, linguistic, artistic, and political development of the societies in which they live.

Purpose:

- To promote reconciliation and mutual understanding by presenting Roma arts and culture as integral parts of European heritage, and by highlighting Roma contributions to national majority cultures, societies, economies and languages.
- To combat antigypsyism through the visibility of authentic Roma narratives and cultural expressions.
- To elevate Roma-led cultural knowledge production and support Roma artists as agents of change.
- To emphasize belonging, centuries of Roma presence in Europe, and the historical roots of contemporary exclusion, including anti-Roma legislation and discriminatory state practices.

Target audiences: Media, cultural institutions, policymakers, educators, civil society actors, and the broader public, with specific attention to contexts in Romania, Belgium, Italy, Germany, Spain, Czech Republic, and Sweden.

2. Key Principles for Messaging

2.1. Shaping Narratives in First Person

Roma culture must be defined and led by Roma people themselves. Cultural production is a form of political action—it reclaims space in societies where Roma have been historically marginalized and silenced. Authentic communication requires Roma artists, scholars, and cultural producers to be at the forefront of telling their stories.

Roma communities must retain narrative sovereignty. Cultural institutions should move from speaking about Roma to creating platforms where Roma speak for themselves, including shared curatorial authority and co-authorship of exhibitions, publications, and programming.

Communication should privilege first-person narratives and Roma-led knowledge production. Roma should not be spoken about; they should be speaking. Cultural representation must shift from external observation to internal authorship.

Communication should avoid treating Roma as a homogeneous and anonymous mass. Instead:

- Focus on named individuals.
- Highlight biographies and personal trajectories.
- Use concrete historical events and lived experiences.
- Avoid generalized language that essentializes “the Roma community.”

Examples and useful resources:

- Barvalipe Roma Online University, including its online courses, masterclasses and the Digital Library of Critical Romani Scholarship as a key resource for Romani-led academic work, offering decolonized perspectives on Romani history, identity, culture, and activism¹
- Critical Romani Studies journal enabling intellectual and artistic production

¹ <https://eriac.org/barvalipe-roma-online-university>

2.2. Roma History as Part of National and European Histories

Roma history must be presented as an integral part of the histories of European nations. Roma communities have been present across Europe for centuries, contributing to national cultures, economies, languages, and political life. Writing Roma into national histories is not symbolic inclusion — it is a necessary correction to long-standing exclusion from dominant historical narratives.

Roma history must be embedded within national and European historiographies as part of state formation, labor systems, artistic innovation, and democratic struggles. This includes recognition of anti-Roma legislation and policies that shaped national legal systems and continue to influence contemporary exclusion.

Communications should emphasize:

- Belonging and continuity of presence
- Centuries of contribution
- Roma as foundational actors within European societies

At the same time, it is essential to acknowledge the existence of anti-Roma legislation and discriminatory state practices that continue to shape contemporary forms of exclusion and deprivation. These include, but are not limited to:

- Roma slavery in the Romanian principalities (abolished in 1856).
- The Pragmaticas of the Spanish Catholic Monarchs (beginning in 1499), aimed at forced assimilation.
- Holocaust, anti-Roma laws during Nazi era
- Twentieth-century racial legislation and ethnic registration practices.
- Segregation in housing and education.
- Forced sterilization policies in several European countries

Key historical reference points should include:

- Roma Holocaust Memorial Day (August 2)
- Roma Resistance Day (May 16)
- International Roma Day (April 8)
- International Romani Language Day (November 5)

Useful Resources

- ERIAC Roma Resistance Project: <https://eriac.org/stories-of-resistance-form/>
- Echoes of Memory : Roma Resistance :
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S6Lh5f7YL8s>
- CoE Roma History Factsheet: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/roma-and-travellers/roma-history-factsheets>

Avoid a victim-centered framing. While persecution must be documented, communication should center:

- Roma political mobilization.
- Roma intellectual production.
- Roma artistic innovation.
- Roma resistance movements and agency.
- Roma contributions to European public life.

Personal stories should be used as vehicles to represent broader historical processes.

2.3. Challenging Systemic Violence and Antigypsyism

Antigypsyism is a structural form of racism that extends beyond individual prejudice; it is embedded in institutions, policies, and dominant cultural narratives. Roma arts challenge this systemic violence by reclaiming authentic voices, asserting cultural visibility, and confronting the erasure of Roma voices. Roma artists and cultural producers actively resist the ongoing exclusion of Roma communities, presenting their lived experiences as acts of reclamation, dignity, and justice.

