

Documentation

Antigypsyist Incidents

A Retrospective on 10 Years of Documentation

**We would like
to thank everyone**

who contributed to the creation of this documentation
through reports or in other ways.

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Preface

Ten years of DOSTA! For ten years now, the Documentation Center on Antigypsyism has been systematically documenting antigypsyist incidents in Berlin. While this is a considerable amount of time, it all began even earlier. As early as 2010, when we founded Amaro Foro e.V. in Berlin, it was clear to us that there was much to be done. Even then, members of our community were telling us about very difficult living conditions and a lack of fair access that made their participation in Berlin impossible. Discriminatory experiences on the street, while shopping, at school, at work, when dealing with government authorities, at the doctor's office, etc. still characterize our everyday lives today.

As a self-organized association that offers practical support and sees itself as a representative of community interests, we immediately began seeking out conversations with political and administrative representatives to draw attention to grievances and contribute to solutions.

Berlin, September 2024

by Violeta Balog

*Head of the Documentation
Center on Antigypsyism,
DOSTA/MIA-Berlin*

However, the existence of antigypsyism in Berlin was mostly denied, especially when the issue was raised with government agencies and authorities. Department heads and team leads confidently stood before us and claimed that they treated everyone equally in their office and therefore did not need any education or sensitivity training on antigypsyism. As a newly founded self-organized association of young people, we were accused of emotionality and a lack of objectivity.

But these circumstances did not stop us. On the contrary – they only motivated us more to make antigypsyism more visible. Along the way, we found many friends and supporters, but we also made ourselves unpopular by not shying away from addressing problems head-on. As members of civil society, we saw this as our duty and responsibility... and we still see it that way today.

Countless hours of volunteer work and controversial discussions, as well as a great deal of effort at persuasion, paid off. The Berlin Regional Office for Equal Treatment and Against Discrimination (Landesstelle für Gleichbehandlung – gegen Diskriminierung, LADS) recognized the problem at the time and supported an awareness campaign in 2012 and 2013 for education and awareness-raising work on the topic of antigypsyism, which laid the foundation for today's Documentation Center on Antigypsyism (Dokumentationsstelle Antiziganismus, DOSTA), which officially began its work in 2014.

A lot has changed since then. Not only have we pioneered nationwide monitoring work in the field of antigypsyism, but we have also established facts that are confirmed by figures and scholarly analysis. The topic has been on the political agenda for several years and is now an integral part of strategies and concepts for combating racism at the federal and state level. For the first time, we had an independent commission on antigypsyism, which presented a comprehensive report and valuable recommendations to the federal government; we have the first Federal Government Commissioner against Antigypsyism and for the lives of Sinti and Roma in Germany; we have the first nationwide Reporting and Information Center on Antigypsyism (Melde- und Informationsstelle Antiziganismus, MIA), in which DOSTA participates as the Berlin regional reporting office. In addition, Berlin was the first federal state to introduce its own anti-discrimination law, to which DOSTA also contributed. This closes a number of legal loopholes in the General Act on Equal Treatment.

All of this progress has made antigypsyism, which has long since arrived not only in the far-right scene, but at the core of German society, even more visible. Unfortunately, even after ten years of DOSTA, the findings are disturbing. While we can speak of many successes, the other side of the coin is very worrying. The number of reported incidents is continuously increasing; we are experiencing a political situation that is moving more and more to the right, which more or less also reflects societal developments; members of the minority group are publicly murdered in European countries by state representatives; people fleeing war are segregated and assistance is denied. We have achieved a lot in ten years, but there is still a lot to be done. While, on the one hand, antigypsyism and its manifestations are becoming more and more subtle, on the other hand, we perceive antigypsyist continuities that remain/are omnipresent in the center of society even today, such as the use of the racist externally-applied label.

In order to recognize subtle antigypsyism and to be able to counteract it continuously, deep insights and knowledge are necessary. Ensuring this in the long term requires not only strength and courage, but also political will and the long-term allocation of resources.

We would like to thank all members of the community who, despite their experiences, find the strength to continue fighting and the courage to report cases. We also thank all current and former employees for their strength and engagement. Last but not least, we thank all witnesses for reporting cases, all project partners for the dialogue and support, and all partners at the political and administrative level for their trust and support.

Do not forget to report cases and to help make antigypsyism more visible. We wish you an insightful and informative read!

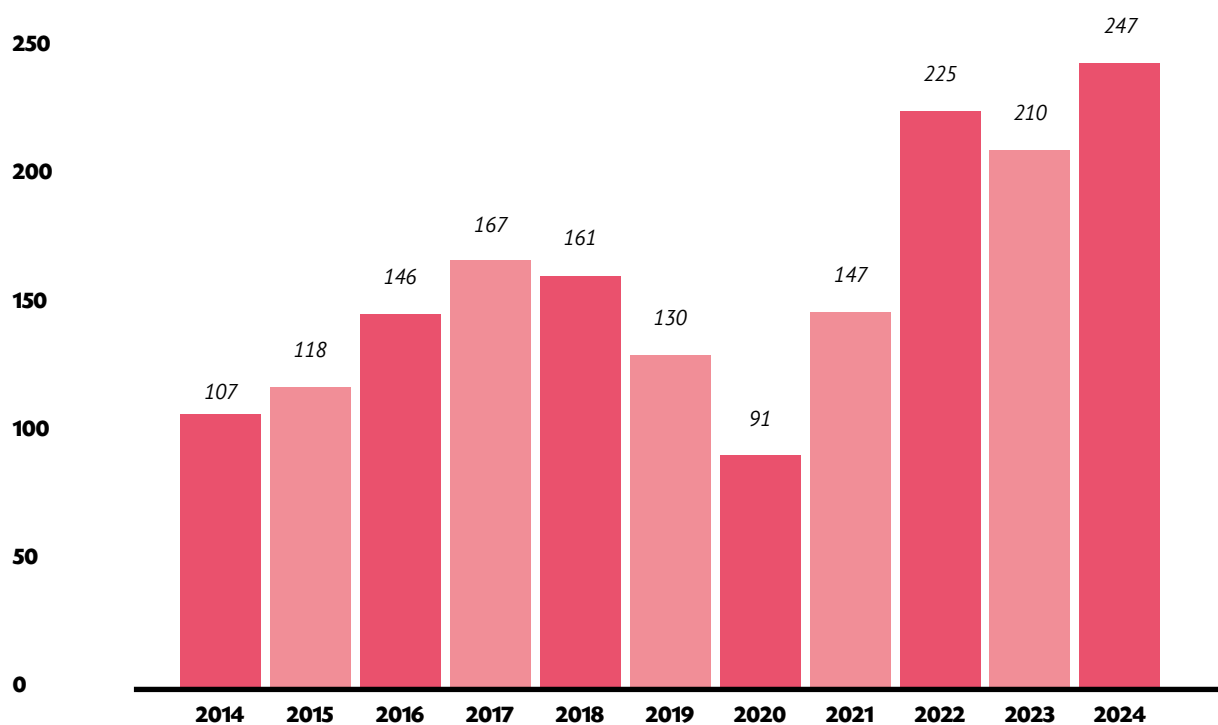
Trigger warning

This brochure contains original quotes that include racist and offensive language. In addition, the report covers topics such as bullying, physical violence, illness, war, and death.

A Retrospective on 10 Years of Documentation

Fact Sheet

Development of Case Numbers



**1749 Incidents
since 2014**

General Retrospective

Retrospective: 2014–2018

In the last ten years, a lot has changed, politically and legally – at least on paper – and especially for EU citizens from Romania and Bulgaria.

When the documentation of antigypsyist cases began in 2014, full freedom of movement for workers from Romania and Bulgaria came into force on January 1, 2014. In Germany, the rights that came into force as a result were discussed in the context of antigypsyist debates about “poverty-related immigration” and “benefit fraud.” In Berlin in particular, the media focused their reporting on the “Cuvry Wasteland” (“Cuvry-Brache”), which still existed at the time, and the homeless people living there, of whom Romanian Roma were of particular interest for their racist campaign. In 2014, the government decided to limit the right of entry and residence (Section 2 of the Freedom of Movement Act/EU) of job-seeking EU citizens to six months. The exception to this rule should be those who can prove that they are seeking work and have a prospect of being hired.

