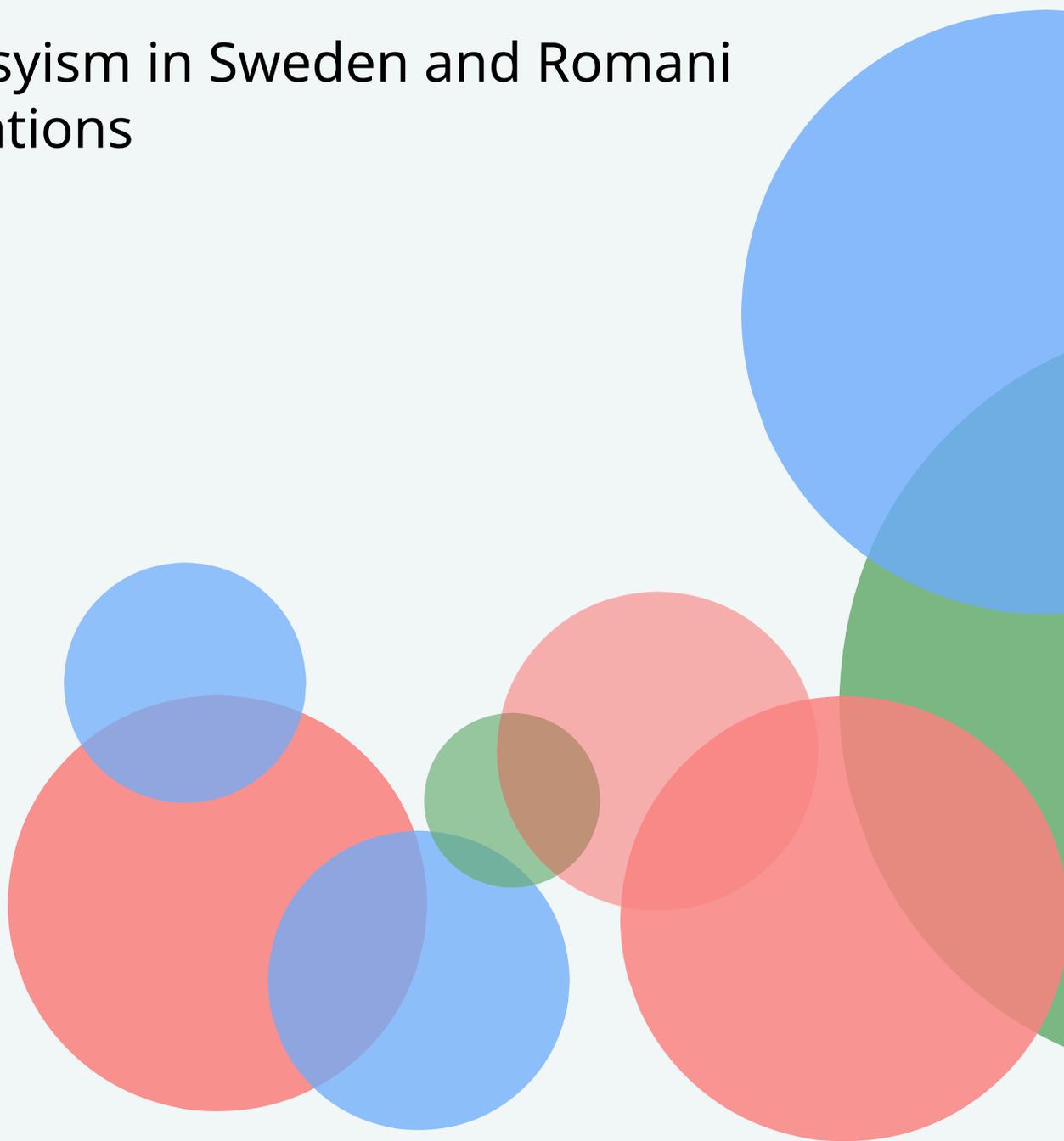

Antigypsyism in Sweden and Romani Interventions



Jan Selling & Samanta Selimovic

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

The JEKHIPE Project

The JEKHIPE project *Reclaiming our Past, Rebuilding our Future: New Approaches to Combating Antigypsyism* is a CERV-funded project aimed at improving the lives of Roma by addressing systemic and institutional antigypsyism, promoting transitional justice, fostering knowledge-building and awareness, and strengthening Roma identity and participation.

It is a follow-up to *CHACHIPEN*, an earlier CERV project, officially titled *Paving the Way for Truth and Reconciliation Process to Address Antigypsyism in Europe. Remembrance, Recognition, Justice and Trust-Building*. Concluded in 2023, CHACHIPEN introduced an innovative transitional justice-based approach to raising awareness of systemic injustice and ongoing antigypsyism in policymaking, while advocating for a comprehensive truth and reconciliation strategy.

JEKHIPE focuses on multiple levels of policy-making, including research, monitoring, advocacy, networking, alliances building, awareness raising, capacity building, and empowerment. It aims to engage with national and European institutions, academia, politicians, justice mechanisms, state authorities, civil society, and Roma communities themselves to challenge the status quo on approaching Roma issues, particularly antigypsyism, and propose mechanisms for increased accountability by national governments.



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Foreword

This report was commissioned by ERIAC and within the framework of the JEKHIPE project to be authored by Jan Selling and Samanta Selimovic in the summer of 2025.

Selling has been responsible for research design and background chapters on antigypsyism and Roma history in Sweden, as well as quantitative media analysis and the section on Roma newspapers, radio and TV in Sweden. The report also relates to policy analyses and interview studies related to discourses on Roma rights and antigypsyism conducted by Selling within the framework of CHACHIPEN and JEKHIPE. Selimovic has been responsible for sampling examples of contemporary Roma political and cultural interventions, but Selling has also contributed. The intention of the report is to relate these parts to each other in order to provide a picture of how Roma cultural workers and activists in Sweden contribute to strengthening Roma identity, counteracting stereotypes and antigypsyism and finding new ways for Roma liberation. The authors are jointly responsible for the selection of examples, the report's conclusions and recommendations. Selimovic has also written a personal afterword.

About the Authors:

Jan Selling is a professor of critical Romani studies at Södertörn University. Since 2010, he has researched and taught about Roma history, Roma liberation and antigypsyism. Main publications: *Svensk antizigansim* [Swedish Antigypsyism] (2013), *Romani Liberation* (2022; also in Swedish version as *Frigörelsen*, 2020), reports on Sweden for the projects CHACHIPEN (2022) and JEKHIPE (2025) and participation in RomArchive 2015-2019 and ERIAC's project Re-Thinking Roma resistance (2020). At Södertörn University, he has been conducting an international online colloquium for doctoral students with a focus on antigypsyism and critical Romani studies since 2020.

Samanta Selimovic is an activist, advisor and representative in Roma issues, active both nationally and internationally. She has been involved in several cultural and social projects, including 'Roma cultural heritage in Västernorrland', the identity project 'Young Roma voices' and initiatives that support Roma towards studies and work. Selimovic is also a driving force in a Roma cultural association in Sundsvall, with a special focus on women's rights, the fight against antigypsyism, and the strengthening of Roma identity and culture. She has described her path to becoming a Roma activist in the essay "Existensen" [The Existence.] (2024, in: B., L. Lundqvist & J. Olsson (eds) *Feminiqua. Historier om motstånd*. [Feminiqua. Stories of Resistance], pp. 282–291.

Executive summary

This research report by Jan Selling and Samanta Selimovic, published as part of the JEKHIPE project, examines Roma history and current challenges in Sweden, as well as how antigypsyism is challenged by contemporary Roma interventions in media, politics and cultural life.

The first part provides a historical background from the arrival of the first Roma in Sweden, via the civil rights struggle of the 1960s to today's situation. A quantitative content analysis of the Swedish press 2000-2025 states that during the mid-2010s, there was a momentum for issues of Roma rights. This was partly due to gradual openings for different Roma groups to have their say in the public discourse, thanks to the rights that followed the recognition of Roma as a national minority. However, the positive turn was mainly triggered by the 2013 revelation in the mass media that the Swedish police were still conducting ethnic registration of Roma on a large scale. This blatant violation of the law made it clear that structural antigypsyism was still firmly rooted in the country and a state Commission against Antigypsyism was established: the discourse swung from portraying Roma as the problem, as before, to seeing antigypsyism as the real problem. A number of government initiatives were started, but Roma demands for a truth commission were not met. Instead, in 2012, a strategy for Roma inclusion was introduced with the goal that equality for Roma would be fully achieved by 2032. The inclusion strategy was partly a failure, partly because it was conducted in a short-term and project-oriented manner without a thorough antigypsyism analysis. At the same time, populist discourses have strengthened antigypsyism, for example in connection with debates about the "begging ban".

The second part of the report addresses questions about how, where and in what direction Roma interventions are expressed in a structurally anti-Gypsy social context such as the one we have in Sweden today. Based on their respective horizons of experience and knowledge, the authors have jointly searched for clear examples of "critical Roma interventions". Through more than 20 examples collected, the following categories of arenas and actors crystallized as significant:

1. Civil rights: Individual Roma who have significantly influenced the public discourse.
2. Journalism, literature and libraries based on Roma discourse position.
3. Social media and popular culture: Roma forums or famous Roma people who promote Roma rights issues or express Roma pride.
4. Critical Romani Studies. Roma academics who are or have been active in the field of critical Romani Studies.
5. Exhibitions that have been created to a significant extent by Roma and that highlight Roma rights and identity issues.

6. Theatre: Actors, drama or theatre ensembles that, based on Roma discourse positions that are social commentary.
 7. Festivals that also have the ambition to raise rights issues or counteract stereotypes.
 8. Organisations that promote Roma's influence in society and counteract antigypsyism.
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The themes that appear most recurrently in these "Roma interventions" are criticism of antigypsyism, pride in being Roma, representations of cultural identity, memory and historical justice, feminist perspectives and queer-Roma identity. In this there is a great diversity of perspectives that are partly related to the different subgroups' varying historical experiences. One observation is that many of the actors have roots in the former Yugoslavia. The report also notes that women are overrepresented among the actors.

In summary, the report states that there is a dynamic development within the Roma civil society in Sweden that is rooted in a history of civic activism and that is increasingly taking in intellectual Roma impulses outside Sweden. Roma journalism has gained in importance in recent years, partly thanks to investments in public service. Social media appears to be a great potential. A challenge for many actors is to find a balance in dependence on the state: while state aid can influence the direction of Roma interventions, public funds for Roma culture and knowledge production are necessary to even out structural inequalities.

Introduction

Background: Roma in Sweden

Roma are a recognized national minority in Sweden, along with Swedish Finns, Jews, Tornedalians and Sami, who are also indigenous peoples. Minority status, which means that Roma have the right to "maintain and develop their culture and preserve the essential elements of their identity", is based on self-identification and anchoring in the group. This means that the person who identifies as Roma and has some form of anchoring in the group belongs to the minority. Other criteria, such as language skills, are irrelevant. There are no official statistics on the number of Roma in Sweden, but data that is often cited in official documents claim that it is probably between 50,000 and 120,000 (ISOF, 2025).

In official texts, the national minority Roma in Sweden are often divided into five groups: travellers, Swedish Roma, Finnish Roma, non-Nordic Roma and newly arrived Roma. This definition was made by the Government together with a Roma Council in connection with the recognition of Roma as a national minority in 1999 (SOU 2010:55). The division is not based on cultural characteristics, but on the historical contexts that link different parts of the Roma minority to Sweden. This means that Roma who culturally and linguistically perceive themselves as the same group can also be included in several of the five groups, for example, Roma with origins in the Balkans can be considered either non-Nordic or newly arrived. The names of the groups have sometimes been criticized, for example because "Swedish Roma" is misleading, because the entire minority is Swedish and that "new arrivals" is a term that does not fit well with people who were born in the country (Nationalencyklopedin, 2025). The practical significance of the group division is that it is being used to distribute co-influence and resources linked to minority policy. The division can also be used to give an overall picture.

Resande (Romani Travellers) generally consider themselves descended from the first Roma who came to Sweden in the early 1500s. There are also links to other Roma groups such as German Sinti and Finnish kale. The term "traveler" is believed to come from the fact that some people traveled during parts of the year and offered their goods and services in different places. During the 20th century, travellers have had civil rights and the right to housing and schooling, but have often been subjected to structural discrimination and violations. Traveller Romani is a variant of Romani chib. Travellers are probably the largest of the five main Roma groups in Sweden.

"Swedish Roma" (mainly Kelderasha Roma) denote groups whose ancestors came to Sweden in the late 1800s and early 1900s. These were small groups that immigrated to Sweden via Russia or Denmark. Most of them had their roots in Romania where Roma had been slaves until 1856. As a result of the Swedish state's policy, the history of the Roma immigrants at the time came to be completely separated from that of the

Travellers. Up until the 1950s, Swedish Roma were denied citizenship rights, housing and schooling. Kelderasha means coppersmith, and coppersmithing was part of the group's livelihood in Sweden until the mid-1900s, along with other handicraft services, entertainment, and trade.

Finnish Roma (or kalé) are descended from the Roma who in previous centuries were exiled from Sweden to Finland, which was then part of Sweden. Therefore, the Travellers and the Finnish kalé largely have a common history. From 1914 to 1954, there was an explicit ban on immigration for Roma. When the law was repealed, many Finnish Roma, like other Finns, sought work in Sweden. In the 1960s, the group of Finnish Roma became numerically larger than the group of Swedish Roma.

“Non-Nordic Roma” (including lovara, arli, gurbeti) came from different parts of Europe to Sweden from the end of the 1960s. Most came to Sweden when the country needed labour during the 1970s and 1980s.

“Newly arrived Roma” may belong to different Roma groups. Many come from the Balkans and came to Sweden as refugees from the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Of these, a large proportion are Muslims. Roma from southeastern Europe who moved to Sweden in connection with the EU's enlargement are also included in this group.