Cultural institutions function as civic spaces where public memory is negotiated. Addressing antigypsyism therefore requires institutional accountability in collections, programming, research priorities, and governance structures.

Examples and useful resources:

- Roma filmmakers document police violence and resistance using visual arts to confront systemic injustice, for example Amaro Kino², Patrin Roma Filmmakers Network³, etc

² <https://eriac.org/amarokino/>

³ <https://patrinfilms.com/about>

- ERIAC's exhibitions, focusing on Roma Holocaust memory and contemporary struggles, offer a platform for Roma voices to resist historical erasure.
- Work on Roma Holocaust survivors, including writer and painter Caija Stojka, writer Matteo Maximoff, etc...
- Memorial and public art projects in Germany, such as *'The Memorial to the Sinti and Roma victims of National Socialism'* ⁴ unveiled in 2012 in Berlin that contributes to public remembrance and resistance against historical erasure.
- Resistance stories, conveyed through portraits and exhibitions, continue to educate broader audiences about Roma struggles and the ongoing fight against oppression.
- Grassroots movements empower Roma communities to challenge systemic oppression and resist marginalization through local activism and collective action.
- Role of Roma self-organizing and political activism, like examples of Romani Rose in Germany, Nicolae Gheorghe in Romania, Juan de Dios Ramirez Heredia in Spain or Katarina Taikon in Sweden.

2.4. Teaching and Communicating the Roma Holocaust

The Roma Holocaust must be treated as an integral and inseparable part of European memory culture and Holocaust education. It is not a marginal chapter of history, but a central component of Europe's broader history of racialization and exclusion. Recognizing the genocide of Roma and Sinti is essential not only for historical accuracy, but for confronting contemporary antigypsyism, which continues to draw on long-standing stereotypes, legal discrimination, and structural exclusion.

Within ERIAC's work, the Roma Holocaust is approached as both a historical event and a living memory that shapes present-day realities. Teaching about it must therefore move beyond symbolic commemoration and become a sustained educational commitment embedded in national curricula, teacher training, cultural programming, and public communication strategies.

Through sustained educational and cultural engagement, remembrance becomes a tool for justice, ensuring that the Roma Holocaust is not only acknowledged, but meaningfully integrated into Europe's collective memory.

Educational communication should:

⁴ <https://www.stiftung-denkmal.de>

- **Center Roma voices and survivor testimony**, using personal stories to humanize history and restore dignity.
- **Contextualize and Explain institutional responsibility**, including racial laws, police registration, deportations, and bureaucratic systems of persecution.
- **Highlight historical continuities**, linking past persecution to present-day structural antigypsyism.
- **Avoid isolating** the Roma Holocaust from broader European history
- **Emphasize Roma resistance and resilience**, not only victimization.
- **Mark key commemorative dates** such as August 2, April 8, May 16, and November 5 in communication strategies.

2.5. Centering Roma Contributions in European Heritage

Roma arts are central to European cultural heritage, from Flamenco in Spain to contemporary visual arts in Eastern and Central Europe. This should be recognized, celebrated, and institutionalized. Recognizing Roma arts as central to European heritage is a political act that reclaims Roma identity and challenges historical erasure. Cultural recognition of Roma artists is essential for reconciliation and an inclusive European identity.

Roma artistic production must be recognized as contemporary European art rather than categorized as folklore or ethnographic curiosity. Museums and cultural institutions should adopt acquisition, commissioning, and funding policies that ensure Roma artists are integrated into permanent collections and mainstream exhibitions.

Examples and useful resources:

- romArchive: <https://www.romarchive.eu/de/>
- romaMoMA blog: <https://eriac.org/category/romamoma/>
- Gosia Mirga-Tas's "Re-Enchanting the World" at the Venice Biennale marks a groundbreaking moment in the representation of Roma art on the international stage: <https://eriac.org/re-enchanting-the-world-malgorzata-mirga-tas/>
- Eugen Raportoru's works on historical trauma and Roma presence in Romania offer a critical insight into the intersection of Roma identity and European heritage.
- Roma film festivals, like Ake Dikhea: <https://akedikhea.com/>
- Barvalo exhibition at Muceum: <https://muceum.org/en/expositions/barvalo/>

2.6. Intersectionality and Diversity of Roma Experiences

Roma are not a homogeneous group but a diverse one – this internal plurality is a source of richness and pride. Additionally, Roma experiences are shaped by gender, class, geography, age, and sexual orientation as well as lifestyle and ideology. Cultural expressions must reflect this diversity, offering multiple perspectives that enrich the broader societal narrative.