At the beginning of 2015, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruled on the legality of excluding EU citizens who are not gainfully employed and not seeking work from benefits under Social Code Book (Sozialgesetz, SGB) II, only to then also exclude EU citizens who are seeking work from this later that year. This year, the Berlin Social Court went against a decision by the Federal Social Court that granted EU citizens with a secure residence a right to social assistance under SGB XII. The court stated that EU citizens in need of assistance would be entitled to secure state support in the event of their return, with the result that applications for such benefits were approved in expedited proceedings and decided unfavorably for the applicants. Applications for legal aid were also increasingly rejected, creating further hurdles in a system of exclusion. These restrictions were further tightened the following year with the exclusion of EU citizens without entitlement to Unemployment Benefit I (Arbeitslosengeld-I, ALG-I) from any social benefits under SGB II and SGB XII. In addition, in 2018 the federal government passed a law “against illegal employment and social welfare abuse” that was intended to exclude EU citizens from receiving child benefits under certain conditions, thereby making the family benefits departments (Familienkassen) subordinate to the immigration authorities.

The expulsion and eviction from Berlin’s green spaces and parks, empty promises about providing housing, and antigypsyist reporting are a continuum in the annual reports. Whether in Tiergarten, Neukölln or Kreuzberg, leading district mayors, such as Stephan von Dassel or, at the time, Franziska Giffey, made and continue to make it clear that such settlements in green spaces will be dealt with very harshly – with evictions, including at night if necessary, and by providing buses for return journeys of the people concerned. Furthermore, such evictions included precedents that were litigated in court and that followed the likewise continuously perpetuated racist narrative of so-called clan crime – a narrative that is still used by the media and politicians today, even after the racist murders in Hanau and those committed by the National Socialist Underground (Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund, NSU). Even arbitrary deportations, such as the one carried out in 2016 after the memorial to the Sinti and Roma Murdered Under National Socialism in the Tiergarten park was occupied by several Roma activists, are part of the day-to-day of German authorities and a continually recurring topic.

Another particular issue that has been prevalent from the beginning of the project to this day is the sexist and racist discrimination of women. This multiple discrimination is not only evident in day-to-day life in the form of noticeably condescending, racist behavior towards women with an assumed Romani background, but also through eugenic statements in the health care system or on the basis of mass DNA tests targeting women from the Roma community in criminal cases, such as those of the NSU or a case from 2017 in which a dead newborn was found in a park in Lichtenberg.

Especially repression by the authorities leads to exclusion from society, poverty, and deportation. In the ten-year retrospective, contact with the authorities was and is one of the biggest obstacles to equality for Roma and people externally identified as such. In everyday life and in public spaces, attacks range from verbal use of the racist externally-applied label to direct physical violence and threats of such violence. The fact that such violence and repression are still possible and apparently largely accepted and supported by mainstream society is due, among other things, to the persistent antigypsyist reporting in the German media, which legitimizes such thinking.

Retrospective: 2019–2024

Roma or people assumed to be Roma experience exclusion and discrimination in all areas of life – in their dealings with public authorities, on the housing market, in healthcare, etc. Furthermore, political debates and media reports are often riddled with antigypsyist stereotypes. With this summary of the last five years, we not only want to raise awareness about antigypsyism, but also draw attention to the fact that especially in times of crisis such as a pandemic or war, Roma and people believed to be Roma are still being made scapegoats today. Additionally, the increasing shift to the right in Germany is resulting in more and more restrictive changes to the law, which primarily affect Roma and ensure that they are excluded from the social welfare system and even deported.

In previous publications, we have already reported on the tightening of asylum laws, which primarily affect Roma or people from the Western Balkans and the Republic of Moldova who are thought to be Roma. One example is the so-called “Hau-ab Gesetz,” a law which came into force in 2019 as the “Second Act to Improve the Enforcement of the Obligation to Leave the Country” (“Zweites Gesetz zur besseren Durchsetzung der Ausreisepflicht”).

On February 19, 2020, a 43-year-old man shot and killed nine women and men at several locations in Hanau within a period of six minutes: Gökhan Gültekin, Sedat Gürbüz, Said Nesar Hashemi, Mercedes Kierpacz, Hamza Kurtović, Vili Viorel Păun, Fatih Saraçoğlu, Ferhat Unvar and Kaloyan Velkov. The perpetrator acted out of racist motives. The racist terrorist attack in Hanau shocked society. February 2024 marked the fourth anniversary of the terrible attack, and the investigation into the events and circumstances surrounding the crime has still not been fully resolved. Our thoughts are with the victims and their families.

The pandemic years of 2020 and 2021 have acted as an accelerating factor with regard to antigypsyism. While in various Eastern European countries, Roma settlements were completely sealed off and in some cases guarded by the police, in Germany entire apartment blocks were quarantined in several cities after there had been Covid-19 infections there. The buildings affected were always those known to be home to many Roma or people who were believed to be Roma by others. All communications were strongly characterized by antigypsyism.

When Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine began in February 2022, millions of people fled the country, including Roma. Even as they fled, refugees who were identified as Roma were confronted with discrimination and exclusion. They were deemed not to be “real” refugees. We have already observed this discourse in 2021 in relation to refugees from Moldova: they are collectively ascribed a Roma identity and instead of being seen as people in need of protection, they are portrayed and perceived as a threat.

The number of reported incidents has increased almost annually over the last ten years, although the real figure is likely to be much higher. With over 200 incidents in the last two years (2022 and 2023), the number recorded by the Documentation Center on Antigypsyism DOSTA/MIA Berlin has reached a new all-time high. The current political situation and the increasingly vocal shift to the right are reflected more and more in the number of cases.

10-year Retrospective by Area of Life

Case Studies

A Romanian applicant for SGB II benefits receives a rejection from the job center on the grounds that he is taking up employment solely to supplement his social benefits and is thus abusing his right to freedom of movement.

Contact with the Authorities

DOSTA was founded primarily on the basis of cases of discrimination against people from Bulgaria and Romania that were documented in our social counseling center. These people had repeatedly experienced antigypsyism, especially in their dealings with various government agencies. Since then, there has been an ethnicizing and criminalizing treatment of migrants from Romania and Bulgaria, the antigypsyist content of which can be seen above all in the political and media debates following the EU's eastward expansion. Here, the terms "poverty immigration" and "social benefit abuse" were and still are used when referring to people from these countries of origin. Over the years, more and more such codes or ciphers for Roma have been found and used by the authorities; in the past, the racist externally-applied label was also used more frequently by the authorities. At the latest since the dissemination of the Internal Guidelines of 2018, we know that the practices of the authorities, such as refusing to accept applications due to a lack of knowledge of German, requesting unnecessary documents, as well as blanket refusals, are based on antigypsyism, which also manifests itself in discriminatory remarks and pejorative comments with socially chauvinistic, welfare chauvinistic, criminalizing or culturalizing content. Although the passages that explicitly mention Bulgarian and Romanian citizens have been deleted, these groups continue to be criminalized. For those affected, nothing has changed in terms of harassment from the authorities, except that this discrimination has become more subtle. Most of the documented cases concern contact with the job center and the Federal Employment Agency, but also with the family benefits office (Familienkasse), the social housing assistance office and the State Office for Refugee Affairs (Landesamt für Flüchtlingsangelegenheiten, LAF).

Education

Antigypsyism in the field of education has always been the sphere of life with the most reported incidents, alongside “contact with authorities” and “everyday life and public space.” Children and young people with an actual or ascribed Roma background experience significant educational disadvantages in Berlin schools time and again. This is accompanied by physical and/or psychological violence such as discrimination and racist bullying, in some cases on a daily basis. Mechanisms of exclusion are manifested in the allocation or non-allocation of school enrollment places. The violent experiences can lead to children staying away from school, while teachers and school administrators avoid taking responsibility and blame the families for the “school absenteeism” and blame it on cultural differences, instead of actively combating discrimination at their school and intervening in acute cases. To this day, this victim-perpetrator reversal has hardly changed at all; there is still a lack of easily accessible, trustworthy complaints offices with experience in dealing with racism and with the actual power to take action. Nevertheless, it should not go unmentioned at this point that there were and are committed social workers, mediators and witnesses in Berlin who not only represent important reporting sources for DOSTA, but also stand up for many young people.