The Diaspora Perspective

Compared to its Nordic neighbours and also to Germany, the Roma minority in Sweden is significantly more heterogeneous in terms of culture, language and religion, as well as in terms of collective memory and historical experiences. This is important for the understanding of historical and contemporary antigypsyism and the conditions for emancipation and liberation.

On the one hand, this means that Roma's historical experiences from other countries should be seen as an integral part of Swedish collective memory: oppression, persecution and genocide in the form of the Roma Holocaust and Romanian slavery, but also experiences of emancipation, such as the liberation from slavery and the openings that existed under Titoism in Yugoslavia until the collapse and war of the 1990s. According to Selling (2022 and 2025), this has not been widely understood and taken into account by authorities with assignments in the cultural heritage sector. If, for example, the Holocaust of Roma is regarded as a history with only a marginal connection to Sweden – in that Sweden was excluded from the war – this may have contributed to the marginalization of Roma's experiences in memory politics linked to the Holocaust that already follows from the IHRA's exclusionary definition of the term Holocaust, as a synonym for Shoah (IHRA, 2000).

On the other hand, it means that the diaspora perspective can be particularly relevant when it comes to the multicultural Roma national minority in Sweden. Awareness of belonging and common origins, regardless of the historical experiences of subgroups and differences in culture, language and religion, has in all likelihood been strengthened: both through international Roma activism and the amalgam of Roma voices that are to be heard within the framework of minority policy, e.g. institutionalized settings such as advisory boards. The criticism of minority policy as imperfect and homogenizing is justified: at the same time, more and more arenas have been created for different Roma groups to seek a common agenda. Likewise, there is criticism within the Roma movement against "strategic essentialism", i.e. if Roma present the stereotype that the majority society wants in order to be heard at all (Belton, 2010). On the other hand, at least in the Swedish context, the legacy of the first Roma World Congress in London in 1971 - which rather marks the opposite of strategic essentialism - seems to be gaining importance: 8 April is now on everyone's calendars and celebrated around the country in a variety of ways, the Roma flag has become a symbol that more and more people recognize, and the international struggle of Roma to define themselves and be political subjects is being recognized; e.g. through the history of the date itself. In all these respects, the diaspora perspective and the diversity of the Roma community can be a resource. One hypothesis in this report is that the breakthrough of social media, through its easy accessibility, spontaneous networking and transnational structure, has been a resource that has particularly well interacted with the needs and opportunities of the Roma diaspora, and created an alternative to Roma organizations and Roma media of the traditional type.

Theory: antigypsyism, collective memory and historical justice

Antigypsyism is a specific form of racism that mainly affects Roma. It has a partly common history with anti-Semitism through its medieval origins; For example, Roma, like Jews, suffered from exclusion during this time, accusing them of being unreliable strangers, spies for foreign powers, and enemies of the Church. At the same time, antigypsyism has in common with many later racisms that it is based on a hierarchization where Roma are considered inferior and a social threat to the norms of the majority society. Antigypsyism has historically defined its object alternately ethnographically (culturally), genetically or socially (lifestyle). Stereotypes that are unique to antigypsyism include an inherited propensity for begging and nomadism (Selling, 2020; Title, 2025).

Antigypsyism is based on historically rooted prejudices and stereotypes linked to the derogatory term "gypsies" or "Gypsies". This term is stigmatizing already because of its origins to designate "untouchables" (athinganoi) in 14th-century Byzantium and then because through the 500-year Roma slavery in Romania it was made synonymous with slave (tigan) and finally by the Nazis was a categorization that formed the basis for the genocide during the Holocaust. Since the recognition of Roma as a national minority in 2000, awareness of this negative charge has increased. The term is therefore not to be regarded as neutral. It is sometimes referred to as the "z-word", analogous to the "n-word".

The fact that many researchers, as well as a large part of Roma civil society and authorities in Scandinavia and Germany, use the terms *Antiziganismus* and *antiziganism/antisiganisme* (antigypsyism) – despite the fact that it includes this part of the word – is precisely because it focuses on the prejudice and motives of antigypsyism and not on the ethnic identity of the target. For the same reason, in 2020, the National Council for Crime Prevention switched to this concept in its hate crime statistics, after previously using the alternative term anti-Roma (BRÅ, 2023). The understanding of antigypsyism as a concept, based on notions of the "z-word", also means that antigypsyism, like anti-Semitism, can be studied as a socio-cultural phenomenon that can exist even without the presence of real Roma. A further similarity is that antigypsyism and anti-Semitism are "bipolar" racisms, which express themselves in both contempt and fascination. One consequence of this analysis is that antigypsyism cannot be understood by studying Roma culture (Selling, 2024).

In research, politics and administration, there are a number of different definitions of antigypsyism. In this research report, we start from the following definition, which has been developed based on archival studies on Swedish antigypsyism, but which claims universality. According to it, antigypsyism is "a historically changing discourse formation in which the 'conceptual Gypsy' takes shape and the exclusionary practices of the

majority society develop." (Selling, 2013, p. 13.) This definition has the advantage that the concept can be filled with content by allowing the empirical material to speak.

Furthermore, the report is based on the perspective of critical discourse analysis linked to power-critical theories of collective memory as fundamental to collective identities. The report places emphasis on discourses on Roma self-representation and memory politics, as these can be seen as representations of empowerment and interventions that challenge existing power relations, more specifically antigypsyist hegemony.

Questions and hypotheses

RQs: IO which forums/arenas/spaces does the emancipatory Romani subjectivity be expressed? In what way do they challenge structural antigypsyism? In what ways do they express Romani stories of emancipation and liberation?

Hypothesis: Recognition of national minorities, immigration of post-Yugoslav Roma refugees and the breakthrough of social media have been beneficial for the recognition of Roma rights, the fight against antigypsyism and the social mobility of Roma.

Methodology

The report uses "Mixed methods" for data collection and analysis, i.e. qualitative and quantitative methods as well as analysis of secondary literature and policy documents. The report is also based on the interdisciplinary approach of critical discourse analysis to make power structures and social inequalities visible, as well as the conditions for society-changing counter-discourses. The collection of data for part 2 of the report, "Critical Roma interventions", has been carried out on the basis of the criteria specified below and based on the report authors' respective knowledge and experience windows.

PART 1: Antigypsyism and counter-discourses in Sweden

Historical overview

1512 to 1914: State persecution and local coexistence

The earliest evidence of a Roma presence in Sweden is found as an official document in the City of *Stockholms Tänkebok* of 29 September 1512, where it is mentioned that "Tatras" from "the land of Little Egypt" had come to the city, which has been interpreted as being about Roma. According to the protocol, there were about 30 families led by a "Mr. Anthonius, a count with his countess". They are said to have been treated well and given food and shelter. (City of Stockholm, 2025) More is not known about the group.

However, King Gustav Vasa, who was crowned in 1523, regarded the foreign newcomers as spies who were to be expelled from Sweden. Vasa was supported by the Reformed, i.e. now Protestant Church, which claimed that Roma were heretics. The Church of Sweden and the monarchy thus took the same line that dominated the continent in both Protestant and Catholic countries. In 1560, the Swedish Archbishop Laurentius Petri effectively banned Roma from the church: priests were now not allowed to "baptize their children or bury their corpses". (Etzler, 1944) To the Riksdag in Örebro in 1617, the clergy demanded that all Roma be expelled from the kingdom.

In 1637, the wishes of the founders of the clergy and the kingdom became a reality and a law was passed on the expulsion of the Roma, the "Placat on the Expulsion of the Tatra People from the Country". Older, antigypsyist historians already described this as unusually cruel (Björckman, 1730) or even as an "extermination plan". (Etzler, 1944, 69) All Roma, both men and women, were to be expelled from the country by November 8 of the following year. It became a crime to help Roma. Roma men found after this date would be hanged without trial, while women and children would be driven out of the country. It is not known if any hangings actually took place. Apparently, the authorities were content to deport Roma families abroad. Large groups settled in Finland, which at that time constituted Swedish territory in the east.

The so-called tatar clause in the Church Act of 1686 meant a radical change in the church's outlook. Roma could now be received in the Christian congregations, and the priests were allowed to baptize their children. On the basis of this law, the church came to be used as an instrument of forced assimilation. (Etzler, 1944; Selling, 2013)

During the 18th century, this policy continued to prevent all immigration of Roma and to force those already in the country to permanent settlement and assimilation through the Church.

However, this dark picture of the history of the Roma in Sweden up to and including the 18th century, which is also primarily the history of the Romani Travellers (resande), should be nuanced. As on the continent, there were local exceptions to the repressive policy. Among other things, in the 1600s, Count Per Brahe the Younger allowed Roma to establish themselves in Gränna to devote themselves to trade and crafts, and Karl XII deliberately recruited Roma to the Swedish army. (Selling, 2022 b) Historians have also emphasized the interdependence between farmers and itinerant Roma who offered sought-after goods and services (Tervonen, 2010).

Towards the end of the 1800s, Wallachian Roma immigrated, mainly with metal crafts and coppersmithing as a livelihood. This group is now called *Swedish Roma*, but was called "Gypsies" ("zigenare") in the language of the time. When they arrived, Sweden was in an economic crisis with extensive proletarianization, and large crowds of propertyless people roamed the country roads. Although Romani Travellers and other Roma were a vanishingly small group of a few thousand people, nationalistic and increasingly racist propaganda soon made these groups the archetype of "antisocial vagabonds". Already through the Vagrancy Act of 1885, it had become a criminal offence to be propertyless and homeless, while many municipalities introduced explicit residence bans aimed specifically at travellers (Selling, 2013).

1914-1954: Racial biology, exclusion and forced assimilation

Antigypsyism intensified during the 1920s, when racial biology made its breakthrough in Sweden. The numerically larger group of Romani Travellers was now specified with the derogatory term "tattare", which can largely be understood as Romani Travellers. These were to be assimilated, including through forced taking of children. When it came to "Gypsies" (that is, the group that today is called Swedish Roma), there was a political ambition to make life so unbearable for them that they voluntarily left the country through bans on business and camps. The forced wandering existence was also partly aimed at counteracting the "racial mixing" between "Gypsies" and Swedes that racial biologists considered to be the origin of "tattare". (SOU 1923:2; Selling, 2013; Government Offices, 2014)

Between 1914 and 1954, the Aliens Act explicitly prohibited all immigration of Roma and travellers, which meant that the Roma in Sweden were completely isolated from their relatives in Europe. Thus, it was not possible for Roma to flee to Sweden from Nazi persecution. Norway and Denmark had similar laws. It is only documented that two Roma managed to enter the country during this time: Hanna Brzezinska (later Dimitri, 1931–92) and Sofia Brzezinska (later Taikon, 1931–2005). Staff on the white buses showed compassion and allowed them to go with them even though they were Roma. (Selling, 2022 b)

The growing interest in racial biology and eugenics was behind the sterilization law that came into force in 1934. The law was tightened in 1941 so that it was sufficient to invoke social reasons for sterilization. The decision was motivated by the necessity of "cleaning up the Swedish population". It was often said bluntly that Romani Travellers and other Roma were considered "undesirable" (Westin, 2014; Government Offices, 2014). When eugenics lost its credibility after 1945, the state no longer considered itself able to identify who belonged to the group "tattare" and this year's registration of the group was therefore the last (Selling, 2013). However, Romani Travellers (Resande) continued to face discrimination and stigmatisation as a result of established beliefs. While other Roma were easily recognizable into the 1960s as a result of their forced way of life outside society, many Romani Travellers (Resande) sought to escape persecution by, as far as possible, concealing their ethnic identity.

1954-1999: Assimilation into the welfare state

The special policy towards "Gypsies" continued, but was characterized by a radical reversal through the so-called gypsy investigation in 1954. It stated that the country's 740 Swedish Roma were illiterate and suffered from poor physical and mental health as a result of the policy pursued (SOU, 1956:43). The investigation had been preceded by demands from the Roma representatives Johan Dimiter Taikon (1879–1950) and Rupert Bersico (1874–1961) and the Communist Party of Sweden, which in 1953 had proposed to the Riksdag to investigate measures against "racial discrimination against gypsies". The driving force behind the parliamentary motion was the social physician John Takman (1912–98), who during his travels in the United States had been inspired by the African-American movement's struggle against racism and who in 1952 had published a detailed socio-medical study of the situation of the Swedish Roma. For the Social Democrats, the issue was that the situation of the Roma did not fit into the image of the Swedish welfare state as the world's most modern and equal society. The investigation was led by publicist Gösta Netzén, who was also involved in a court case concerning the collective eviction of Roma from a campsite in Ludvika, which led to a police officer being convicted for misconduct in actions against Roma for the first time in Sweden. The report proposed a number of social measures, including to guarantee Roma's right to housing and schooling. (Selling, 2022 b.)

The state assumed financial responsibility, and the National Board of Health and Welfare established a counsellor service for issues concerning Roma. However, the investigators showed little interest in Romani culture and language; They sought the assimilation of the Roma into Swedish society. Against this policy, the author Ivar Lo-Johansson became involved, who for his part had a romanticizing view and wished to preserve what he considered to be "gypsy way of life". (Selling, 2013.)

The Swedish Roma were granted civil rights and gradually life improved materially for the Roma, but the promises of the gypsy inquiry were only fulfilled very slowly. It was in

this situation that Katarina Taikon published her documentary books *Zigenerska* [Gypsy woman] (1963) and *Zigenare är vi* [Gypsies Are We] (1967). She also engaged in a high-profile and long-lasting debate with Ivar Lo-Johansson, in which she rejected his perspectives as unworldly and negative for the Roma cause. In 1964, Katarina Taikon, together with John Takman and the publicist Evert Kumm (1912–88), founded the Gypsy Society, which published the political journal *Amé beschas- vi bor*. The society, whose members included the photographer Björn Langhammer (1933–86), Thomas Hammarberg, Hans Caldara's and Katarina's sister Rosa Taikon, was committed not only to the rights of Swedish Roma but also to the right of Roma refugees to stay in the country. (Selling, 2022 b.)