Linguistic inclusion is central to cultural equity. Exhibitions and public programming should incorporate Romani language, reflecting both linguistic justice and recognition of Romani as part of Europe's cultural heritage.

Examples and useful resources:

- Work on Roma women artists including Delaine Le Bas, Emilia Rigova, Selma Selman or Luna de Rosa art addressing gender, identity, and racism, offering an intimate portrayal of Roma women's experiences.
- Roma artists and cultural producers which provide subjective insight into Roma experiences at the intersection of gender and sexual orientation including works by Robert Gabris, Daniel Baker or Lindy Larsson.
- Traveller Pride - organization for LGBTQ travelers (both identity definitions used inclusively) artist residency program specifically for queer travelers
- Roma Feminist Collective Archive/ library
- Roma Giuvlipen theatre by Mihaela Dragan and others.

3. Messaging and Action Strategy: Arts and Culture as Tools for self-empowerment and Reconciliation

Art can unveil the truth about how stereotypes about Roma people fuel institutional violence. Roma arts and culture can be used as powerful interventions to make these invisible injustices visible. Roma arts not only respond to exclusion but reshape European cultural canons and challenge the gap between proclaimed European values and lived realities.

Creating exhibitions that juxtapose stereotypes with real-life consequences—such as combining historical documents with Roma testimonies and artworks—can expose the ongoing impact of cultural prejudice. Roma filmmaking, theatre and literature can powerfully translate subjective Roma experiences and foster empathy and mutual understanding. Contemporary visual arts and performances can build emotional connection and address difficult and contentious issues. Roma music is not only entertainment but a legacy of centuries of musical self-expression, both a strategy of collective expression, means of conserving collective memory as tradition passed on across generations, borders and identities.

At the same time, arts and culture is a powerful tool for Roma themselves to boost ethnic pride, challenge self-stigmatization and feeling of shame. It is a platform for self-expression, as well as self-liberation and empowerment. It can also be used strategically to mobilize political action and encourage activism.

3.1. Counteracting Stereotypes and Systemic Racism

- Use artistic interventions to make visible how cultural prejudice fuels institutional violence.
- Use arts and culture to show the historical legacy of centuries of exclusion and their contemporary consequences
- Curate exhibitions juxtaposing stereotypes and real-life consequences, e.g., combining court documents with Roma testimonies and artworks.
- Use Roma arts and culture to build empathy about the consequences of antigypsyism

Example:

- "Call the Witness" at the Venice Biennale, which combined art, performances, and

discussions to address the oppression and inequality faced by Roma communities:

- The *Forgotten Memory* project by the Documentation Centre seeking testimonies from Holocaust survivors, enabling Roma communities to tell their own stories, reclaiming their history:

<https://dokuzentrum.sintiundroma.de/en/documentation/collection/the-forgotten-memory/>

- Voices of the Victims section by Karola Fings in the RomArchive:

<https://www.romarchive.eu/en/voices-of-the-victims>

Instead of defensive or reactive messaging, communication should be confident, affirmative, and grounded in agency:

- Roma art does not ask for permission to exist — it reshapes Europe's cultural landscape.
- Antigypsyism is not a matter of opinion — it is a structural injustice that art helps us confront.
- Roma culture is not folklore frozen in time — it is a living, political, and creative force.
- Behind every stereotype stands a real person, a family, a history — art restores that humanity.

Recognizing Roma contributions is an act of historical accuracy.

3.2. Collaborative Art and Cross-Community Dialogue

Using arts festivals, murals, performances, and workshops as shared spaces can foster collaboration and mutual understanding between Roma and non-Roma communities. This approach not only promotes reconciliation but also ensures Roma communities are leading the conversations about their own representation. Initiatives which bring Roma and non-Roma together, co-creation process...

Examples:

- The Atchin Tan/Stopping Place at Glastonbury Festival – a dedicated Roma, Gypsy, and Traveller space showcasing arts, theatre, and activism, providing a unique platform for cultural exchange and resistance:

<https://atchin-tan-glastonbury.org/>

- Khamoro festival in Prague, one of Europe's most important Roma cultural festivals, which combines music, public dialogue, and intercultural exchange to promote

Roma visibility, artistic excellence, and transnational solidarity:

<https://khamoro.cz/en>

- RomHeritage: <https://romheritage.eu/>

3.3. Redefining National and European Identity through Roma Art

Redefining national and European identity by showcasing Roma art is central to reconciliation. It demands recognition of Roma as co-creators of European culture, and not just as objects of history.