Everyday Life and Public Space

In the last 10 years, a clear increase in antigypsyist incidents can be observed, particularly in the domain of “everyday life and public space.” These include insults and physical attacks in public transport, on the street, in restaurants or even untargeted incidents, for example at memorial sites. One constant in this domain is the racist propaganda by neo-Nazis and/or right-wing parties, which manifests itself in threatening letters, stickers, graffiti, explicitly antigypsyist election posters or mass mailings. A large proportion of antigypsyist insults in the public sphere come from and are carried in particular by mainstream society. The Leipzig Authoritarianism Study 2022 shows that antigypsyist attitudes in the German dominant society still go unchallenged and are virulent. Not least, the use of the racist externally-applied label still does not pose a problem for many people in German mainstream society. In response to this, DOSTA 2022 included the manifestation of “relativization/denial of antigypsyism,” which not only reflects the trivialization of the use of the racist term of designation, but also the assumption that Sinti and Roma themselves are to blame for their discrimination – including their persecution by the National Socialists and the genocide perpetrated against them.

Social Work (since 2022)

We did not include the section “Antigypsyism in Social Work” in the DOSTA category system until 2022, but since the association was founded, we have been able to gain deep insights into this area, particularly through the advice and counseling center of Amaro Foro e.V.

Case Studies

A child was beaten, insulted, and repeatedly discriminated against on racial grounds by a teacher. As a result, the child no longer wanted to go to school, which led to the family being fined for truancy. The child eventually changed schools.

At a subway station, a man yells at a family, shouting “fucking gypsies” and “Sieg Heil.” None of the passersby intervene.

Case Studies

A young mother who is pregnant again was confronted by an employee of the accommodation where the woman and her family are staying with the suggestion that she should have an abortion because there are already too many of them. The mother is very happy about her child and her pregnancy and has at no time expressed a desire to have an abortion.

Social work was repeatedly shaped by the current political and media debates, which also influenced municipal orders and expectations of social work. While from 2011 to 2014, the professional discussions revolved around the supposed “poverty-related immigration from South-eastern Europe,” often directly labeled as “Roma immigration,” from 2015 onwards, the professional field was concerned with other issues. This continued until early 2022, when many Ukrainian citizens sought protection in Germany after the Russian attack. Familiar antigypsyist narratives in the profession became increasingly prevalent again.

In principle, these can be found, unchanged over time, both in statements by social workers and in social work measures and in the way people are treated. On the one hand, professional practices are strongly shaped by othering, with people who are identified as Roma being referred to as hard-to-reach clients because they are supposedly different from the others. On the other hand, attempts are made to explain this supposed otherness with a “Roma culture,” which is also often exoticized. Attributing particular factors to culture thus remains at the core of antigypsyist practices in social work. It runs like a red thread through the field, leading to professional thinking being determined by deficit-oriented approaches and disorders.

In addition to accusations such as irresponsibility, criminality, carelessness and the accusation that people are not telling the truth, etc., evaluations and heteronomy are part of everyday life in social work. On the one hand, these affect the quality of the work and, on the other hand, violate basic principles of professional ethics such as participation, self-determination, empowerment, etc.

Furthermore, the tendency to shift responsibility remains unchanged in social work practice, especially within mainstream services. Based on the abovementioned focus on differences, clients who are identified as Roma are often referred to self-organized associations. In addition to language barriers, a lack of specialist knowledge on the part of professionals is repeatedly cited as a reason. However, whether this knowledge is available in the self-organized associations seems irrelevant; the main thing seems to be that it comes from the same “cultural background.”

Self-organized associations with low-threshold social work offerings on an equal footing are still necessary not only for this reason, but also because they generally counteract renewed segregation through their professional skills and expertise.

Critical examination of one’s own position as a person and, beyond that, of the position and role of the profession are therefore indispensable. As long as equal treatment and respect remain only ideas and are not actually practiced, social work will continue to tend to reinforce racist stereotypes.

Housing

Racism/antigypsyism in the housing market is a growing problem that has been evident in the DOSTA documentation over the last ten years. Landlords continue to profit from the hardship of people looking for housing

in Berlin's extremely tense housing market. In particular, people with an actual or assumed Roma background are often forced to live in dilapidated properties that have been neglected by landlords, in return for horrendous rents. Antigypsyist discrimination in the housing market ranges from refusal to rent due to a lack of knowledge of the German language, informal rental practices, arbitrary termination of rental contracts, the framing of so-called "problem real estate" to racist bullying by neighbors in existing rental relationships to fraudulent methods that ultimately lead to the eviction of entire buildings, which often house people with an externally or self-ascribed Roma background. Involuntary homelessness, which often results from this and should actually be covered by the General Security and Order Act (Allgemeines Sicherheits- und Ordnungsgesetz, ASOG) or according to SGB XII, regardless of whether or not social benefits are received, is a common problem for our clients. During the pandemic, it was observed that this, albeit temporary, solution was automatically extended as a benefit, but that this benefit was quickly terminated for people who were not entitled to social benefits. The threat or reality of homelessness and the associated pressure from the social welfare office or job center fuel closely interrelated existential fears. The extent of systematic discrimination thus extends across various spheres of life. EU migrants from Bulgaria and Romania continue to be particularly affected by this. In general, it can be said that over the last ten years, the situation in Berlin's shelters and the access to them has remained catastrophic.

Contact with Law Enforcement and the Judiciary

In the last ten years, in the area of "contact with law enforcement and the judiciary," in addition to un-justified measures on the part of the public order office – particularly with regard to homeless people – or refusals of services by the courts, above all, a significant area can be identified that has remained unchanged and represents a massive incursion into the lives of Roma and people who are identified as such: contact with the police. The most frequently reported cases to DOSTA were unjustified measures related to evictions, racial profiling and the associated racist characterizations and criminalizing assumptions, as well as physical attacks and brutal police action against people with a self-ascribed or externally-ascribed Roma background. The dissemination of antigypsyist knowledge, such as the notion of so-called clan crime, is also a strategy used by law enforcement agencies to criminalize and defame Roma and people who are identified as such. For several years, DOSTA has been drawing attention to this pseudo-knowledge, an entrenched part of the historical tradition of public authorities. This also includes data collection and the recording of ethnic affiliation, which has its origins in National Socialism and was one of the reasons for the persecution and murder of Roma and Sinti and was adopted by the justice and law enforcement apparatus of the Federal Republic of Germany. The consequences of this are, among other things, a general mistrust of the authorities on the part of the communities and, on the other side, continuous inaction and a failure to take those affected seriously.

Case Studies

A neighbor terrorizes a family and collects information about them (e.g., when they are awake, listen to music, sing). His wife has insulted the family members as "hobos" and said that they should go back to their country.

A legal guardian tells a young woman from Russia, in the presence of a social worker, "how bad the clans" and Muslims in general are in Germany. She also says that "Sinti and Roma are the worst of all," who, with their entire "clan," literally flood the courts.

Case Studies

Report from a social worker: "Following a preliminary consultation for a cesarean section with the gynecologist in charge, the anesthesiologist arrogantly recommended to a pregnant Romani woman that she should have herself sterilized during the procedure. The gynecologist had not previously raised the subject of sterilization, and there was no medical necessity."

The owner of a shop in the immediate vicinity of a refugee shelter (with many refugees from the Republic of Moldova) asks a social worker whether "these dirty gypsies" are from the shelter. The social worker replies that she does not know, but that she has heard that many of the refugees are unemployed and do not work.

A homeless man from Romania was employed by a construction company without a contract to work all day on a construction site. He was promised 140€ for 12 hours of work per day, but in the end, his boss only gave him 50€.

Access to Health Care

Over the last ten years, the unchanged difficulty in accessing statutory health insurance, which is determined by internal instructions and restrictive EU regulations that violate European law, as well as special requirements of these, has been particularly noticeable in the sphere of life of "Access to Health Care." Antigypsyist discrimination by medical and caregiving staff is also documented as an ongoing problem not only in the DOSTA statistics, but also at the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency. Those affected experience refusals of treatment, degrading, often eugenic and culturalizing remarks, or even the withholding of relevant information due to ignored language barriers. In principle, a continuity can be seen in all documented instances in this area from the very beginning.

Access to Goods and Services

In this area of life, cases of refusal by mobile phone providers to close contracts, refusal by banks to open accounts and refusal of access to shops have been repeatedly reported since the project began. Criminalizing insinuations, such as those of alleged theft, in business contexts have been and continue to be a reality for people who are identified as Roma. In all these years, various banks have refused to open accounts for customers. Although the German Payment Accounts Act (Zahlungskontengesetz, ZKG) came into force in 2016, according to which every consumer can open an account even without a permanent address, discrimination-free access to bank accounts for people with a self-ascribed or externally-attributed Roma background is still not guaranteed even after the ZKG. Although it is possible to assert claims under the General Equal Treatment Act (Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz, AGG) if goods or services are withheld on the basis of antigypsyism, those concerned rarely take legal action.