1999-2016: Minority status and the fight against antigypsyism are established

From the 1970s onwards, the political activism of Finnish Roma became increasingly important, not least through Aleka Stobin (1935–2001), who was elected chair of the Nordiska Zigenarrådet (Nordic Gypsy Council) when it was founded in 1973. Stobin represented the view that Roma from different groups must cooperate on rights issues. (Selling, 2022 b; *Nationalencyklopedin*, 2025).

Although explicit state antigypsyism was now history, clear traces remained in the form of discriminatory attitudes and structural discrimination. The state policy was still paternalistic, that is, Roma were considered a problem and the state would find solutions. Through recognition as a national minority in 2000, rights documents were created that establish the right of Roma to participate in the formulation of all policies that affect them (Swedish Parliament, 1999/2000:KU6). A tangible effect of this is that Romani Travellers (Resande), like other Roma groups, have created their own organisations and that more individual Roma voices have begun to be heard in public. In 2014, Soraya Post made history by being the first Romani person to be at the top of a ballot paper for a Swedish political party (*Nationalencyklopedin*, 2025). In 2014–19, she represented the Feminist Initiative in the European Parliament, where she was a driving force for resolutions in 2015 and 2017 on combating antigypsyism (European Parliament, 2015/2615 RSP).

The minority legislation states that Roma, like other national minorities, have a strengthened right to mother tongue education and that all pupils in compulsory school must be taught about the culture, language, religion and history of the national minorities (SFS 2009:724). Other tangible results are that public service broadcasts in Romani Chib several days a week and that state universities have received funds, earmarked for national minority studies, including languages. Finally, the 2000 legislative texts removed the obsolete terms "Tattare" and "Gypsy" from public language, so that they are no longer considered neutral.

The development since the turn of the millennium can be described as a shift in perspective. The previous policy had rested on the view that Roma were to blame for their marginalization and through state measures should be "integrated into society". Nowadays, Roma's human and civil rights should instead be put at the center and inclusion should be a goal (Selling, 2022 b). However, the Delegation for Roma Issues appointed by the government in 2010 concluded that Roma rights in Sweden were still far from being met (SOU 2010:55). For this reason, in 2012 the Government launched a strategy for Roma inclusion with a focus on social vulnerability, and initiated a white paper on the state's abuses and violations of Roma during the 20th century (Regeringskansliet, Ds 2014:8).

When it was revealed in 2013 that the police in Skåne kept an extensive ethnically based register of Roma, the government decided to establish a commission against antigypsyism under the leadership of Thomas Hammarberg, which resulted in an apology and financial compensation for individuals. The Commission noted that it is common for Roma from different groups to choose not to be open about their Roma identity in order to avoid being subjected to antigypsyism, which in itself constitutes a violation of a human right. In recent years, voices have been raised for Roma, like Sami and Tornedalians, to be granted a truth commission aimed at collective reconciliation and redress (Selling, 2022 a).

After 2016: "A lost momentum" and continued antigypsyism

Structural racism is a term used to describe power structures in society and culture that disadvantage certain groups and benefit people from the majority society. It can thus be about both socio-economic conditions and cultural practice, for example the way in which Swedishness is talked about towards minorities. Structural racism is thus something other than individual vulnerability and it does not have to be based on anyone's opinions. In this context, one can speak of structural antigypsyism.

Structural antigypsyism can be said to reproduce antigypsyist attitudes in individuals. These attitudes can then be expressed in the actions of individuals and institutions towards people who are perceived as Roma, or who are associated with the antigypsyist stereotype of "gypsies". This can manifest itself in discrimination or hate crimes.

A specific consequence of structural racism is so-called minority stress, a mental and physical impact of the stress it means to belong to a minority group in an environment characterized by racism. The particular form of minority stress that affects many Roma manifests itself in deteriorating health and an unwillingness to be open about their Roma identity.

Structural antigypsyism

Among other things, life expectancy is shorter and many Roma choose not to be open about their Roma identity. In addition, due to historical exclusion, Swedish Roma have not had the same opportunity as other residents of Sweden to accumulate family fortunes and create networks in business, cultural life and politics.

Discourses, debates and ways of talking about certain social problems and linking these to Roma, such as the debate about the ban on begging, media events about honour culture or Roma schooling. These discussions become structurally antigypsyist if they link negative phenomena to Roma as a collective and also describe Roma as a unified collective. While antigypsyist discourse in the first half of the 20th century argued that so-called "Gypsies" or so-called "Tattare" had innate negative qualities, today's antigypsyists argue that "the Romani culture", as they understand it, is the cause of all problems.

Some of these prejudices can be countered by knowledge: that the national Roma minority consists of a large number of groups with quite different historical experiences and practices. For example, knowledge about historical exclusion and about Roma's struggle for the right to go to school and the right to housing can disprove false, and structurally anti-Gypsy, claims that Roma culture is against school education and that "Gypsies have the trek in their blood". The debate about begging bans in Sweden and other countries has often been structurally anti-Gypsy, partly because it revives age-old stereotypes about "gypsy beggars", partly because it has created the false image that everyone who begs is Roma and all Roma beg, and partly because it ignores the root cause why people from southeastern Europe in desperate need of help have sought out Swedish streets and squares: the extreme poverty and racism, which can be linked to the legacy of slavery in present-day Romania, which had a similar character to African-American slavery and was abolished in 1856.

Hate crime and discrimination

In a high-profile case in Huskvarna in 2018, the homeless Romanian man Gheorge "Gica" Hortolomei-Lupuska was subjected to sadistic beatings to death. The perpetrators were young people. The incident had been preceded by polarized debates about "begging bans" and incitement against so-called "beggars" on social media. On the forum Flashback, there were posts that gave the perpetrators support and Gica was referred to as a "gypsy parasite". However, it turned out that Gica was not of Roma ethnicity. The police investigation could not find evidence of hate crimes (Selling, 2022 b, p. 156-157).

Hate crime is defined by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (BRÅ) as follows:

"Hate crimes consist of crimes where the offender's motives can be linked to prejudice or negative beliefs towards a certain nationality, ethnicity, skin colour, creed, sexual orientation or transgender identity or expression." (BRÅ, 2025)

If an act is confirmed by a court as a hate crime, it means that the punishment will be harsher than it would otherwise be. Hate crimes can include anything from slander and bullying to vandalism, assault and murder.

In 2020, the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (BRÅ) changed its terminology from the previous term anti-Roma to antigypsyist. The reason for the change was as follows:

" The term is to some extent synonymous with anti-Roma, but antigypsyism can be explained more closely as the majority society's prejudices about and negative attitudes towards a stereotyped image of Roma (Selling 2013). However, antigypsyist hate crimes can also affect non-Roma and people who do not want to call themselves Roma. Since hate crimes are motive-based and are based on the perpetrator's prejudices or beliefs, Brå has made the assessment that antigypsyist hate crimes are a more appropriate and inclusive term to describe the hate crimes that Roma and Resande are exposed to. (BRÅ, 2023) "

Discrimination is defined by the Equality Ombudsman (DO) as negative discrimination on the basis of, for example, ethnicity (DO, 2025). This can mean anything from harassment to a person not getting a lease or being called to a job interview, for example because the person is perceived as Roma. Unlike BRÅ, the DO does not keep any statistics on what could be called antigypsyist discrimination.

However, the County Administrative Board (2024) believes that the number of reported antigypsyist hate crimes and reported cases of discrimination on the basis of Roma origin has decreased in recent years, while interviews and surveys show that the phenomena have increased. The County Administrative Board interprets this to mean that there is an increasing number of unreported cases: that victims do not dare to report for fear of reprisals or out of distrust of the judicial system. (cf. Wallengren & Mellgren, 2015)

If this conclusion is correct, it is in itself a sign of increasing structural antigypsyism. Researchers have cited a hardening social climate and negative media attention about Roma as possible causes, which can be compared to the time of the begging debate (Selling, 2025).

Minority stress and everyday racism

Minority stress is a stress that can affect minorities as a result of prejudice and discrimination. It is a type of illness in addition to the usual stress that all people, regardless of group affiliation, can experience. It is often a matter of concern based on experiences of not being seen or treated as equal to the majority (Länsstyrelsen, 2025).

One could also describe minority stress as a defense mechanism linked to minority people's awareness that they live in a society where they can be exposed to prejudice, discrimination, racism, or even violence at any time. In this way, it can be said that minority stress is rationally determined.

Minority stress is a relatively new concept, but the phenomenon has been around for as long as antigypsyism, other racism and homophobia. For example, the concept of minority stress was not used in John Takman's major socio-medical study, which in 1952 was able to prove for the first time the medical effects of antigypsyism's stress effects on Swedish Roma. Neither the Delegation for Roma Affairs (2010), the Strategy for Roma Inclusion (2011) nor the Commission against Antigypsyism (2016) used the term, although they all touched on the phenomenon in different ways (cf. Takman, 1952; SOU 2010:55; SOU 2016:44; Regeringskansliet, 2011/12:56).

As far as Roma are concerned, it is well documented that this leads to many Roma in certain contexts choosing not to be open about their Roma identity (County Administrative Board, 2024; Wallengren & Mellgren, 2015). There are also strong indications that minority stress among Roma, regardless of whether they are able or willing to share their ethnic identity, has a negative impact on some Roma children's schooling and generally creates a trust gap between Roma and the majority society. When minority stress creates a negative self-image among Roma or causes Roma to adapt their behaviour because of the stress, it is called internalisation. The phenomenon is also addressed in autobiographical literature written by Roma such as Katarina Taikon (1967) and Hans Caldaras (2002).

In a film on SvT/UR, psychologist Giovanni Rafael talks about his own experiences of being exposed to minority stress as a Roma. The program also features Valeria Redjepagic who works with Roma inclusion: <https://urplay.se/program/240636-stolt-rom-fordjupning-minoritetsstress>.

Policy analysis (CHACHIPEN, JEKHIPE)

Within the framework of the CHACHIPEN project, experiences and conditions for truth and reconciliation processes regarding antigypsyism and Roma rights in Germany, Sweden, Romania and Spain were investigated. The report on Sweden (Selling, 2022) stated that the country, which was discussed internationally in the early 2010s as an inspiring example, has lost momentum since 2016. The government's decision on a

"white paper" on historical abuses against Roma and a temporary commission against antigypsyism was not followed up by any radical policy changes or institutional reforms. Instead, these measures prevented the establishment of a possible truth commission: it was felt that the state had now done enough. In the still valid Swedish 20-year inclusion strategy from 2012, there was hardly any discussion of antigypsyism, but in 2021 the government assessed that no revision was needed to meet the new standards in the EU's framework for national Roma integration strategies.

The Swedish CHACHIPEN report argues that one of the main reasons for this lack of impetus is a dysfunctional system for Roma political participation, which tends to follow the principle of "decide first, inform later". The report also notes that there are no proposals to strengthen academic knowledge production about antigypsyism. Finally, the report draws attention to increased demands to include Roma in the concept of the Holocaust, in violation of Swedish official policy according to the IHRA's definitions. The report concludes that the exclusion of Roma can have negative consequences for the distribution of research funding and for efforts to combat antigypsyism.

The so-called JEKHIPE report (Selling 2025), which was a follow-up to the CHACHIPEN report, states that the negative trend in Swedish policies against antigypsyism has continued. The Government still sees no need to upgrade the Swedish inclusion strategy to meet the requirements of the EU's Strategic Framework for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation (NRIS). The report shows that Roma actors are frustrated and that Roma's trust in society is declining. The most important factors behind this trend, according to the report's author:

- A change in the political climate that gives antigypsyism a boost;
- Deficient structures for Roma participation.
- Rejection of Roma initiatives for historical justice, such as proposals for a truth commission and the full inclusion of Roma in Holocaust memory.

The JEKHIPE report recommends three ways to move forward:

1. Establish a Swedish truth commission with a focus on Roma politics since the recognition of the rights of national minorities in 1999, including memory politics.
2. Earmark European and national funds for research on antigypsyism.
3. Establishment of an EU-wide initiative to resolve the dissonance between the different positions of the EU and the IHRA on Roma in memory of the Holocaust

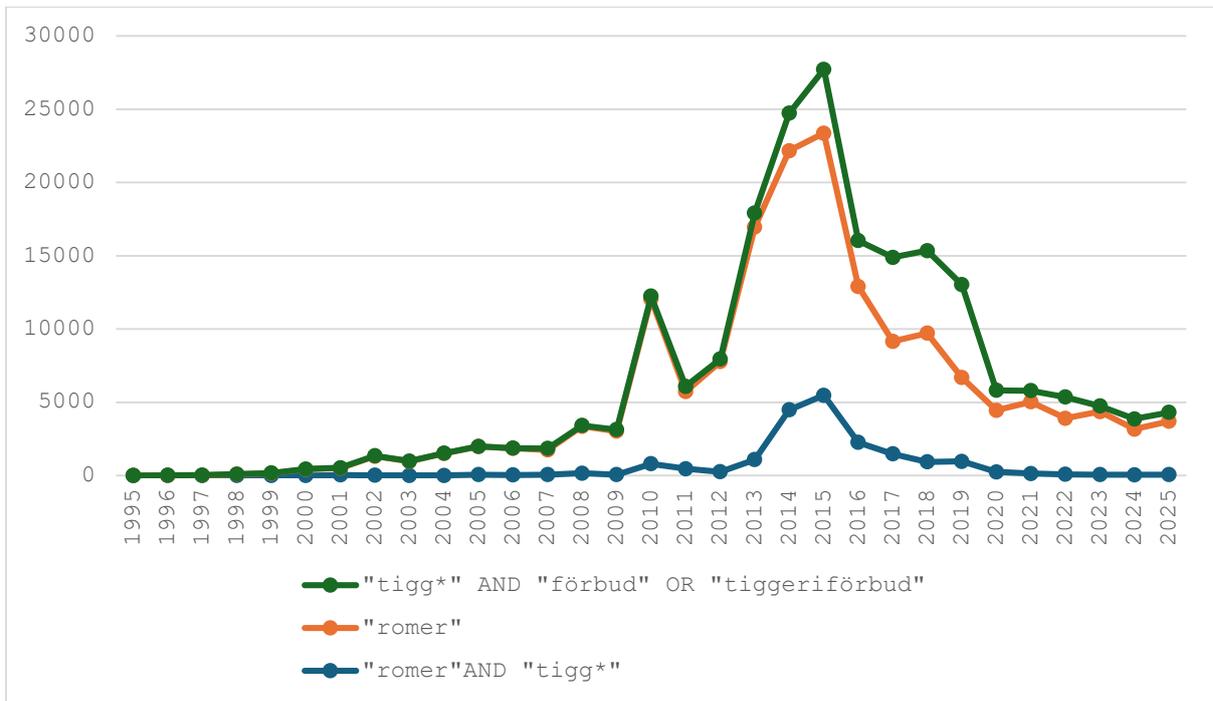
The above discussed reports from CHACHIPEN and JEKHIPE are based on political analyses and interviews with senior officials and Roma key stake holders. In the following sections a picture is given of discursive changes through quantitative content analysis of media reporting based on key keywords.