Examples:

- Małgorzata Mirga-Tas's reinterpretations of Renaissance art to include Roma presence.
<https://eriac.org/i-set-out-to-re-tell-the-roma-story/>
- (Re)Conceptualizing Roma Resistance exhibition in Berlin highlighting Roma resistance during the Holocaust through contemporary art, reshaping narratives of trauma and resilience: <https://eriac.org/reconceptualizing-roma-resistance-2/>
- Roma Moma blog :<https://eriac.org/category/romamoma/>
- Romani filmmaker Vera Lacková's documentary "How I Became a Partisan" uncovering the forgotten stories of Roma partisans in former Czechoslovakia, highlighting their resistance during World War: <https://eriac.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Lackova-Vera-2020-%E2%80%98How-I-became-a-partisan.-.pdf>

4. Practical Guidelines for Civil Society, Media, and Institutions

4.1. Do's and Don'ts

Do

Center Roma voices in all storytelling

Showcase contemporary and intersectional art

Highlight structural injustices and art responses

Collaborate meaningfully and equitably

Connect Roma arts to wider social and political issues

Engage Roma artists in decision-making roles

Don't

Speak about Roma without Roma participation

Reduce Roma culture to folklore or stereotypes

Treat Roma arts as decorative or apolitical

Use Roma art without credit, consultation, or pay

Isolate Roma culture from contemporary debates (e.g., racism, gender)

Use Roma art without proper acknowledgment and collaboration

4.2 Digital and Traditional Media Campaigns

Both digital and traditional media platforms are powerful tools for promoting Roma identity and arts. Tailoring the message to the medium and ensuring it reaches both Roma and non-Roma audiences is essential for challenging stereotypes and fostering reconciliation.

Digital Media: Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok are excellent channels for spreading Roma narratives and art on a global scale. Digital campaigns can be particularly effective in reaching younger audiences and spreading awareness through viral content.

Examples of Digital Media Campaigns:

- **Italy:** *Romni APS's* social media initiative featuring Roma women artists on platforms like Instagram and TikTok, showcasing their contemporary art and

challenging gender stereotypes within the Roma community.

- **Sweden:** *Trojasko Drom* uses social media to highlight the cultural activism of Roma youth, sharing their murals and artwork as acts of resistance against antigypsyism. This campaign invites the broader public to engage in discussions about systemic racism in Sweden.

Traditional Media: Traditional media such as newspapers, television, and radio still hold significant influence and can amplify Roma voices to a broader demographic. Tailoring messages to these media requires strategic partnerships and collaborations with key media outlets.

Examples of Traditional Media Campaigns

- **Czech Republic:** A national newspaper, *Lidové noviny*, runs a feature on Roma visual artists and their impact on Czech art, highlighting their contributions to the European art scene.
- **Germany:** A televised series hosted by the *Documentary Center for Sinti and Roma* that airs on national television, focusing on Roma artists, history, and the fight against antigypsyism.