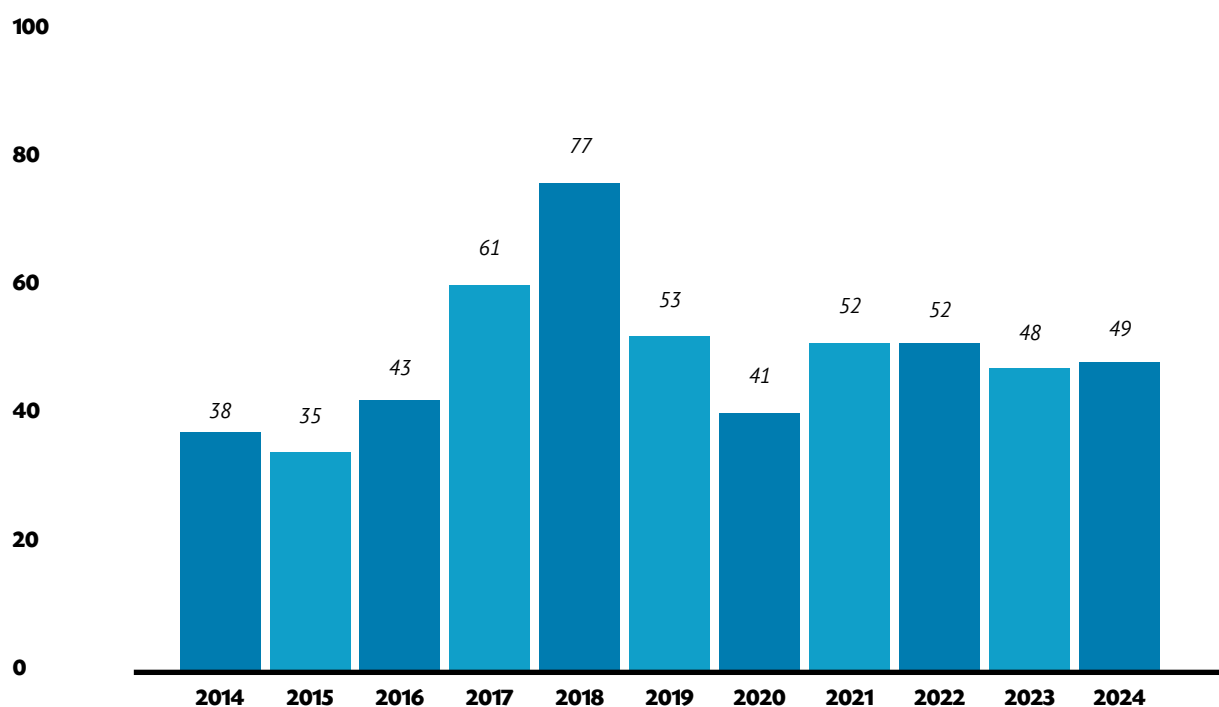
Working Environment

In the world of work, Roma and other employees perceived as such regularly experience antigypsyist insults from superiors and colleagues, as well as criminalization and exploitation. Relevant low-wage sectors take advantage of people's difficult situations, and violations of labor law are a regular occurrence. Exploitative and extortionate practices such as threats of non-payment, dismissal, physical violence or dismissal in the event of accidents at work, illness and pregnancy have been documented since the project began. The Covid-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the situation, with mass layoffs threatening livelihoods. Those concerned mostly refused offers of intervention out of a justified fear of losing their jobs, however precarious.

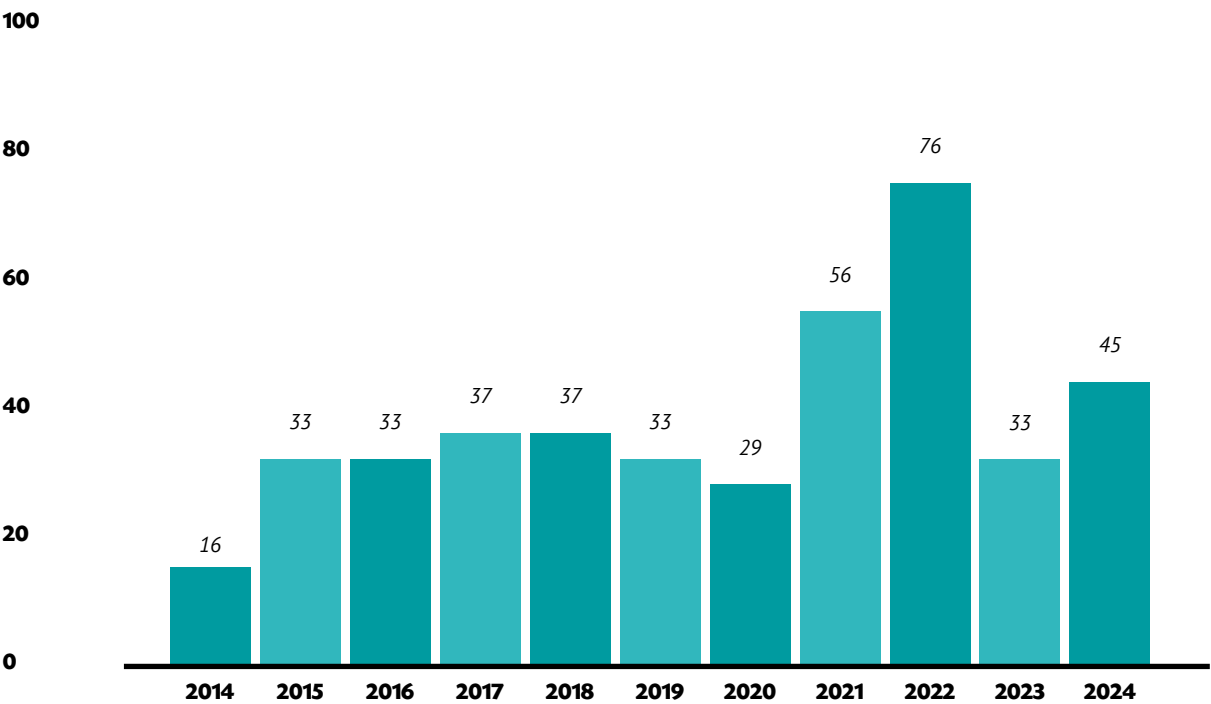
The 3 biggest areas of life

Developments in case numbers over 10 years

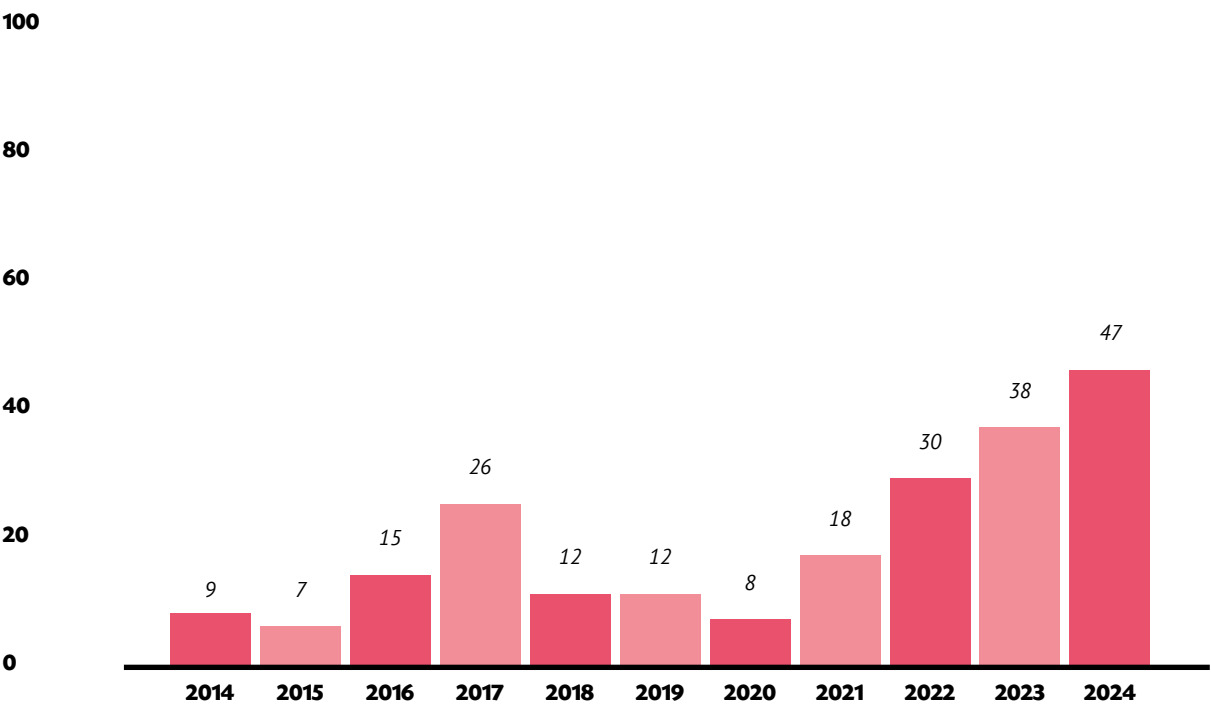
Antigypsyism
Contact with the Authorities



Antigypsyism
Everyday Life and Public Space



Antigypsyism
Education



DOSTA

Recommendations for Action

In the ten years that antigypsyist incidents have been recorded, the Documentation Center on Antigypsyism has documented a total of 1,502 cases in a wide range of areas. Through years of recording, the project has helped to make antigypsyism more visible and an important part of anti-discrimination work. The fight against antigypsyism is also increasingly being considered in politics and administration, so that appropriate measures can be taken, such as the establishment of the position of the Federal Commissioner for the Fight against Antigypsyism and for Sinti and Roma Life in Germany.