Quantitative Media Analysis

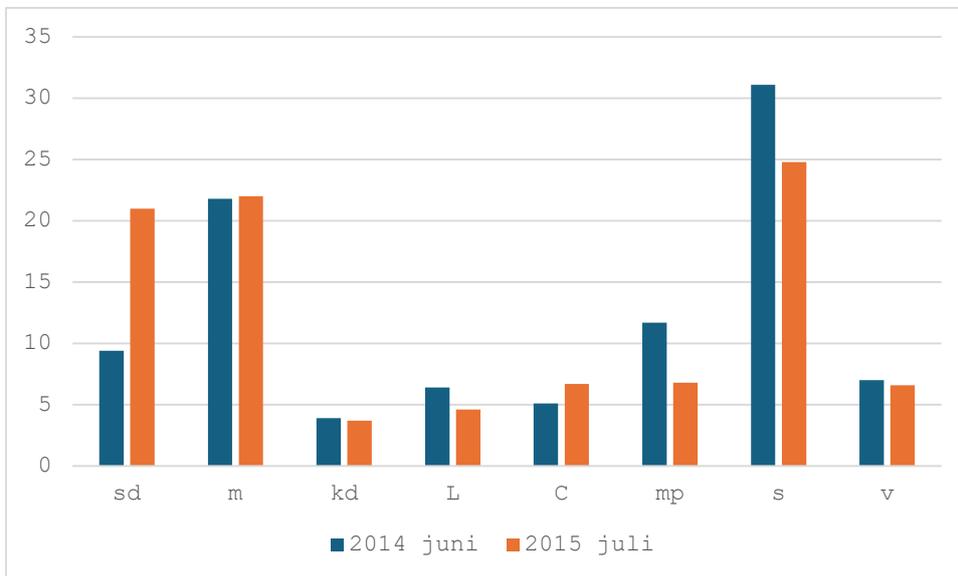
Based on the theory that antigypsyism is a "historically changing discourse formation in which the 'conceptual gypsy' takes shape and the exclusionary practices of the majority society develop" (Selling, 2013) one can by reading discourses get a picture of the conditions for social change – for the better as well as for the worse. In other words, discourse can be seen as a factor and indicator of power relations in society and of what is of interest in this report, namely the social situation of Roma. One way to read discourse is through quantitative media analysis. The following analyses have been made via the web archive Retriever Media Archive (<https://www.retriever.se/tag/mediarkivet/>) and includes 2818 Swedish editorial sources, i.e. both press and television and radio, but not social media.

Previous research has found that interest in Roma issues in the mass media in Sweden gradually increased after minority recognition in 2000 and that the search term Roma* showed a significant peak in the years 2013-2015 (Selling, 2022 b). This coincided with the revelation of the police record. The trend in reporting was positive for Roma, as they were undeniably subjected to enormous legal abuses that could be linked to ethnic discrimination, racism and antigypsyism. At the same time, the government published a so-called white paper on the state's abuse of Roma during the 20th century. This was subjected to strong criticism because it could be perceived as antigypsyism being a thing of the past, while the revelation of the police register more than clearly revealed continued structural antigypsyism. The government's way of saving its credibility was to appoint a Commission against Antigypsyism with a majority of Roma members and the irreproachable human rights advocate Thomas Hammarberg as chairman. Through the Commission, the trend continued that Roma rights and the need to combat antigypsyism were relatively high on the agenda (cf. Selling, 2022 b).

However, for a few years now, another discourse with the opposite effect had taken hold, which was structurally antigypsyist: the discourse that "Roma beggars" from Romania and Bulgaria took advantage of the EU's freedom of movement and through "criminal gangs" were channelled to Sweden. The right-wing populist message that was not only put forward in Sweden was that a ban on begging must be introduced. In her MA thesis, lawyer Sunita Memetovic has shown that the argumentation itself was antigypsyist (Memetovic, 2020). A quantitative media analysis from Sweden also shows another dimension, namely that the word Roma was increasingly used as a synonym for beggars, reactivated antigypsyist stereotypes and that Roma or beggars became interchangeable concepts that in practice came to be a replacement word for the z-word. In 2015, "begging" was mentioned in more than a third of all articles about Roma, compared to less than a tenth before 2014. At the same time, during this time, the number of articles on "begging bans" continuously increased.



The Commission saw it as one of its tasks to sue in the stream. In retrospect, it can be said that it had some effect but was insufficient. A parallel observation is that the right-wing nationalist party Sweden Democrats (SD) during this period doubled its voter support in public opinion and stabilized at a historically high level.



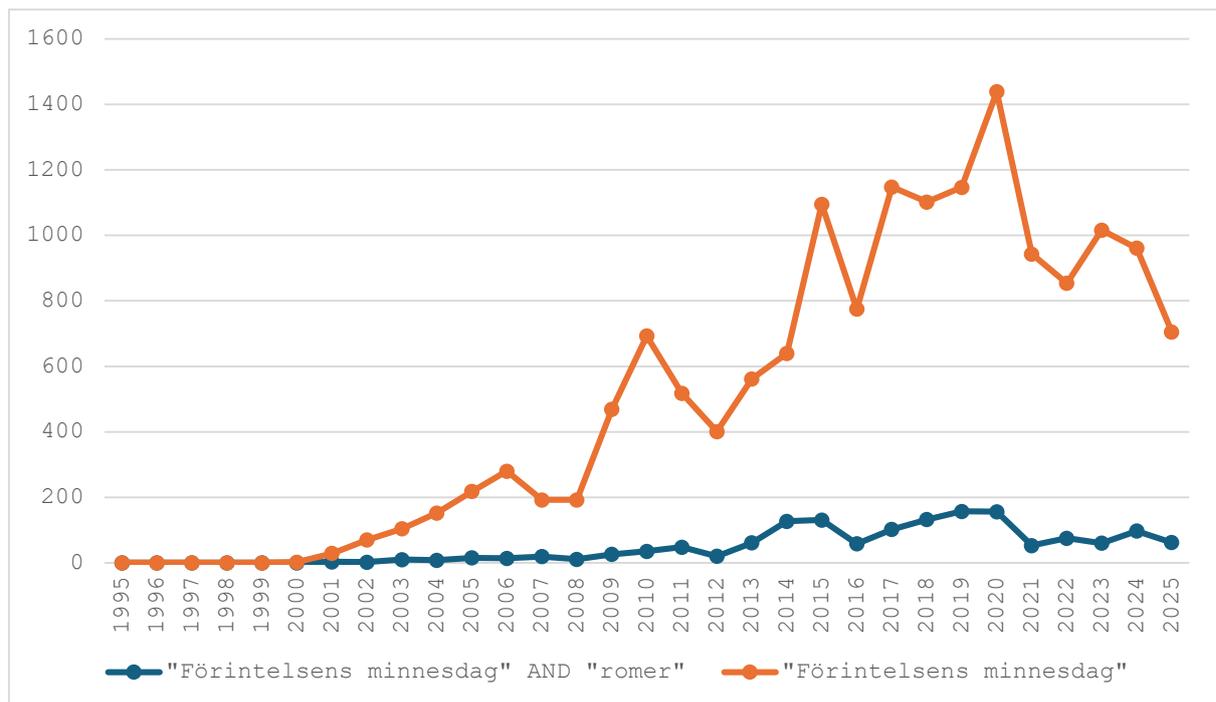
The aggressive rhetoric against street vendors and musicians, pawn collectors and homeless people from southeastern Europe led to the group being subjected to antigypsyism, regardless of ethnic origin. Wallengren & Mellgren, 2017) This culminated in 2018 in a homeless Romanian man, "Gica", in Huskvarna being brutally beaten to death by two young people. on social media, the young people's sympathizers had

stigmatized Gica as a "z** parasite". It turned out that Gica was not Roma and the police did not believe they could find evidence of hate crime motives. Possibly partly in light of this incident, BRÅ changed the category of anti-Roma hate crimes to antigypsyist hate crimes in 2020.

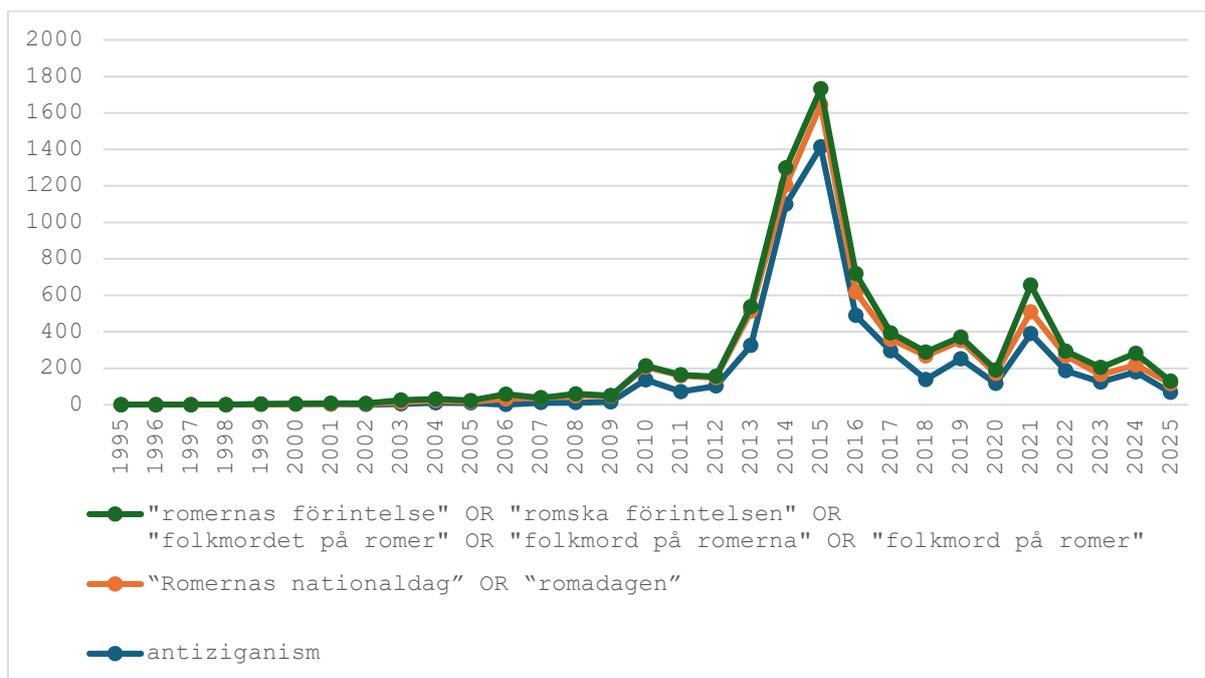
"The drop that erodes the stone"

Based on the theory of historical justice as a tool/arena for renegotiating belongings in the collective memory (Selling, 2022 b) or as redress linked to recognition.

The assumption that Roma have been marginalised, and continue to be marginalised, in discourses on Holocaust memory (cf. Dzafic Ferhatovic, 2022) can be illustrated by the following diagram of the mention of Roma in relation to Memorial Day on 27 January in Swedish editorial material 1995-2025. The graph shows that Roma are mentioned in only 10 percent of this reporting and that the proportion has not increased significantly over time, despite the fact that the memory of the liberation of Auschwitz has been increasingly highlighted by the institutionalization of Holocaust Remembrance Day.



If, on the other hand, one considers the media attention surrounding the positively charged International Roma Day 8 April in relation to commemorations linked to the Roma Holocaust, an almost perfect correlation emerges. From this, it can be concluded that discourses around Roma historical justice interact with the quest to strengthen a Roma identity.



A closer analysis of the timeline shows that the media discussion on these topics begins with the recognition of Roma as a national minority (2000) and reaches its peak in the years 2013-2016. There is also a singular peak in 2021, after which it decreases, but at a level that is significantly higher than before 2010.

The peak in 2013-2016 coincides with a general drive in Sweden for Roma rights and the fight against antigypsyism related to the White Paper, the disclosure of the police register and the Commission against Antigypsyism (cf. Selling, 2022 a). The highlight of 2021 coincides with the 50th anniversary of the congress in 1971 and with the Malmö International Forum in 2021, which was criticized for marginalizing the Roma memory, which in turn generated a discussion.

After 2021, there was a clear decline in interest in Roma issues. It is an observation that coincides with the results of the previously mentioned CHACHIPEN and JEKHIPE reports for Sweden (Selling, 2022 a and 2025). At the same time, even after the downturn, media attention is at a level that is higher than before 2010. This can be interpreted as meaning that the results achieved have not been wiped out and that there is a potential to take as a starting point.