5. Conclusion

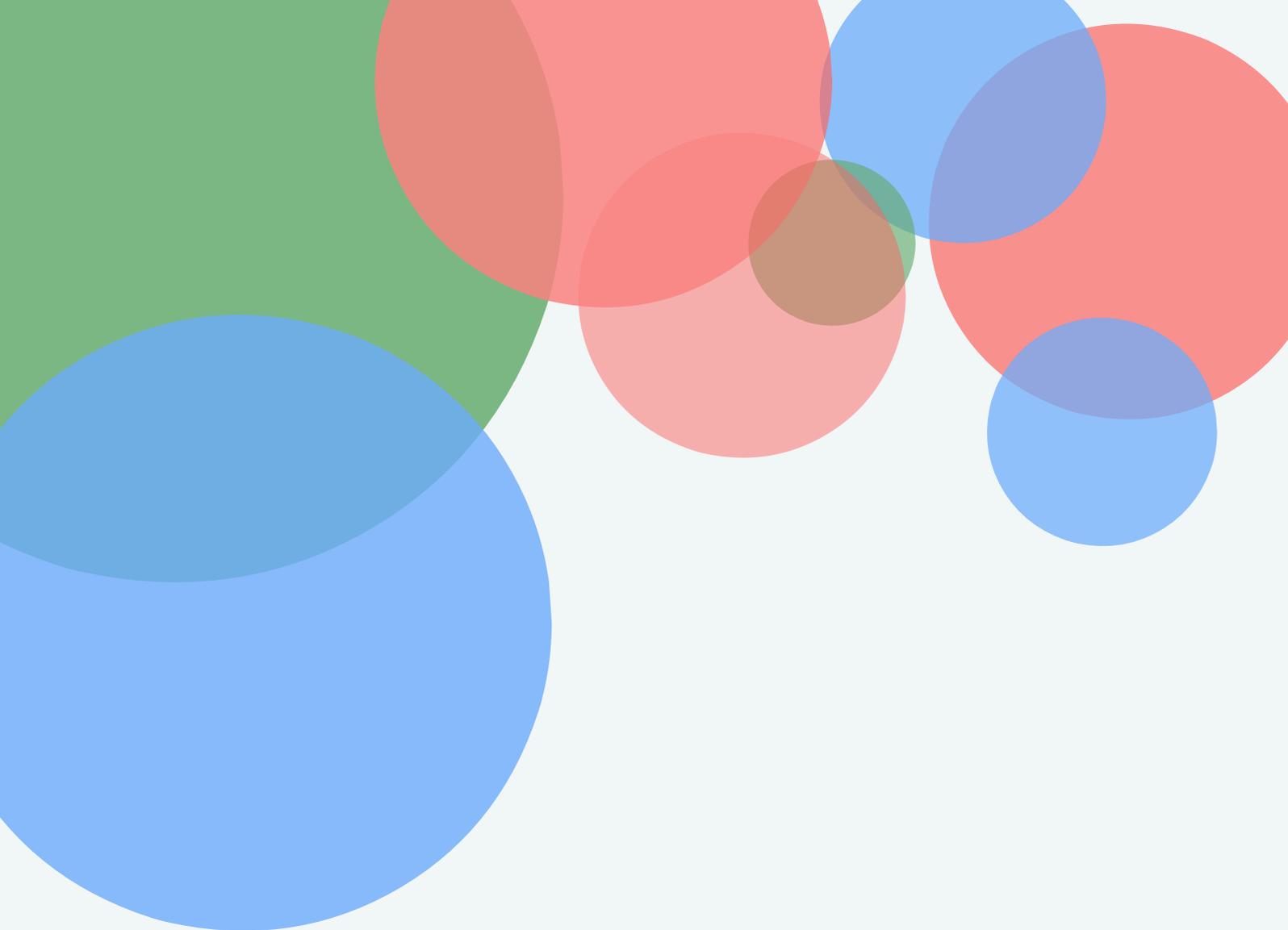
Roma arts and culture are not merely reflections of history; they are active, dynamic forces that shape contemporary society and reconfigure Europe's cultural landscape. They document survival, express resistance, transmit memory across generations, and articulate visions of justice. In contexts where Roma have long been marginalized, misrepresented, or silenced, cultural production becomes both a political intervention and a declaration of presence.

Promoting Roma identity, history, and culture therefore requires more than visibility. It requires structural inclusion, institutional responsibility, and a commitment to writing Roma into national and European narratives as historical actors, cultural innovators, and democratic contributors. Recognition must move beyond symbolic gestures and become embedded in museums, curricula, media practices, public commemorations, and policy frameworks.

These guidelines underline the importance of shaping narratives in the first person, embedding Roma history into broader historical frameworks, and avoiding reductive or victim-centered representations. Communication must center agency, belonging, and contribution, while also acknowledging the historical and legal structures that produced exclusion and continue to shape inequalities today.

Arts and culture offer powerful pathways toward reconciliation—not through erasing painful histories, but through confronting them honestly and creatively. By supporting Roma-led knowledge production, co-curated exhibitions, public space interventions, youth participation, and commemorative practices, institutions contribute to a more equitable cultural ecosystem. When Roma artists, scholars, and activists are recognized as co-authors of Europe's story, cultural democracy becomes more than a concept; it becomes practice.

Building inclusive societies requires sustained commitment. Through long-term collaboration, institutional reform, and responsible communication, we can help ensure that Roma communities are not treated as peripheral to European heritage but acknowledged as central to its past, present, and future.



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