The project has also campaigned for years for the introduction of a state anti-discrimination law (Landesantidiskriminierungsgesetz, LADG) and has been closely involved in its development, along with many other anti-discrimination projects. The aim of the LADG was to at least close some legal protection gaps for people affected by antigypsyism. Because our evaluations of the last few years have repeatedly pointed to a number of exclusion mechanisms, structural racism and institutional antigypsyism that need to be combated. In addition to a strong anti-discrimination framework, strong legal instruments are needed to take legal action against racist bullying at school, against racist police violence or against violent deportations, etc. While these are important positive developments, we cannot afford to rest on our laurels. The steady increase in the number of cases, but also current political developments, show that there is an urgent need for action. For example, the General Equal Treatment Act (Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz, AGG) urgently needs to be reformed to enable action to be taken against official harassment, because, as our long-term records show, Roma and Sinti experience the most discrimination when dealing with public authorities. And especially in times when the shift to the right is becoming ever louder and more visible, it is all the more important to strengthen and support those affected by antigypsyism and other forms of racism. For ten years, DOSTA has been systematically recording anti-Gypsy incidents in a number of areas of life. Over time, further needs have been identified and new areas of life have been included in the categorization, such as social work, which we will only start recording in 2022. The project precisely determines the need for action for each area of life and formulates specific recommendations for action, which can be read in detail below:

Contact with the Authorities

- The internal guidelines for the “Combating of Organized Abuse of Benefits by EU Citizens” have so far merely been modified. The guidelines should generally no longer be used and the corresponding antigypsyist and generalizing administrative practice should also be terminated immediately and sanctioned if necessary.
- Authorities must focus on sanctioning those who profit from exploitative working conditions, not those who are subjected to them. This also means that when an employment relationship is terminated, employees should not be disadvantaged when applying for benefits.
- The General Equal Treatment Act (Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz, AGG) must be reformed to cover the domain of state activities.
- At the state level, it must be ensured that the General Security and Order Act (Allgemeines Sicherheits- und Ordnungsgesetz, ASOG) is consistently implemented, i.e. that homeless people are immediately provided accommodation regardless of their entitlement to benefits.

Education

- The right to education must apply to all children in Berlin, regardless of their residence status. The allocation of a daycare or school enrollment place close to home must be provided within a few weeks.
- The segregating practice of welcome classes must be ended. Instead, additional language learning support is needed, as is already being practiced in individual schools in so-called tandem models.
- It is imperative that all employees in the education sector be sensitized to racist stereotypes.

Everyday Life and Public Space

- Report incidents to DOSTA/MIA Berlin
- Strengthen structures for independent victim counseling and raise awareness of them
- Improve the recording and documentation of racist/ antigypsyist violence by official bodies
- Sensitizing professional groups, for example public transport personnel, to antigypsyism/racism

Social Work

- The history of social work in Germany, including its role during the Nazi era, must be more firmly anchored in training in the interest of critical self-reflection.
- Social work activities require mandatory and regular supervision and further training and, with regard to working conditions, should be designed in such a way that employees have the opportunity to reflect on and develop their work.
- In the case of so-called culturally sensitive approaches, it is imperative that members of the respective

communities be part of the team; the underlying concept of culture must be critically reflected upon.

- The range of awareness-raising measures on antigypsyism should be expanded and made more accessible.
- The consideration of ethnicity in case observation and processing, which is most-often externally ascribed, must be critically questioned in the context of further training.

Housing

- An effective rent control is needed in Berlin, along with significantly more affordable housing. The rent stabilization for social housing should be unlimited.
- The Housing Supervision Act (Wohnungsaufsichtsgesetz) must be reformed so that property owners can be held more accountable in the event of unacceptable living conditions.
- Refugees should be housed decently.
- Adequate accommodation according to ASOG, especially for vulnerable persons such as families with children, pregnant women, the elderly or sick people.
- Free and needs-based language courses, independent and cost-free counseling on education and employment, and offers to promote education and training for adult EU citizens can also facilitate access to the labor market in order to prevent dependency in the housing context.
- To end homelessness, a paradigm shift away from systems of emergency overnight accommodation and towards long-term solutions is needed. Housing First must be extended to groups without entitlement to social welfare benefits, such as homeless EU citizens.

Contact with Law Enforcement and the Judiciary

- Sensitizing training on antigypsyism must be an integral part of training. This includes topics such as the role of the police and law enforcement authorities as well as the judiciary in National Socialism.
- Victims who want to file a complaint after suffering racist insults must be taken seriously in police stations.
- Independent and sufficiently equipped complaints mechanisms are needed.
- We are fundamentally critical of the deportation of Roma; at the very least, however, certain humanitarian standards should be observed, i.e. no family separations, no deportations of sick people, no night-time intrusions into homes.

Healthcare

- In publicly funded health care institutions, employees must be sensitized to antigypsyism.
- There should be independent complaints mechanisms to ensure that those affected do not receive poorer medical treatment or no medical treatment at all because of racist attributions.

- Access to statutory health insurance must be made significantly easier by not collecting back-dated contributions and by improving communication with insurance companies in other EU countries.
- Creation of more extensive structures for informing insured persons about their rights
- Easier access to translation services, breaking down of language barriers, for example, by means of multilingual information materials, pictograms, and visual information material

Goods and Services

- Close protection gaps in the General Equal Treatment Act (Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz, AGG)
- AGG complaints offices for those affected by racial profiling and criminalization in the service sector
- Implementation of the Payment Accounts Act (Zahlungskontengesetz, ZKG) and appropriate support if banks fail to comply with it

Working Environment

- The connection between precarious work and migration must be continuously researched.
- Employers who deliberately create exploitative dependencies must be consistently sanctioned. Overall, the entire low-wage sector must be more strictly regulated. It is time to effectively prevent violations of labor law and occupational safety from going unpunished due to a chain of subcontracting companies.
- Support and counseling services must be created or expanded and made more widely known for affected employees.

Data Collection and Data Protection

- Counseling centers and points of contact, as well as regulatory and public authorities, must ensure that their employees are aware of the current state of data protection law and end the un-lawful practice of gathering information on (alleged) ethnicity. Data that has already been collected must be securely destroyed, both digitally and in hard copy files.
- Employees must be informed about the historical context of the collection of ethnic data in training courses and made aware of the problem, so that they can also recognize attributions in their daily work.

10 Years of Media Monitoring

For 10 years, we have been systematically monitoring Berlin newspapers to identify and document antigypsyist representations and argumentation patterns. We analyze the media discourses relevant to Berlin in relation to people with a self-ascribed or externally-ascribed Roma background. The media monitoring was first carried out in 2014 as part of DOSTA and is the only one of its kind in Germany. Since 2020, the media monitoring has been part of the model project “Diversity in Media.”

The selection of articles is based on a keyword search: on the one hand, we look at the keywords “Sinti and Roma” and “Roma,” but also terms that often function as a cipher, such as “Romanians and Bulgarians.” These are terms that have been associated with “Roma” so often that they now function like a code. For example, it is often not clear to the German mainstream society that not all Roma are Romanian, nor are all Romanians Roma. The same applies to “Bulgarians,” “South-Eastern Europeans” and, in Berlin, specifically also to “Moldovans.”