Key people and organisations:

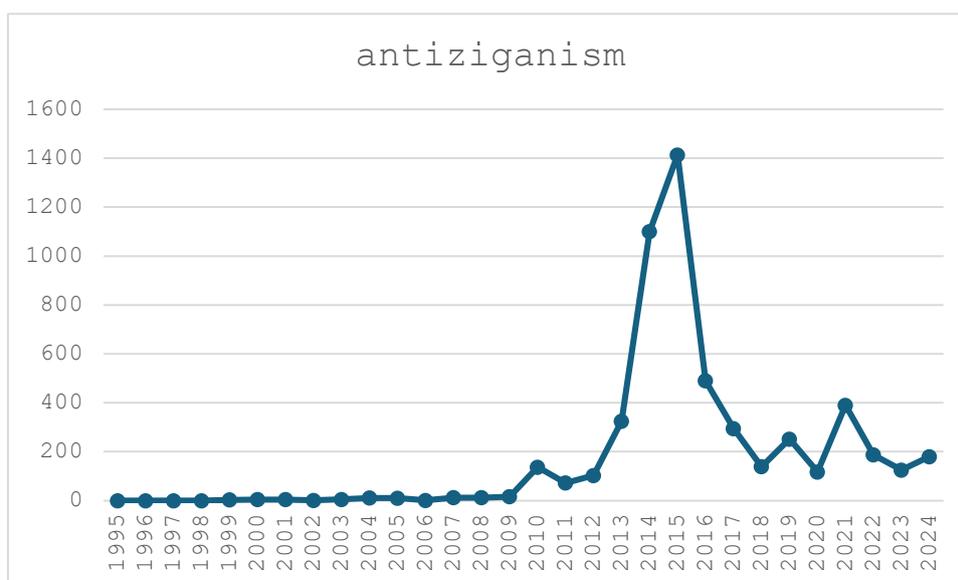
Unlike e.g. in Germany, there is no Roma NGO that has a significant media presence as a political actor over time.

The Roma individuals who received the most hits during the period 8 April are Hans Caldaras (singer and writer), followed by Jenni Kay (journalist at Roma public service) and Katarina Taikon. While the hits on Caldaras and Katarina Taikon are scattered over time,

mentions of Jenni Kay are concentrated around the period around 2021, which coincides with the fact that during this time she was one of the faces in the County Administrative Board of Stockholm's campaign "I am Roma" that highlighted role models for young Roma in Sweden (Björk, 2021). To that extent, one can see that a government campaign had some impact.

In reporting related to the Holocaust/Roma genocide, the Roma people mentioned most times were Berith Kalander (daughter of Holocaust survivor Hanna) and Teodor Mutto (Holocaust survivor).

The search term "antigypsyism" also follows much the same timeline: almost non-existent until 2000, then a significant peak in the years 2013-2017, and another in 2021. It is noteworthy that by far the most mentioned Roma person with this topic was the former EU parliamentarian Soraya Post (387 hits). Thomas Hammarberg, who was chairman of the Commission against Antigypsyism 2014-2016, had 658 meetings during the period.



Memorial Days

2 August:

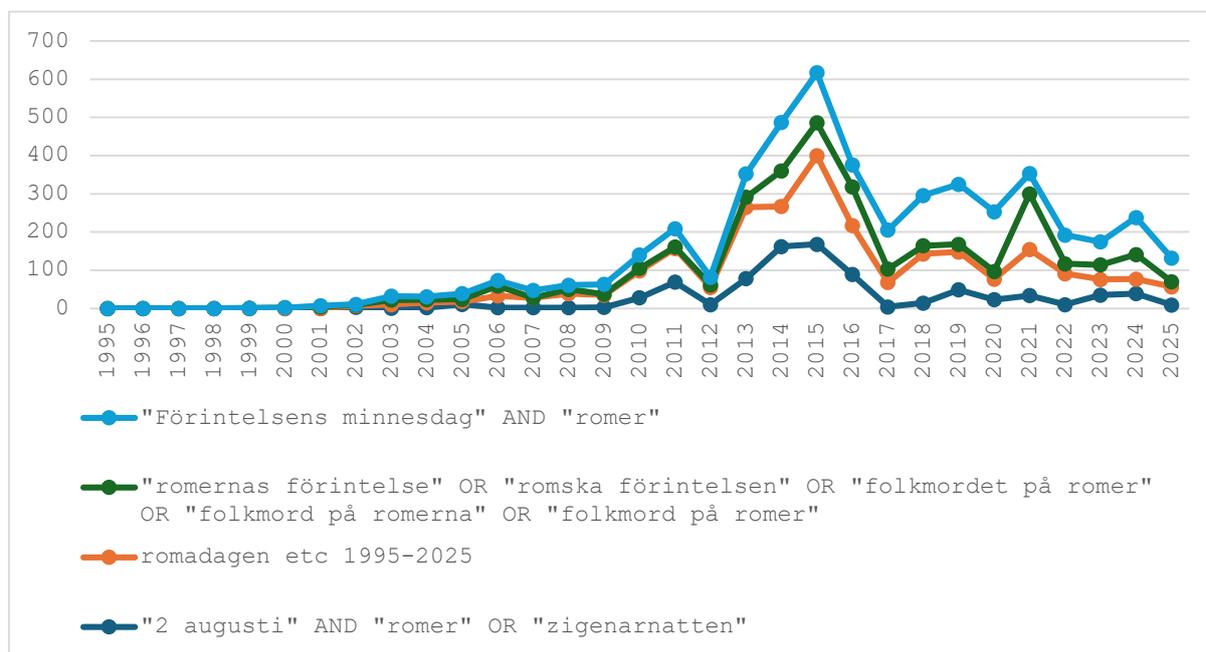
First mentioned in 2002. A significant peak in 2013-2016 and then declined, but to a level higher than before 2010.

January 27:

First mentioned in 2001 (1 article), peaks 2014-2020. Significantly: still rising trend

16 May:

Not (yet) established as a relevant commemorative date. Only occasional mentions.



"Romer":

The term is hardly used until the year 2000, and then gradually replaced "Gypsies". For example, in *Bonnier's Swedish dictionary* in 2002, the terms were stated as parallel, while in the 2010 edition the term "Gypsy" was described as outdated and that it is "Roma" that should be used. The press followed suit and the largest news agency, TT, decided to follow this new language policy. (Löfvendahl, 2013.) In the language of the authorities, the shift took place in connection with the recognition as a national minority in 1999.

PART 2: Critical Roma interventions

Roma make up only about one percent of Sweden's population. In addition, for structural reasons, Roma have a lower level of education than the majority population and a disproportionately low share of accumulated material assets and cultural capital. For these reasons, Roma have fewer opportunities to influence policy, which is why minority and inclusion policies focusing on Roma rights are pursued in the first place. However, the analyses cited above show that these measures are insufficient. In the historical background, examples have been given of how Roma individually and collectively, for example by pursuing the legal case concerning illegal evictions in Ludvika in 1956, and the civil rights movement that arose around Katarina Taikon in the 1960s has driven the development. In Taikon's case, it proved crucial that her organization succeeded in forging alliances with anti-racist politicians and cultural workers. Similarly, Soraya Post's success was founded in the European Parliament. However, the observed momentum around Roma rights during the period 2013-2016 was mostly forced by a media event: the newspaper Dagens Nyheter's revelation about the police's illegal ethnic registration of Roma. Thanks to this, the issue was raised high on the agenda of newsrooms and both Roma representatives and high representatives of the majority society supported Roma's demands for redress. (Selling, 2022 a).

Sweden is often described as a pronounced culture of consensus, where social issues are decided through dialogue rather than open conflict. Therefore, the questions raised in this report depend on Roma being able to gain access to public discourse through interventions.

For these reasons, Roma's own organisations and also Roma media have had difficulty gaining political impact, although their importance in mobilising Roma politically should not be underestimated. Katarina Taikon's journal *Amé Beschas* also linked the Swedish situation to the international Roma civil rights movement for the first time, not least through its involvement in the cause of Roma refugees in the late 1960s. In one of the magazine's editions, probably in 1969, a recording of "Djelem djelem" was distributed as a vinyl single to all the magazine's subscribers, which is probably the first publication of the Roma anthem in Sweden. After this heyday for Swedish Roma activism, it took into the 2000s before relevant Roma media were created in Sweden. Among these can be mentioned *e Romani Glinda*, which existed from 1998 to 2019, and had a focus on cultural issues and Roma activism with Fred Taikon as the responsible publisher. In 2009, the Roma academics Gregor Kwiek and Robert Brisenstam created a Romani electronic journal with a scientific focus, *Romani e Journal*, which was published with only a few issues. Since 2016, the Frantzwagner Society has been publishing the online magazine *Drabbrikan*, which focuses on culture and history. Since 2019, the online newspaper *Magasin DIKKO* (see below) is the Roma civil society's only editorial news organ in Sweden with a wider circulation.

By far the greatest importance for reporting on Roma issues in recent years has been the Roma editorial offices at Swedish Radio and TV, which now have daily broadcasts in Roma and conduct journalism based on the requirements of public service: objectivity, impartiality, high ethical standards and the promotion of democratic values. The journalistic profile, combined with the requirement to broadcast radio and television in Roma, has made it necessary to train Roma journalists. The effect has been both that Roma language and culture have been promoted and that Roma issues have been continuously scrutinized in the media, and it is common for features from the Roma editorial offices to also be disseminated in Swedish-language public service. Another effect is that Roma actors are highlighted and can gain a platform

Questions posed in this part of the report are about how, where and with what direction Roma interventions are expressed in a structurally antigypsyist society such as contemporary Sweden.

Delimitations and selection

The research task formulated by ERIAC means that projects and activities that only express cultural or religious practices fall outside. It is thus not an ethnographic report. Another delimitation has to do with a critical view of minority and inclusion policy. (cf. Kozce, 2019 and 2020.) From this critical perspective, inclusion policy can be criticised for having

- ignored research on antigypsyism
- essentialised Roma as a culturally deviant group characterised by social exclusion
- created a landscape of short-lived projects with a Roma focus, which rarely have had a lasting impact and do not always correspond to the oft-claimed motto "Roma empowerment" (Länsstyrelsen, 2020).
- the state distributes influence and resources via so-called "Roma national organizations", which in principle means organizations that once received state grants; The system has been criticised for lacking transparency, in principle inviting corruption and leading to individuals creating rogue organisations – which in practice have neither members nor activities – are rewarded, while authentic Roma NGOs and competent Roma people are pushed aside. (Selling, 2022 a)

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The purpose of this report is not to provide space for or scrutinise such politically unproductive Roma NGOs and Roma inclusion projects. As authors of the report, we have, based on our respective knowledge and experience windows, searched for clear examples of "critical Roma interventions" and avoided including borderline cases. We have therefore chosen to illustrate each category only through a few examples. This can

be said to give an impressionistically true picture, without any claim to be complete or objectively representative. Our approach is constructive: to look for aspects of critical Roma interventions in these examples.

The categories have not been predetermined, but have arisen through an initial analysis of the collected results. To some extent, they can of course be seen as overlapping and other researchers would make the categorization different. It is also obvious that significantly more examples than those we have chosen could have been raised, even on the basis of our definitions and delimitations. In our survey, the following categories have been crystallised:

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1. Civil rights: Individual Roma who in their actions have significantly influenced the public discourse and politics surrounding Roma and antigypsyism.
 2. Journalism, literature or library activities based on Romani discourse positions.
 3. Social media and popular culture: Roma forums or famous Roma people in popular culture who promote Roma rights issues or express Roma pride.
 4. Critical Romani Studies. Roma academics who are or have been active in the field of critical Romani Studies.
 5. Exhibitions created to a significant extent by Roma and that highlight Roma rights and identity issues.
 6. Theatre: Actors, drama or theatre ensembles that take their starting point in Romani discourse positions and thereby become social commentary.
 7. Festivals: Roma cultural festivals that also have the ambition to raise rights issues or counteract stereotypes.
 8. Organisations: Roma NGOs or state-organised NGO-like activities that promote Roma influence in society and counteract antigypsyism.
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Pioneering human rights defenders

Katarina Taikon

(1932-1935)

Katarina Taikon's importance to the Swedish Roma's civil rights struggle is enormous. She grew up without schooling and later became a prominent writer and activist during the 1960s, where her works such as *Zigenerska* [Gypsy woman] (1963) and *Zigenare är vi* [Gypsies Are We] (1967) questioned stereotypes about Roma and criticized discrimination but also patriarchal structures within her own family tradition. Taikon played a crucial role in the fight for Roma rights, inspired by the African-American civil rights movement and was a co-founder of the *Zigenarsamfundet* (Gypsy Society) and its magazine *Amé Beschas – Vi bor*. Taikon led a successful campaign to save Roma refugees from deportation, but later lost faith in political solutions, which led her to start writing the children's book series *Katitzi* about a Roma girl's upbringing in Sweden. Her

work has had a lasting impact and her books continue to be important in the fight for justice and understanding. The children's book series *Katitzi* gave Katarina Taikon an undisputed place in Swedish children's literature. In 2025 was recognized by the government as one of the 100 most important cultural phenomena before 1975 that shaped Sweden and thus part of a "Swedish cultural canon".

(Digital Museum, n.d.; RomArchive; Selling, 2022 b; SOU 2025:92; Taikon, 1967; Taikon, 1963; Tamas & Mohtadi, 2015).

Rosa Taikon

(1926-2017)

The silversmith Rosa Taikon, like her sister Katarina, received recognition as part of Swedish culture, which was indicated, among other things, by the fact that she was already in 1969 at the National Museum of Sweden to be awarded a solo exhibition of her jewellery art and silversmithing, which was completely unique. The recognition helped her to be listened to in the public conversation. During the 2000s until her death, Rosa Taikon was a very active and often quoted debater on issues of Roma rights. In 2011, she was named by the European Roma Cultural Foundation as one of the senior role models of the Roma civic movement, the "Romani elders", along with Ágnes Daróczi (Hungarian intellectual), Ceija Stojka

(Austrian musician, artist, and writer), Romanian activist Nicolae Gheorghe (Romanian philosopher, sociologist, and human rights activist), Hans Caldaras, Romani Rose (Chair of the Zentralrat Deutscher Sinti und Roma), and Sandra Jayat (French writer and artist). When she was awarded an honorary doctorate at Södertörn University in 2014, it was motivated by both her efforts as an artist and as a civil rights activist. Her estate is managed by Hälsingland Museum, which has a permanent exhibition of Rosa Taikon's works.

(Digital Museum; Hälsingland Museum; RomArchive; Selling, 2020; Taikon & Janusch, 1969).

Hans Caldaras

(b. 1948)

Singer Hans Caldaras is undoubtedly the living Swedish Roma who mainly carries on the baton from the 1960s Roma civil rights movement in Sweden, of which he himself was a central part. Throughout his life, he has been a strong voice for Roma rights and against discrimination. Already in his youth, he was confronted with prejudices that shaped his commitment. In the 1960s, he began his career as a singer and musician and was the first in Sweden to release an album of Romani music in Romani chib. He has also written the music for the TV series *Katitzi*, which is based on the books by

Katarina Taikon. In his autobiography *In the Eyes of the Beholder*, he tells his own story. Caldaras also has an international reputation and in 2011 was named one of Europe's Romani elders, alongside Nicolae Gheorghe, Rosa Taikon, Agnes Daroszi, Ceija Stojka, Romani Rose and Sandra Jayat. As Caldaras had a promising career as an artist in popular music in the 1970s and in 2005 published his autobiography by a large publishing house, Norstedts, he is a well-known person in cultural circles. Based on this platform, he has for decades been a very active social debater and lecturer on Roma issues. As an artist, Caldaras, accompanied by his Roma hot band, also carries on a Roma song tradition. In 2016, he was awarded the Katarina Taikon Prize for his long commitment to the fight against antigypsyism. Other awards include the 2023 Prize from Sweden's Composers and Lyricists "as a Certificate of Appreciation for Meritorious Contributions to Swedish Music" and the Royal Swedish Academy of Music. Gustav Adolf Academy's Prize 2024 for "important contributions to Roma music in Sweden and purposeful work to spread knowledge about the history of the Swedish Roma."

Caldaras, 2002; Caldaras, 2020; *DIKKO*, 2024; RomArchive; *SVT Nyheter*, 2016).

Soraya Post

(b. 1956)

Of the Roma in Sweden, Soraya Post is the person who has had the greatest political impact over the past decade. She was one of the Swedish travellers who in 2014 testified about the state's historical abuses and represented the view that Sweden should establish a truth and reconciliation commission. In 2014, Post made history by becoming the first Roma to be at the top of a ballot for a Swedish political party when she ran for the European Parliament for Feminist Initiative. Her election campaign was successful and she was a Member of the European Parliament in 2014–19, where she became a driving force in putting antigypsyism issues on the agenda. Among other things, she was rapporteur for the resolution "On International Roma Day – Antigypsyism in Europe and the EU's recognition of the day of remembrance of the Roma genocide during the Second World War", which according to the text of the resolution was to be called "European Roma Holocaust remembrance day" (sic!), i.e. the Roma Holocaust Remembrance Day. Post was also rapporteur for the report on 'Fundamental rights aspects in Roma integration in the EU: combating antigypsyism'. Through her work, she has played a significant role in sharpening the EU's strategy from being exclusively about so-called inclusion to equal participation and in highlighting antigypsyism as the root cause of the structural subordination of Roma. During her time in Parliament, she initiated the annual "EU Roma Week", a week of conferences in connection with International Roma Day on 8 April, to bring together decision-makers, researchers and activists to discuss the situation of Roma in Europe. From 2014 to 2016, Post was also a member of the Swedish Commission against Antigypsyism. The media analysis presented above (p. ??) indicates that she has had a decisive role in establishing

discourses on antigypsyism in Sweden.

(European Parliament, 2015/2615(RSP); European Parliament 2017, Post, 2020; RomArchive.)

Journalism, literature and libraries

Agnes Lakatos

Journalist Agnes Lakatos has been part of the Roma-language editorial staff of the public service channel Radio Romano for over 20 years, but also has a university degree as a social worker. Radio Romano fulfills an important social function as an independent journalistic body with a focus on Roma civil society in relation to the majority society. In his forthcoming autobiography, Lakatos describes this experience as follows:

"When I got the chance to start working with Radio Romano, I immediately felt that this was something big. For the first time, the Roma in Sweden got their own program where they could hear their own language variants spoken, where they could listen to news that touched them and where their voices could be heard on equal terms. From half an hour a week to becoming a significant voice for the Roma. (...) The first broadcasts were a challenge. We were few employees, resources were scarce and there was no established tradition of Roma radio in Sweden to lean on. But we had a vision: to create a timely, engaging and professional programme for Roma throughout the country. (...) For me, the radio is a powerful tool. It gives us the opportunity to tell, influence and change. In every feature, every interview, every live broadcast, there is a chance to make a difference – to build bridges between people and communities. Today I am proud to be a part of Radio Romano and Swedish Radio. Here I get to use my voice – and make room for others."

Based on this platform, Lakatos has also reached out to a broader, Swedish-speaking radio audience in recent years with longer reports that have broken new ground by delving deep into topics such as the Roma Holocaust, Roma slavery and Professor Emeritus Ian Hancock's work as a researcher and Roma leader.

(Lakatos, 2021; Lakatos, 2023; Lakatos, 2024; Lakatos, n.d.)

DIKKO online magazine and book publisher

DIKKO was started in 2014 as a street newspaper for solidarity work with poor EU migrants, but was closed down for financial reasons after a couple of years. DIKKO was restarted in 2018 as an online newspaper with a profile on journalistic coverage and opinion formation on minority issues, and especially Roma issues. For a number of

years, DIKKO has been the Roma civil society's only independent newspaper and all material is available in both Swedish and English. The responsible publisher and co-founder is ethnologist Britt-Inger Lundqvist, who is herself a Romani Traveller (Resande). DIKKO also works with book publishing and has published about ten monographs and anthologies focused on anti-racism, LGBTQ issues, Roma history and the promotion of the Resande Romani language.

In 2024, DIKKO was awarded the Ordfront Democracy Prize, which is awarded annually in connection with the Human Rights Days to organisations, activists or cultural workers with a strong commitment to equality. The explanatory memorandum mentioned, among other things, that:

»*Magasin DIKKO* is an important platform that focuses on highlighting perspectives and issues related to national minorities, human rights, democracy and racism. By prioritising a traveller/Roma perspective, the newspaper strives to increase awareness and engagement in the democratic discourse.

DIKKO emphasises that all people have equal value and that fundamental rights must be respected, while actively rejecting discrimination and extremism. By offering free PDF books such as *Bryt mönstret – en antirasistisk verktygslåda* [Break the Pattern – An Anti-Racist Toolkit] and *Resandefolkets berättelse – Vorsnos manusch* [The Story of the Resande People – Vorsnos manusch] makes knowledge accessible to all, promoting equality and justice.

(DIKKO publishing house; DIKKO Magazine; Ordfront, 2024.)

Bagir Kwiek

(b. 1971)

Between 2019 and 2021, Kwiek was Sweden's first Roma reading council appointed by The Swedish Arts Council. In this role, he initiated Roma readings in libraries and cultural centres across the country and created meeting places where Roma children and young people could discover books in Romani and feel pride in their language and culture.

Kwiek also participated in an inquiry by the National Library of Sweden into establishing a Roma resource library, to provide the country's public libraries with Roma literature.

In this inquiry, Kwiek actively contributed to the issue of establishing a state-run Roma research library linked to Critical Romani Studies at a Swedish university, a proposal that has not been followed up further.

Kwiek has also been active at the Romano Center in Gothenburg to support Roma families, provide them with information about their rights and started various projects and networks that strengthen the Roma community. Together with Monica Hirsch, he

has published the storybook *Det var en gång det som inte var* [Once upon a time, there was what wasn't] and is now working on documenting Roma stories and history in novel form. Kwiek was one of the initiators of the exhibition *We are Roma*, which he initiated together with others and which was shown at the Gothenburg City Museum. The exhibition aimed to make visible the history, culture and everyday life of the Roma and to help break down prejudices and create better understanding by presenting Roma stories and experiences.

(Gothenburg City Museum, 2013; KB, 2020; <https://www.bagir.se/> ; Kwiek, & Hirsch, 2013.)

Social media and popular culture

Zofia Selimi

(b. 1986)

Zofia Selimi is a food creator and cookbook author who runs one of the country's most popular food Instagram accounts and over time has become a Roma activist. She has long hidden her real identity as a Roma for fear of discrimination due to her origins and her traumatic experiences when she fled the wars in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Once in Sweden, she decided not to talk openly about her origins for fear of prejudice.

But when she published her first cookbook in 2023, she decided to reveal her secret and be proud of her Roma heritage. This decision marked a turning point in her life. She wanted to fight against prejudice and be authentic. Reactions to her revelation were mixed: Some contained negative comments, but the majority of her followers were supportive.

In her cookbook, Zofia talks about her journey and the food that shaped her, and now calls it Roma food from the Balkans. She has also participated in the TV series "Zofia's Food Journey", where she travels back to Yugoslavia for the first time in 20 years to face her fears and accept her identity.

(Selimi, 2023; SvT, 2024).

Romane domacice – Roma women's group online

In 2020, Esmā Veselovski and Andrea Morina from Helsingborg founded a Facebook group for Roma women that now has about 6500 active members: *Romane domacice*. The group serves as a platform to support and empower Roma women in their everyday lives, where all voices are heard and questions are welcome.

Esma Veselovski is actively involved as an administrator and has organized various live events on topics such as education, discrimination and culture. Members also share personal concerns, recipes, and celebrate together. In connection with various holidays, the group collects donations to humanitarian organizations and distributes clothes to those in need.

Esma Veselovski has previously been engaged in international solidarity with Roma refugees from Kosovo and also participated as a speaker at the World Roma Congress 2023. She has also been a lecturer at a national Romani university student meeting in connection with a conference in Critical Romani Studies at Södertörn University. Andrea Morina has been noted for her poetry about prejudice against Roma. She is now undergoing an apprenticeship program at SR Radio Romano to become a radio journalist.

The members of the group are Roma women, mainly from the Arli group around the world. It is an unlimited platform where everyone can discuss what they want as long as you do not break the group's rules.

Romane domacice is an example of how horizontal networks can have an impact on Roma activism and create solidarity across national borders.

(Lundqvist, 2024; SR/Radio Romano, 2020, 28 October; SR/Radio Romano, 2021, June 21; SR/Radio Romano, 2023, 2 October; World Roma Congress, 2023.)

Luciano Axelsson as Lucianoz

Luciano, born in 1993 in Stockholm and originally from Rinkeby, is a Swedish dansband singer with a Roma background. He became popular after his sister uploaded a video of him with the song "Det är dig jag går och väntar på" ["It's you that I am waiting for"] on Christmas Day 2022. Since 2023, he has performed with the popular televised show *Allsång på Skansen*, had an intermediate appearance in Melodifestivalen and toured with Diggiloo. He has also released singles such as "Simsalabim" and the latest "Tio av tio". With his music, he wants to convey love and encourage young people to become enthusiastic about Dansband music. Lucianoz (his stage name) describes himself as a Swedish traveler in an interview with *Dagens Nyheter* and is proud of his origins. He has also made a documentary about his dream profession as a dansband artist on TV4. His success as an artist is not least based on his impact on social media.

Based on the purpose of this report, Lucianoz's importance lies in the fact that he is open about his Roma identity in a positively charged celebrity and can thus be a Roma role model. An additional dimension is that the genre he has made his breakthrough in, dansband music, in Sweden is strongly coded as white. This is despite the fact that, as Hans Caldaras pointed out in his autobiography, Roma musicians have been very common in Swedish entertainment music, but usually without being open about their

Roma identity. Thus, it can be said that the ordinary, but apparently atypical has contributed to the interest in his career.

(Caldaras, 2002; Lundberg, & Tedesjö, 2023; Tv4, 2023).

Critical Romani Studies

Sunita Memetovic

Memetovic works as a lawyer, mainly with criminal cases as a defence attorney, and since 2021 is a partner in Advokathuset Ericksson & Häggquist in Uppsala (ehlaw.se). When she became a member of the Swedish Bar Association in 2019, she was, as far as is known, the first lawyer in Sweden with a Roma background.

Memetovic has been appointed as an expert and expert in a number of government investigations concerning the human rights of the Roma minority. She has also been a driving force in increasing awareness and understanding of the situation of the Roma in Europe. Ever since her time as a law student in Uppsala, Memetovic has been strongly involved in encouraging young Roma to pursue academic studies, including through her involvement in a project called antiZ and later as a guest lecturer in Critical Romani Studies at Södertörn University, where she has contributed to building the subject since 2016.

Through her time as a student in Critical Romani Studies at the Central European University, she has become a Swedish bridge to the academic conversation and the theoretical development in Critical Romani Studies that has been created around CEU in recent years. In a degree project in 2020, Memetovic applied critical race theory in her legal review of the introduction of "begging bans" in various European countries.

Sunita Memetovic has two master's degrees (L.L.M) in law and human rights. She also has double world championship titles in karate.

(S. Memetovic, 2020; S. Memetovic, 2021; Södertörn University.)