We compare our results with nationwide media debates. We include national and regional articles when their racist depictions receive particular public attention. Over the years, we have built up expertise in this field. This enables us to identify developments in antigypsyist media reporting and formulate recommendations for action. In our work, we are in continuous exchange with self-organized Roma associations and Roma activists, as well as with media professionals and academic research representatives in the field, such as Neue Deutsche Medienmacher, Mediendienst Integration, Bildungsforum Antiziganismus, Gesellschaft für Antiziganismusforschung and the Research Center on Antigypsyism at the University of Heidelberg. The results of the media monitoring correspond with the findings of scientific research on the central themes and narratives of the discourse of German mainstream society about people to whom a Roma identity is ascribed.

Media representations never correspond to the lived realities of the various groups represented in society. As a rule, the media focus on events that have a supposed newsworthiness, that is, that are out of the ordinary. With regard to people with a self-ascribed or externally-ascribed Roma background, an association with “negativity” appears to be the decisive criterion for media professionals. The link between Roma and poverty and/or crime is a recurring theme in reporting to this day, as the review of these articles shows. This results in a distorted representation that is perceived as representative of the minority’s overall situation. Furthermore, ethnic attributions often appear abruptly in text or captions without any context being explained. It can therefore be assumed that it is not a self-designation, but an external attribution, which apparently occurs particularly quickly in the context of certain topics and markers such as “begging” or “garbage.”

The work of self-organized associations remains essential in this field. At least among professional media workers, sensitivity to racist labeling has increased. While this was used as a matter of course in the 1990s and 2000s, it is hardly to be found in today’s media landscape. In addition, contacts with editorial offices have been strengthened. This is having a noticeable effect. Increasingly, voices from the community are being heard, creating a more diverse picture. More and more newspapers are also reporting on the occasion of International Romani Day on April 8 or taking note of studies on discrimination against Roma. Even days of remembrance such as Roma Holocaust Memorial Day on August 2 now appear to be firmly established. Information on history, such as on “Himmler’s Runderlass,” is also increasingly available. In smaller local newspapers, there have been more reports in recent years about the inauguration of new memorials for Sinti and Roma who were victims of the Porajmos. Roma are now also at least being considered and mentioned in international debates about new Holocaust memorials. In some individual cases, discriminatory and violent incidents have also made it into the public eye, such as the case of racial profiling in Singen, where 11-year-old Tiziano L., a Sinto, was handcuffed and taken away by the police for no reason.¹

We have also developed a wide range of services for media professionals, including a photo library and a glossary, to make their day-to-day work easier. The photo library provides editorial offices with a self-selected range of

1 Extensive report on the case: Grunau (February 11, 2021).

images that are free of clichés and can be downloaded free of charge from our website. This service has already been met with a positive response. Valuable information on the topic can be found online in the glossary and also in our handbook, starting at the end of the year.

There still remains much to be done. The fact that no profound change has taken place is evident in the recurring debates on the topics of “welfare fraud” and “problem real estate properties” and in the visual representations of homelessness, “clan crime” and the like.

Migrants under General Suspicion of “Social Benefit Fraud”

The arrival of refugees from the Republic of Moldova was the subject of media coverage in Berlin once again in 2023. At the end of the year, the Republic of Moldova was classified as a “safe country of origin” alongside Georgia. At the same time, the reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) was pushed ahead. As a result, our fears of further restrictions to the right to asylum have now become reality. Instead of drawing attention to the fact that Roma in the Republic of Moldova face widespread discrimination and that the concept of “safe countries of origin” undermines the fundamental right to asylum, media reports have continued the antigypsyist narratives of recent years. The narrative that people from Moldova have no legitimate reasons for fleeing their country but instead come with the aim of claiming benefits remains at the center of the debate. The tone has changed to the effect that asylum seekers are being accused of not wanting to accept the rejection of their asylum application, as could be read in the B.Z. (Nov. 1, 2024), among other places, in reference to a Tagesspiegel investigation. The article was illustrated with a discriminatory photo that had been taken and used two years earlier. Supposedly factual reports such as “Social fraud: How big is the problem?” (ZDF, Sept. 1, 2023) imply that Roma seeking protection in Germany have a fundamentally criminal motive. Even if the ZDF report at least concedes that it is a cliché, statements such as “clans, especially from Southeast Europe, often operate from large family associations” negate the previous message. This deeply racist debate is now being cleverly cloaked in terms such as “criminal Moldovan gangs” (B.Z., August 31, 2023). Yet it is perfectly legal to apply for asylum multiple times. Behind such articles lies the political demand to further restrict the already nearly eroded right of asylum.

This mechanism is not new. In the early 1990s, antigypsyist media debates led to a wave of racist violence. Instead of taking these attacks seriously and addressing the deep-seated problem, the federal government drastically restricted the right to asylum in 1993 with an amendment to Article 16 of the Basic Law. This fundamental right, which was firmly anchored in the constitution as a consequence of the Nazi genocide, was intended to ensure the right of asylum for those persecuted on political grounds.

Once again, those who continue to fuel the political mood against refugees are given a lot of space in the media. Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, politicians have repeatedly claimed that Roma are not “real” war refugees and therefore have no right to protection, and that they make life difficult for “real” refugees.² This refers to the legal classification of Ukrainian refugees, who are treated the same as German citizens with regard to social benefits. For example, an antigypsyist statement by CSU politician Thomas Karmasin made national headlines: he claimed that the “Roma families” housed in the Munich area “miraculously mostly have freshly-printed Ukrainian passports.” Because they also speak Hungarian, Karmasin accuses them of benefit fraud on the basis of mere assumptions. This ignores not only multilingualism and/or dual citizenship in Eastern Europe, but also the reality of the lives of those people who have had to flee from war.

The way this statement was taken up by other media, such as the Berliner Zeitung (September 20, 2023), shows that well-known, antigypsyist clichés can be powerfully linked to current events – up until the point that there was actually talk of “fake Ukrainians” (Focus, February 24, 2024). Before the EU’s eastern expansion in 2004 and 2007, Romanian Roma were similarly

My Anger. This Asylum Change is Not Enough



Asylum seekers from Moldova during their arrival in Berlin (here in Reinickendorf in the summer of 2021); 99.9 percent are not recognized

“Ninety-nine and nine-tenths percent of Moldovans do not receive asylum and are not recognized as refugees either. However, they receive social assistance during the asylum procedure and many remain in Berlin, although they would have to leave according to the law. Some of them not only become a burden on the welfare state, but also on security, because criminal Moldovan gangs have now formed here.” (B.Z., August 31, 2023)

² In 2022, a headline in an article in Focus (April 8, 2022) read, for example, “Nasty Suspicion: Do Roma Really Come from Ukraine?”

turned into second-class refugees. Many fled to Germany due to the war in former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. The Minister of Justice at the time, Herbert Helmrich (CDU), was quoted in the 37/1992 edition of *Der Spiegel* as follows: "(...) Herbert Helmrich (CDU) harshly demanded that the borders be better sealed off. (...) If the group of Sinti and Roma were to be persecuted, they would be entitled to asylum. But I have my doubts about that," said the Christian Democrat."³ By reversing the roles of perpetrator and victim, people seeking protection are dehumanized and criminalized. The cliché of statelessness accompanies debates on Roma migration. Whether consciously or unconsciously, "Sinti and Roma" are listed in misleading and sometimes indiscriminate contexts, as if they could not possess citizenship. The *taz* commented that many residents have both Ukrainian and Hungarian passports, but then went on to refer to Ukrainians, Russians, Hungarians, Slovaks and Roma (*taz*, September 1, 2023).

In the Ruhr area, the issue of "social benefit fraud" was linked to organized crime and, after a raid, was associated with the keywords "gangs" and "problem real estate." In 2023, the *BILD* newspaper ran the headline: "Suspicion of Social Benefit Fraud: 430 Southeast Europeans, 6 houses! Arrests During Raid" (*BILD*, Aug. 15, 2023), in order to make a connection to Roma in the text. This shows particularly clearly how antigypsyist debates can build up over years and continue seamlessly even after a longer period of time. As early as 2018, the mayor of Duisburg initiated an antigypsyist debate about EU citizens receiving child benefits. He complained that he now had to "deal with Sinti and Roma" who "litter entire street sections and exacerbate the rat problem." Various socially chauvinistic clichés, which are presented as supposedly part of Roma culture, played a central role in the child benefit debate: the stereotypes of the family with many children, of traveling around Europe and of "living at the expense of others."

These debates, which follow a similar pattern, make it clear how indiscriminately keywords are combined to stir up suspicion of social benefit fraud in the media and to fuel antigypsyist sentiment: Politicians and journalists warn of an alleged "immigration into the social welfare system", especially of larger families; a threat scenario is constructed. In 2013, the *BILD* newspaper ran the headline: "Is Germany Threatened by a Wave of Roma?" What was meant was the labor migration from the EU countries Bulgaria and Romania; however, not of highly qualified specialists, but of workers in the low-wage sector with few material resources, who were dependent on support in Germany. They are still assumed to come for various social benefits. ZDF wanted to counter the increasingly racist debate and ran the headline "Not only Roma are coming, academics are coming too" on *heute.de* in 2013.⁴ This logic naturally excluded the possibility that Roma could also be academics, that they were at all equal to members of the "majority society." The term "poverty migration" is defamatory in itself. It creates a threatening backdrop, which is also evident in the *BILD* headline quoted above: the alleged mass immigration of poor people appears as a threat.

In the debate about so-called "poverty immigration," which has repeatedly attracted attention since the 2010s, it is particularly evident that a person's Roma background, whether real or attributed to them by others, is largely irrelevant. As early as 2018, we issued a statement highlighting the problem of disproportionate processing times for child benefit applications, sometimes taking more than two years, compared to applications with connections to foreign countries. Moreover, two phenomena are often confused in reporting on the subject: on the one hand, the payment of child benefits for children living abroad, and on the other hand, the alleged entry of families into the country for the purpose of claiming child benefits. The former corresponds to the EU regulation that child benefit is paid wherever someone is liable for tax, and in the same amount for everyone. Anyone who questions this rule would, consequently, also have to demand that taxes only be paid at the level applicable in the country of origin. The terms "abuse" or "benefit fraud" place those affected under general suspicion, even though their claims are completely undisputed.

On the other hand, the legal situation of EU citizens has also changed overall. They must either have been registered in Germany for at least five

Various Ploys Revealed. Social Benefit Fraud by "Fake Ukrainians": the Faeser Ministry Reacts

(*Focus*, 24 February 2024)

"To this day, Russians, Hungarians, Slovaks and Roma also live here alongside Ukrainians, and many residents have a Hungarian passport in addition to their Ukrainian one."

(*taz*, Sept. 1, 2023)

³ *Der Spiegel* 1992: "Sinti und Roma nach Bonn."

⁴ End, Markus (February 24, 2014): „Von Klischees und falschen Bildern. Eine Analyse: Wie berichten Medien über Sinti und Roma?"

years or have employee status in order to receive social benefits such as citizen's income at all. Accordingly, in the vast majority of cases, these are supplementary benefits, since the salary from the employment relationship is not sufficient for survival. Instead of strengthening and protecting the rights of the often extremely exploited and precarized migrant workers, German municipalities and social systems suddenly appear to be under threat. It is the same insinuation that is also made in the course of asylum procedures, although legally it is a completely different situation – Roma are generally suspected of fraud by politicians and the media. In debates on “poverty immigration,” all antigypsyist labels are repeated very often. It can be said across the board that whenever Roma migrate, whether from the Western Balkans, as EU citizens from Romania and Bulgaria or currently from Moldova and Ukraine, Roma are generally reproached when they exercise their rights, thus justifying discriminatory behavior.

Attributing Precarious Living Situations to Culture

Debates on “problem real estate properties” and homelessness point to the essentialist core of antigypsyist stereotyping, according to which certain characteristics are interpreted as fixed characteristics of all members of a group. In Berlin, we continually see how mainstream society's antigypsyism is also reflected in the media's portrayal of precarious living spaces in text and images. The mechanism behind it is repeated: entire blocks of houses are labeled as “junk real estate” or even as “problem houses.” Homeless encampments are emphasized as “illegal” or “wild,” marked by “garbage and rats” that disturb local residents. In this topic, a Roma identity is very often attributed, but not substantiated further in the articles. The assessments and descriptions are based primarily on statements from neighbors. In the past, there have been repeated formulations that established a causal link between ethnicity and conditions at specific places of residence, although both the case of dilapidated accommodation and the issue of homelessness are social phenomena.

For example, in 2023, the Berliner Morgenpost ran a headline: “Junk Property: The Illegal Trailer Park Settlement Should be Cleared,” referring to a trailer park settlement in Treptow-Köpenick. Racist buzzwords are far from extinct in debates about housing. What is interesting is that the owner himself had raised the supposed Roma connection by accusing the district of antigypsyism. The district had banned the owner from further renting out the property due to “massive violations of building law.” It is important to address precarious housing conditions and the responsibilities of owners and the district. In this case, however, ethnicity is not relevant. The owner's statement cannot be verified and yet it was adopted by the media without reflection. The impression arises that mentioning the ethnic affiliation alone constitutes newsworthiness and not the underlying social problem itself. The consequences of this reporting were made plain in an article in the Tagesspiegel published towards the end of the year: “There, Sinti and Roma and their families are making a fire, while others are hurrying through the rain from their trailers or dwellings to the toilet facilities” (Tagesspiegel, October 23, 2023). Here, the image of an archaic way of life is drawn. In the reporting on the settlement, it is noticeable that it was only after the residents were assumed to have a Roma background that it was referred to as a “junk property.”

In Berlin, a settlement of homeless people at Berlin Central Station was once again a central topic in the media in 2023. The headlines are often sensational, as in the Berliner Zeitung (February 23, 2023): “Homeless camp: fire, excrement and sex outdoors.” In addition, formulations such as “illegal camp,” “illegal tent settlement,” “wild homeless camp,” “slum in Berlin-Mitte” or “Romanian tent village” are used frequently. Such vivid language creates a supposed dangerous scenario for the civil order in the city. Instead of addressing the unbearable housing crisis in Berlin, people affected by poverty are being made into perpetrators. Even though many articles no longer refer to “Roma” regularly or even use the racist term – a positive development, in

Junk Property: The Illegal Trailer Park Settlement Should be Cleared
(Berliner Morgenpost, November 16, 2023)

fact – with the keywords “garbage” and “begging,” the ciphers “Romanians,” “Bulgarians” and “Eastern Europeans” are used instead. How well this works can be seen in an article by rbb24 (March 19, 2023). It states: “The other camp residents, most of them Romanians, are begging at the train station, says Bob. ‘Nobody here has a job. Only begging.’ (...) Not everyone likes the fact that they are living here in their self-built huts without asking anyone.” Still, there are also extremely frequent descriptive mentions of “rats and garbage,” of noise, as well as of hygienic details in the context of precarious living situations and exploitative rental relationships. It is a distortion of cause and effect. Images also play a major role here. Especially in these articles, the images are very stereotypical, mostly showing rubbish and tents. Rubbish is a central topos in the media coverage of Roma.⁵ However, rubbish disposal is the responsibility of the owner and the municipality, not the tenant. In the case of a house inhabited by white people, complaints about the garbage disposal or the landlord would be expected in such a case, not about the tenants. In addition, all corners of the places of residence are often photographed (presumably without being asked). This poses a particular threat to those living there and represents a massive invasion of privacy (see “Visual stereotypes,” p. 58f.).

The extent of attributions of social and health issues to culture and ethnicity became frighteningly clear during the Covid 19 pandemic. People around the world are experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic as a health, social and economic threat. This collective, global danger has increasingly led to racism and stigmatization of marginalized groups, especially in the first few years. A vivid example of this was the quarantine ordered by the Neukölln health department for several city blocks between June 13 and 26, 2020. Some residents tested positive for the coronavirus, and hundreds were quarantined. This measure marked a fundamental change in strategy in dealing with new infections in the Neukölln district. At the same time, more infections were reported in some districts than in Neukölln – but only the residential buildings in Neukölln’s north were quarantined. Since the first reports of coronavirus cases in the neighborhood, Roma residents have been subjected to racist and antigypsyist hostility from the health department, politicians, journalists, service providers in the neighborhood and on social media.