Katarina Memetovic

Katarina Memetovic has been working as a lawyer at Bodström in Stockholm since 2024. She graduated in law in 2024 from the School of Business Administration at the University of Gothenburg with the thesis *Equality data - Tools against antigypsyism or further discrimination? A study on the legality and legitimacy of the introduction of equality data*. K. Memetovic has during her studies actively participated in the national Romani university student meetings arranged by the Department of Critical Romani Studies at Södertörn University and was one of the keynote speakers at the subject's conference in October 2025. Rapporteur to the European Commission on Sweden's work on Roma

inclusion in 2025. K. Memetovic has also been involved in party politics, including as chairman of The Swedish Social Democratic Youth League (SSU) Trollhättan 2019-2021 and since 2023 as SSU's legal policy spokesperson.

(K. Memetovic, 2024; K. Memetovic, forthcoming 2026; Social Democrats, 2025).

Arman Heljic

Arman Heljic is a doctoral student in gender studies at the Department of Cultural Studies at the University of Gothenburg. His interdisciplinary research project involves Roma, feminist and queer artistic practices with the aim of investigating the potential of queer and feminist art to constitute resistance to antigypsyism – as a specific form of racist violence against Roma. Heljic graduated with a master's degree in gender studies from CEU in 2016 and was a teaching at the Department of Critical Romani Studies at Södertörn University in 2022-2024. Panelists at the Gothenburg International Biennial for Contemporary Art 2023 at the roundtable: *Is the future queer?* as well as at the Off-Biennale Budapest entitled: *THE SEASON OF DARKNESS: Being Civil in an Uncivil Society* 2023. In Budapest, Heljic was a panelist at the roundtable *Practices of Change in Communities of Today and Tomorrow: Towards Institutions of the Future*. He has also been project coordinator and editor of the book project *Queer Roma and Travellers – Stories from Norway, Sweden and Finland* (2025).

(Heljic, 2022; Heljic, 2024; Heljic, forthcoming 2026.)

Alma Dzafic Ferhatovic

For several years, Alma Dzafic Ferhatovic has been a frequently hired lecturer and educator on issues related to antigypsyism and Roma history. Since 2022, she has been a guest lecturer in Critical Romani Studies at Södertörn University and is part of the subject's external academic advisory group. She has also worked as a planning secretary at the Roma Information and Culture Centre in Malmö (RIKC). As a master's student at the Department of Sociology of Law at Lund University, Dzafic Ferhatovic has delved into issues of marginalization of Roma's historical memory and the politics of memory surrounding the Roma Holocaust.

Dzafic Ferhatovic is also a film director. Her short film *Klassens Z* [The Z of the school class], which is partly based on self-experienced events, is about how antigypsyism and the use of the z-word are used in a school environment to insult Roma and how it is allowed to stand unchallenged by classmates and teachers. In 2021, the film received an honorable mention at the International Roma Film Festival in Berlin, AKE DIKHEA, and in 2022 was awarded the Diversity Index Award.

(Diversity Index Award, 2022; Dzafic Ferhatovic, 2022; Swedish Film Database.)

Exhibitions

Self-representation to break stereotypes

Cultural projects in which Roma tell their own stories have become important tools for strengthening Roma's collective identity and counteracting prejudices and stereotypes in the majority society.

The exhibitions we are discussing here have aimed to highlight Roma perspectives by including Roma as active content producers. They are thus created by public institutions in the majority society, but we have nevertheless chosen to include them in this overview, as they can be seen as successful examples of how Roma initiatives have been heard and have been able to benefit from the production conditions that these institutions offer.

The exhibitions function not only as cultural expressions but also as political acts, where Roma reclaim their stories and create counter-narratives to discriminatory depictions.

The most acclaimed in this genre is undoubtedly the exhibition project *We Are Roma*, which was created at the Gothenburg City Museum and presented personal life stories and interviews and emphasized the importance of letting Roma voices be heard. The exhibition was shown in a number of different cities and had a great impact. It was named "Exhibition of the Year 2013" by the museum industry with the following motivation:

"The Gothenburg City Museum has created a beautiful, dignified and thought-provoking exhibition by and with Roma with the aim of seeing the person behind the myth, increasing knowledge about and counteracting negative attitudes. Based on personal portraits, an in-depth knowledge of a multifaceted subject is developed. In an intimate design, the visitor is given space to be challenged, reflect and emerge stronger from the exhibition experience. Through a co-creative approach, the Gothenburg City Museum has taken a holistic approach to the entire exhibition process that challenges and inspires"

Other exhibitions can also be mentioned, which perhaps had less national impact, but had great significance locally and for the participants. I *Unga romer berättar* [Young Roma tell their stories] i Västerås förmedlade nio unga romska personers sina perspektiv på identitet och tillhörighet för att skapa förståelse i majoritetssamhället.

Another example is the exhibition *Idag är jag rom* [Today I Am Roma] in Gävleborg, which collaborates with local Roma and combines historical facts with personal stories and highlights Roma's often overlooked presence in Swedish history.

The exhibition *Unga romska röster* [Young Roma Voices] in Sundsvall 2020 was created against the background of concrete experiences of racism and discrimination, as one of the authors of this report (Selimovic) has experienced. Through the exhibition, 15 Roma

young people wanted to show " that we are just like all other young people, nothing more or less". The pictures are taken with their own phones of their everyday lives, the stories are their own that they have experienced and the objects are something that you have taken with you during all the moves.

The exhibitions exemplify how cultural expressions can function as means of empowerment, education and social change, challenge prejudices and promote greater understanding of the complex experiences of Roma in Sweden. In a broader sense, they can be seen as political resistance to marginalization.

(Gothenburg City Museum, 2013; Junkka, 2021; Köljning, Nylander & Hultqvist, 2013; County Museum of Gävleborg, 2022; Minoritet.se., 2014, April 14; City of Västerås, 2023).

Exhibition z+46

The exhibition Z+46 is a project by the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (MUCF) in collaboration with the Joint Roma International Federation (GRIF), which focuses on stories about young Roma in Sweden. On the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the concentration camps, the exhibition addresses the discrimination and prejudice that Roma are subjected to. Through personal stories of four young Roma from different Swedish cities, it shows how antigypsyism affects their lives and their future.

Referring to the stigmatisation of Roma during the Nazi era, when they were tattooed with a 'Z' and a number in concentration camps, Z+46 aims to address the current challenges faced by Roma, including poor access to education and discrimination in the labour market. The exhibition was opened in conjunction with Södertörn's international conference "Antigypsyism – History and memory" on 3 December 2024, in the presence of Roma professor emeritus Ian Hancock (Texas University at Austin) at the multicultural centre in Fittja.

This emphasized the ambition to create links between different generations and between academic research and the reality of Roma young people in Sweden. The exhibition can also be seen as a contribution to the debate about the Roma Holocaust's place in Sweden's collective memory and the importance of this memory for the fight against antigypsyism.

(Arcidiacono, 2024; MUCF.)

Theatre

Lindy Larsson

(b. 1974)

If Hans Caldaras is the link to the roots of the civil rights movement, Lindy Larsson is the clearest shining link to the politically and aesthetically radical Roma performing arts that have a center in Berlin. He has already had a long career and was awarded Kvällsposten's Thalia Prize in 2010 for his interpretation of *Carmen* at Malmö City Theatre. Larsson became known to an international audience through his role in the Berlin theatre Maxim Gorki's acclaimed production of Yael Ronen's work *Roma Armee* (2017). In the same spirit, but with a Swedish focus, Larsson was behind the text, direction and design of his one-man performance *Tschandala*, in which he made visible the dark five-hundred-year history of the Traveller people in Sweden and critically processed Strindberg's antigypsyist short story *Tschandala* (2022). Collaborations with Roma artists have been recurring in his work – in several of the productions he has participated in at the Maxim Gorki Theater, the décor and costumes have been designed by Delaine Le Bas, who also created the stage costume for *Tschandala*. Gorki's *Roma Armee* was performed in 2018 at the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm and Larsson's *Tschandala* was staged in 2024 at Gorki in Berlin and has toured both in Sweden and Europe, including Vienna and Budapest. In 2025, Lindy Larsson returned to the role of *Carmen*; this time in Christian Weise's production of the opera at the Maxim Gorki Theater. The production did away with the Roma stereotypes that permeate the opera and both the performance and Lindy received an exuberant reception in the press in both Germany and Sweden. Larsson has thus in an innovative way established Roma discourses on historical justice as a motive for theatre. Larsson also found success as a musical artist when he played the lead role of Zac in the popular work *Änglagård*, which is based on a film by Colin Nutley, in 2024. In this capacity, Larsson has often been interviewed on radio and TV and his Romani Traveller identity has been addressed in a positive way. His path to becoming a successful actor in light of what it meant to grow up as a Romani Traveller and queer in a small town in the countryside in Småland has been documented in the SVT film *Lindy the return of Little Light*. The film was named Best Film and also received the Audience Award at the Ake Dikhea Roma Film Festival in Berlin in 2020. *Tschandala* was named by the Swedish Biennale of Performing Arts as one of the most important Swedish theatre productions of 2023. The motivation was:

"Fearlessly, Lindy Larsson goes into a clinch with August Strindberg – at the titan's own theater! *Tschandala/Tattaren* is both a personal and universal confrontation with Strindberg's antigypsyist text *Tschandala*. Larsson takes his starting point in his own background with queer culture and the traditions of the Resande when he elegantly uncovers layers of oppression, offers resistance and inspires hope.

With superb physical performance and charismatic singing, which can move mountains, his theatre concert points to the need for many people's redress."

For *Tschandala*, Lindy Larsson received the Theatre Critics' Award 2022, the City of Stockholm's Honorary Award for Performing Arts 2023 and Katarina Taikon-priset 2023.

(Gorkij.de; Scensverige; Swedish Film Database; Heljic, 2022).

Theater Artem

Arthem is a Roma theatre based in Gothenburg, which in collaboration with the National Theatre tours with its performances. The name "Arthem" can be translated as "artistic Roma land" (atristikano Romano them), hence the abbreviation.

Arthem was founded in connection with the Roma women's rights organization Trajosko Drom's production of the musical theater play *En oförglömlig historia* [An Unforgettable Story]. It continued as an independent cultural association and produced several high-quality performances in collaboration with organisations such as Riksteatern, Folkteatern and Atalante in Gothenburg.

Arthem's critical production *Carmen med förhinder* [Carmen with obstacles] (2023) was a successful tour in Sweden that received positive reviews. In the spring of 2024, Arthem toured with its sold-out show *Nomad*, which originated from an idea by Arthem and is written by Lucia Cajchanova. The work is based on interviews and workshops conducted with Sofia Jannok and Salamanca Taikon Gonzalez, to explore the "nomadic lifestyles" of the Sámi and Roma communities. The play also creates a musical meeting between joik and flamenco. Other productions include *Drömmarnas tält* [The Tent of Dreams], which is inspired by Roma fairy tales and legends. In addition to his own productions and his own band, Taikon's Orchestra, Arthem envisions collaborations to host concerts, workshops, dance performances and lectures.

Arthem is often based on a method that might be called documentary theatre, events and experiences from reality and therefore becomes social commentary. In 2024, Arthem and Trajosko Drom joined forces to promote Romani art and to realize the ambition of becoming a state-owned Romani theatre institution. Arthem also has the stated ambition to create meetings between different national minorities.

(arthem.org; Huss, 2023; Lundqvist, 2024; Lundqvist, 2024).

Festivals

The Five-Folk Festival

The Fem folks festivalen, Five Peoples Festival, is a tribute to the cultures of Sweden's five national minorities and is an opportunity to break down prejudices and learn more about these cultures through free books and workshops. The driving forces behind the festival are the Roma cultural association E Romani Glinda and Fred Taikon, who were awarded the Raul Wallenberg Prize in 2022 for their work to promote Roma rights. E Romani Glinda ran a magazine of the same name from 1998 to 2019 that covered Roma culture and rights issues and is a regular organizer of events at various Roma memorial days.

The unique thing about the Five Peoples Festival is that it creates an intercultural platform that can promote solidarity between different groups. The event has grown steadily over the past eleven years and takes place in collaboration between Roma, Sami, Jewish, Swedish-Finnish and Torne Valley organizations.

(DIKKO, 2023; Raul Wallenberg Academy; SR/Radio Romano; 2023.)

Sweden's International Roma Film Festival

SIRF, Sweden's International Roma Film Festival, is a non-profit association based in Stockholm that was founded in 2009. The purpose of the festival organization is to make Roma's stories and culture visible through film, music, conversations and other cultural forms, and to highlight Roma's experiences and challenges. Between 2011 and 2014, a special film project for young people was supported, and the festivals include film screenings, school screenings and public discussions to break down stereotypes.

SIRF also implements various projects, including the Katarina Taikon project, a film education initiative for national minorities and cultural events. SIRF's commitment to making Roma culture visible contributes to the fight against antigypsyism and the promotion of cultural diversity in Sweden. SIRF's founder, Domino Kai, who still leads the association's work, was awarded the Swedish Martin Luther King Prize in 2019. The prize is awarded annually by a foundation created by the Christian Council of Sweden, the Uniting Church and the Christian Peace Movement.

(Martin Luther King Prize; Minoritet.se, 2016; Swedish Film Institute, 2020).

Organisations

GRIF

The Joint Roma International Association (GRIF, formerly Gävleborg's Roma International Association) is a national NGO that works to promote Roma rights, combat antigypsyism and strengthen Roma culture, language and identity. The activities include youth activities, workshops, lectures and the production of podcasts. The chairman and co-founder of GRIF is Abedin Denaj.

In 2024, GRIF in collaboration with the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (MUCF) produced the exhibition *z+46* described above. Four young Roma were also appointed ambassadors for the project, which also took place in collaboration with the Swedish Holocaust Museum, the Living History Forum, the County Administrative Board of Stockholm and Radio Romano.

In 2025, GRIF in collaboration with a Critical Romani Studies scholar at Södertörn University, conducted an empirical study on young Roma's experiences of antigypsyism. The study showed that structural and discursive antigypsyism is common in the everyday lives of most young Roma. Many respondents in the study cited the "Z-word" as a major carrier of antigypsyist discourses, and reported that insults, and discrimination are often perpetuated or tolerated by teachers and employers. (Selling & GRIF, forthcoming 2025).

GRIF has, without losing its anchoring in Roma civil society, through collaboration with MUCF and academic research, broken new ground in intervening politically in issues of Roma history and contemporary antigypsyism.

(Grif.se; MUCF 2025; Selling & GRIF, coming 2025).

RIKC Malmö

The Roma Information and Knowledge Centre (RIKC) in Malmö is a municipal organisation tasked with implementing the Act on National Minorities and Minority Languages concerning Roma, as well as the Government's Strategy for Roma Inclusion (2012–2032). RIKC is responsible for developing, implementing and following up the Action Plan for the National Roma Minority in the City of Malmö, which has been in place since 2016.

RIKC's work is based on three principles: a) Roma participation, b). research on antigypsyism and c) relevant policy documents at municipal, national and international level. Based on these, RIKC has developed a holistic concept that in essence means that:

- Roma are met and supported on an individual level, for example through the citizens' office at RIKC. This includes increasing their knowledge of minority legislation and human rights and how they as individuals can invoke these rights
- At a structural level, further educate the municipality's politicians, managers and employees about the history and living conditions of the national minorities today, national minority legislation, the City of Malmö's policy for the national minorities, etc.
- At a discursive level, work from the goal of talking to and about each other in an inclusive way. Through collaboration with civil society, municipal and state activities on this need - for a recognizable way of talking to each other - initiate a conversation about who we, both as individuals and collectively, have been, are and can be.

The activities were originally started as a pilot project with the support of the Delegation for Roma Affairs in 2009, which highlighted the RIKC as a possible model at the national level as well. A strength of the RIKC is that it is based on a well-thought-out structural understanding of antigypsyism that corresponds well with the European Commission's upgraded framework for Roma equality, inclusion and participation.

(EU 2020; Halilovic, 2015; City of Malmö, 2025 a and b; SOU 2010:55.)

Discussion: What are critical Roma interventions about?

To answer this question, one can start from the concept of discourse formation, which can be defined as follows:

"If discourse is understood as people's approach to reality, hereby we can refer to the ideas and actions of a particular agent, for example, a Romani activist, in a particular historical situation. If you can connect this to similar discourses of other agents, and they point in the same direction, you can talk in terms of a discourse formation. " (Selling, 2022 b, p. 120).

Against the background of the Swedish history of antigypsyism and Roma liberation up to the present day, one can discern a number of dominant discourse formations in the above-described "Roma interventions", ranked according to impact in the material.

1. **The theme of antigypsyism** is - perhaps almost by definition - central to all categories of Roma interventions regarding Roma rights. Katarina Taikon laid the foundation for seeing through and attacking the phenomenon. The concept itself was first established in the 2010s, but has today been adopted to a very large extent by Roma civil society and journalists. Theory-informed discourses on antigypsyism can be found not only in the critical Romani Studies of academia, but also in NGOs, from the pulpits of parliaments and from the theatre stage.
2. **The pride of being Roma**, and a critical discussion about how minority stress causes many Roma to hide their ethnic identity, are themes that in recent years have gained increasing traction, including in exhibition projects, on the theatre stage, through festivals and in NGO projects. Visibility is a key word. Here, social media and popular culture may play a growing role, both by creating safe spaces and by allowing Roma role models to have an impact.
3. **Different perspectives on Romani cultural identity** are discussed in art forms exhibition projects, but also in critical Romani studies. Perspectives that meet, and sometimes contradict each other, include the importance of highlighting a traditional Roma cultural heritage, the importance of counteracting homogenizing notions of Roma, intercultural perspectives that seek encounters with other national minorities and intersectional approaches, which also emphasize feminist or LGBTQ perspectives. A consistent goal is to counteract the stereotypes of the majority society.
4. **Since the turn of the millennium, memory and discourses about historical justice** have increased in importance as a mobilizing force for Roma civic struggle. These discourses correspond to a general trend of emphasizing history as fundamental to collective identities in society. Exclusion or inclusion in memory therefore becomes charged issues, not least regarding the Holocaust. These discourses are conducted both academically and parliamentarily, but also in the form of Roma events in

connection with memorial days. In these, the different historical experiences of different Roma groups are expressed as differences or brought together.

5. **Feminist discourses** are not only central to critical Romani Studies, but can be found in a great variety of discourses ranging from Katarina Taikon's documentary writings up to today's Romani activities on social media forums. One observation is that women are overrepresented in most interventions discussed above, but also among Romani university students in Sweden.

6. **Queer-Roma identity** is a previously repressed theme that in recent years is increasingly discussed in a positive way. The Roma media and Roma researchers in critical Romani Studies have played an important role here, but also the theatre scene, which through Lindy Larsson has opened up for inclusive and anti-essentialist views on Romaness.

Overall, we see a dynamic development of the Swedish Roma civil society's cultural interventions, which are rooted in a historical tradition of civic struggle, increasingly responsive to Romani intellectual discourses from outside Sweden's borders, and also interact constructively with Romani media and social media. A critical point for many actors is to balance dependence on the state: on the one hand, the state's support structures risk controlling the direction of interventions, on the other hand, Roma, just like everyone else, have the right to share in the state's means of production for culture.

Afterword: Samanta Selimovic.

My name is Samanta Selimovic and I am an activist, project manager and association owner with roots in the Roma community. My driving force comes both from my history and from a strong need to create visibility, security and faith in the future for young Roma and other minorities in Sweden.

I have worked with projects such as Young Roma Voices in collaboration with Sundsvall Museum and been one of the initiators of the project Roma Cultural Heritage in Västernorrland, where we collect stories and objects to make the Roma cultural heritage visible in public contexts. I have also led conversation series and cultural cafés that create safer meeting places for Roma.

I work with an intersectional perspective on rights, culture and inclusion, and have experience of lecturing, driving association development, collaborating with authorities and museums and working with project management in minority contexts.

My goal is to lift Roma voices into conversations where we have often been invisible in culture, schools, politics and public spaces, and to create long-term change through cooperation, popular education and cultural preservation work.

I am Roma, Muslim and woman – three identities that I carry with pride, but which are also often met with prejudice and resistance in society.

I was invited to write in an anthology – a book where several people share their stories. I chose to write about my struggle. About what it's like to constantly feel that you have to prove your worth, just for who you are. FEMINIQA – Stories of Resistance is about different kinds of struggle, activism, and power structures, some are about minorities, others about LGBTQI and NPF. The title of the book is an acronym of Feminism, Minorities, Neuropsychiatry, Queer Activism.

I wrote about the looks, the questions, the comments – but also about the strength. The pride in being who I am. My belief, my culture, my voice. I wrote about my view of existence.

It wasn't easy to write. But it was important.

I wrote for myself, but also for everyone else who recognizes themselves but doesn't always dare or is not allowed to take up space.

My story is not just about struggle – it is also about hope.

About not giving up, after all.

And about standing up for yourself, even when it's difficult.

I have been given Nacksta's enthusiast award in 2024 with the following motivation:

Samanta Selimovic is named Nacksta's Enthusiast 2024 for her outstanding commitment to gender equality and inclusion.

Through her work with children and young people, she has highlighted issues that affect weaker minority groups and created a safe and inspiring environment, especially in dance and folk dance.

Her long-term and persistent efforts, in close collaboration with Nacksta Fritidsgård, have had a significant positive impact on the community.

As a role model, Samanta has motivated both young people and adults to get involved, which has strengthened the local community.

Samanta's work has always been carried out on a voluntary basis, driven by a genuine desire to make a difference. Her contributions have been invaluable for the development of Nacksta and make her a worthy appointment as Enthusiast 2024.

Being nominated as a firebrand is an acknowledgment that what I do – to lift my story, stand up for others and fight for change means something, not only for myself but also for others.

In Sweden in 2025, we like to talk about the equal value of all people – but the reality for many Roma says otherwise. Children still grow up with shame, adults hide their identity and people are denied housing, jobs and respect just because they have a name that sounds Roma.

I myself carried my identity in silence for many years. I didn't dare to say that I was Roma, not even to my classmates. And when I finally began to speak – I was met with silence, distrust or benevolent exotification. It is the Swedish way of hiding discrimination behind politeness.

It is not enough to have symbolic politics, theme days and minority strategies on paper.

We see a society that would rather write reports than take responsibility. Who prefers that we adapt – but not take up space.

There is a silent expectation that we should be grateful, silent and traditional. But we are also moderns, academics, artists, parents – we are here, and we will no longer hide.

We are not a project. We are not a wound in history.

We are human beings – with the right to be visible, proud and free in the country we have lived in for over 500 years.

And we are no longer going to ask for the right to be treated as human beings.

Despite the fact that Roma have been part of Sweden for over 500 years, many still live in an exclusion that society has long accepted – and which politicians have repeatedly

failed to break. Over the years, governments have presented strategies against antigypsyism and for Roma inclusion, but real, concrete measures are conspicuous by their absence. It is time to stop hiding behind formulations and start acting.

Swedish antigypsyism is not a historical problem. It is here, now – in schools, in the labour market, in the meeting with authorities. Despite the recognition of Roma as a national minority and the introduction of a "Roma Inclusion Strategy 2012-2032", the results have been minimal. The strategy has become an alibi for political passivity rather than a plan for change.

The question is simple: Where are the actual stakes? Where is the follow-up? Where are the resources for Roma organisations that year after year have to struggle with temporary project grants without a long-term perspective? Where are the measures in school where Roma children still fall through? And where is the accountability when municipalities systematically fail with inclusion?

It is not enough to say that the issue is taken seriously. It is an empty promise if it is not followed by political will, funding and concrete results. The right of Roma to equality can no longer be a parenthesis in integration or minority policy – it must be a central issue of human rights and democracy.

Antigypsyism is not a Roma problem – it is a Swedish problem. And it is high time that politicians start treating it as such. It's not more strategies we need – it's action.

Antigypsyism must be fought and acknowledged.

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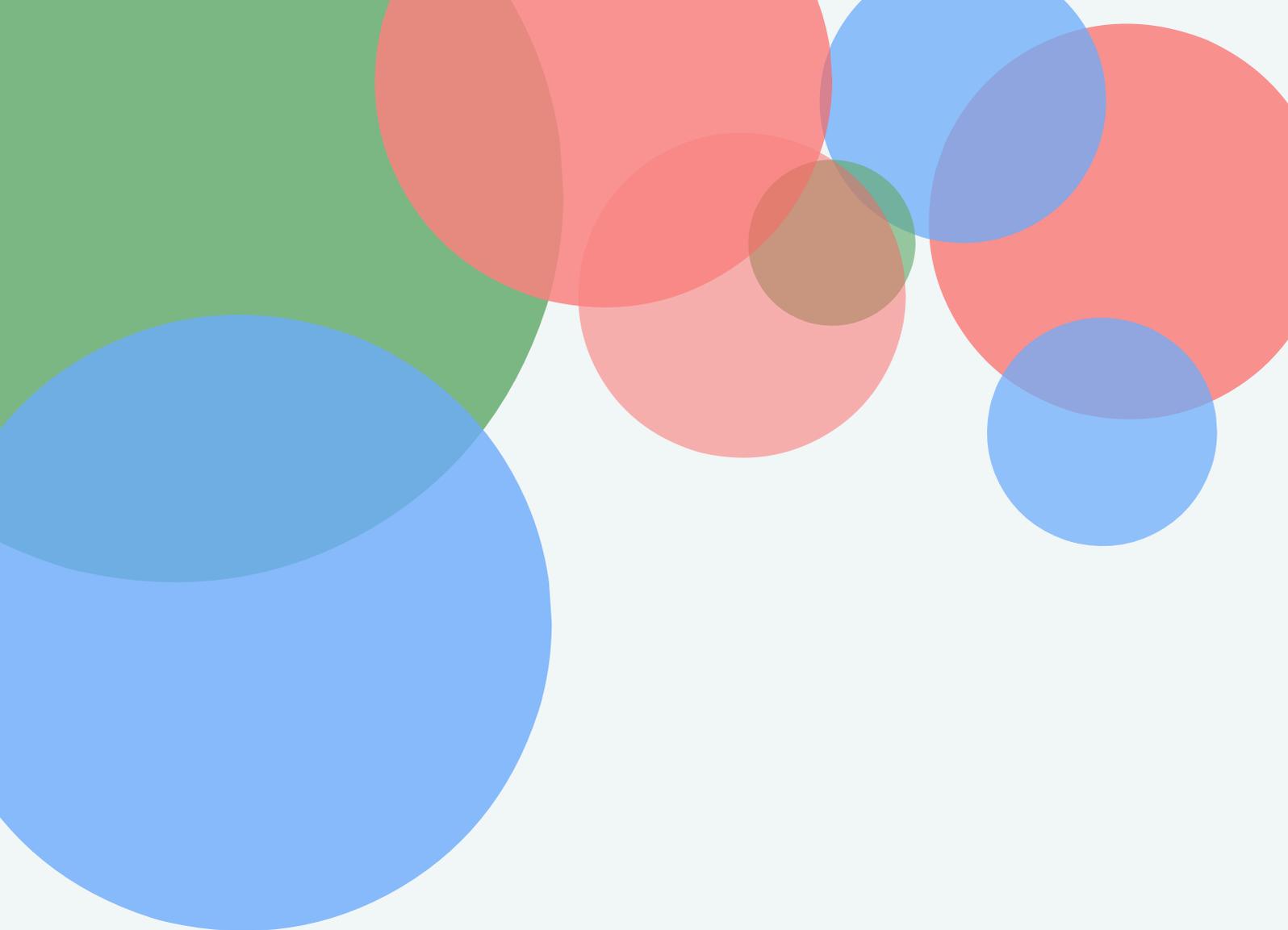
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