In the wake of media coverage on the topic, Amaro Foro submitted various complaints to the German Press Council, which were ultimately unsuccessful.⁶ The reason for this was that certain articles were exclusionary and discriminatory and the association is of the opinion that they violate the guidelines of the press code. Again and again, ethnicity or nationality was mentioned in connection with medical reporting, although from a scientific point of view, this mention has no relevance.⁷ On the contrary, this media reporting promotes the stigmatization of certain groups of people and contributes to their exclusion. The Berlin Senate Department for Health, Care and Equality also drew attention to this. The mention of ethnic origin or nationality has no epidemiological benefit.⁸ The tabloid press has suggested that there is a direct link between the Romanian community and the spread of the coronavirus throughout Berlin: “Corona shock in the neighborhood! In Neukölln, 54 infections have been detected among mainly Romanian residents so far. And there could be more. There are also connections between the Romanian community and other districts. Entire houses have also been tested in Spandau (Wilhelmstadt) and in Wedding (Iranische Straße). Completely imagined statements about how all Romanians in Berlin are said to infect each other with the coronavirus draw on the centuries-old, deeply inflammatory antigypsyist motif of Roma as “disease drivers.” The articles did not provide a differentiated and critical examination of the connection between racism, poverty, housing and access to health care. Furthermore, the completely illegitimate practice of quarantining entire blocks of flats was not questioned. “Romanian” also works here as a cipher for Roma, since there were already various articles that had identified the residents as such. Many other articles were somewhat more nuanced than the B.Z.’s piece, but ultimately also reinforced the image of the “Romanian houses” as a “hotbed” for Covid.

“There, Sinti and Roma and their families are making a fire, while others are hurrying through the rain from their trailers or dwellings to the toilet facilities.”

(Tagesspiegel, October 23, 2023)

Illegal Camp at Berlin Central Station Employs Allotment Garden Plot Holders and the District



“The other camp residents, most of them Romanians, are begging at the train station, says Bob. ‘Nobody here has a job. Only begging.’ (...)

Not everyone likes the fact that they are living here in their self-built huts without asking anyone. (...)

According to Baseler, there have been no specific incidents. Nevertheless, many now keep their plots closed. Almost all of us do that now, especially the women among us: we lock our plots, close the doors to the gardens. The situation used to be more open.” (...) Both speak to each other in a language that is not German, the man excitedly, Bob calmly. The man stays, looking suspicious. Then Bob says goodbye in a friendly manner and leaves with the other man. Before that, he had told us about his plans for the day: nothing.”

(rbb24, March 19, 2023)

Corona shock in the neighborhood! In Neukölln, 54 infections have been detected among mainly Romanian residents.

(B.Z., June 16, 2020)

⁵ See End 2014.

⁶ For more information on our complaints to the Press Council, see: Dokumentation antigypsyistische Vorfälle 2019–2020, pp. 27–29.

⁷ RKI 2020: „Allgemeine Hinweise für Gesundheitsbehörden zur Kontaktaufnahme und Zusammenarbeit mit marginalisierten Bevölkerungsgruppen.“

⁸ See Berlin House of Representatives, publication 18/23824.

Crime Reporting

The Mentioning of Ethnicity in Crime Reporting

After the events of New Year's Eve in Cologne in 2015/2016, many journalists saw racist stereotypes as supposedly confirmed and called on the Press Council to change the guideline for naming the background of perpetrators or suspects in crime reporting. This guideline is intended to ensure that a person's background is only mentioned if it is relevant to the content, in order to protect minority groups from stigmatization. In 2016, several editorial offices decided to always name the background from now on. The Press Council ultimately changed the guideline and formulated it somewhat more openly. With regard to antigypsyist media discourse, however, it is important to emphasize that people with a self-ascribed or externally-ascribed Roma background have never been protected from stigmatization by this guideline, regardless of the version. On March 11, 2016, the taz reported on an event with the spokesperson of the Press Council: "On the other hand, the guideline does allow the nationality of offenders to be mentioned, if – and this is the magic word – there is a justified factual connection. This could be the case, for example, when reporting on clan and gang crime committed by Sinti and Roma, explains Press Council spokesman Protze. Such extended family loyalties can only be understood against a cultural background. That is why journalists are allowed to name Sinti and Roma in this case." Such a statement shows an extremely low level of sensitivity for antigypsyism and, given the signal effect it has, can be considered highly problematic.

"The Berlin 'situation report on clan crime' refers exclusively to persons from Turkish-Arab extended families, unlike, for example, in Lower Saxony, where the crime rate of other closed ethnic groups is also analyzed and assigned to clan crime (for 2022, using the example of a particularly crime-ridden Roma extended family)."

(rbb24, August 12, 2023)

In the area of crime reporting, we consider articles that mention Roma ethnicity to be discriminatory. The tabloid press in particular continues to use every supposed link between Roma and crime for sensational headlines. These articles attract a lot of attention from readers. But the middle-class media are also only too happy to follow this antigypsyist narrative with sometimes lurid reports. In Berlin, two articles by rbb24 were particularly striking. In a side note, it is casually mentioned that, in contrast to the Berlin "situation report on clan crime," the report from Lower Saxony not only "refers to persons from Turkish-Arab extended families," but also the "crime rate of other closed ethnic groups" would be analyzed, such as that of a "particularly crime-ridden Roma family." Not only is the deeply anti-Muslim narrative of the Berlin police force reproduced here without any reflection, but an opportunity has been constructed to associate the keyword "Roma" with clan crime, although they are not mentioned in the Berlin situation report. No mention is made of the fact that the recording of ethnicity by the authorities in Lower Saxony is unlawful.

The Myth of Clan Crime

The concept of clan crime is fundamentally racist. Here, on the basis of ethnicity, a blanket suspicion of organized crime is constructed. The recording and persecution of Sinti and Roma in Germany has a terrible tradition that goes back centuries and culminated in the genocide by the Nazis. Due to Germany's history, collecting ethnic data is in fact prohibited. However, fascist continuities can still be seen in police practice today. If ethnic affiliation is not allowed to be recorded, how could and can the police make statements about whether crimes are committed "mostly by Roma," not only in investigation files but also in publications such as the "Situation reports on clan crime" or crime statistics? In Berlin, for example, the 2017 police crime statistics criminalized people identified as Roma by the police, because the police unlawfully collected data on the (ascribed) ethnicity of suspects. The Berlin data protection officer even issued a complaint against the Berlin police. Belonging to a minority remains a self-identification that cannot be attributed from the outside. And even if it could, why is it relevant to collect such information? These racist labels pose a real danger to people, both from the police as an institution and from large sections of the dominant society, which interprets this police pseudo-knowledge as true and feels confirmed in its racist narratives. The unwillingness to change anything about this shows the historical amnesia of the police and public prosecutors. It is highly dangerous for the police to make statements that are clearly based on antigypsyist stereotypes, which in turn are uncritically disseminated in the media as alleged "expert knowledge."

Nevertheless, various media outlets are not afraid to take up this practice. In 2016, there was a media outcry over a trial against members of a Romanian family for pickpocketing by children who were not yet of the age of criminal responsibility. It was a pilot case because pickpocketing – actually a minor offense – was now being prosecuted and discussed as a form of organized crime. In all media reports, the affiliation to the Roma was mentioned, but a differentiated presentation of the situation of Roma in Romania did not occur. Instead, the poverty of people was voyeuristically exploited in reports and social problems were attributed to culture. In the German media landscape, it was generalized that all Roma were destitute and stole. A police officer who gave a presentation at the open day at the Federal Ministry of the Interior argued in a similar vein, warning of different ethnic groups and their preferred forms of crime. He mentioned the “criminal Roma clans.” The Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, which was represented with an information stand at the open day, sharply criticized this presentation. The B.Z. countered in an article that the alleged “Zi*****feindlichkeit” (a German expression for antigypsyism using the racist label) was ultimately only based on the real experiences of the police officers.

Another topic that repeatedly appears in the media in connection with the attribution “Roma” is that of thefts involving deception and scams. These include, for example, “gangs” that make a living from the so-called “shell game” or from thefts in apartments involving deception. In 2018, Berliner Zeitung and Berliner Kurier reported on the latter phenomenon, quoting verbatim and without comment the 2017 Police Crime Statistics’ formulation that the suspects were predominantly members of the Sinti and Roma. Romanian “thieving gangs” specializing in pickpocketing are also a recurring theme in Berlin media; it can be assumed that such codes are understood by a large proportion of readers as synonymous with “Roma”; this cliché can be found in SPIEGEL as early as 1995. Even though the reference is mentioned less explicitly in reporting some 30 years later: occasionally, articles make specific use of the antigypsyist cliché, as in a rbb24 article on so-called grandchild trick scam. In it, Polish Roma families are generally accused of organized crime. We would like to see the media take a more critical approach to police practices and the information passed on by the authorities, especially when it comes to allegations of criminal behavior.

Furthermore, the Nazi legacy in Germany should be taken particularly seriously. Accordingly, wording such as “entire family trees of suspects” should be a cause for great concern. In this article, Roma are referred to as a large, inscrutable family, organized along patriarchal lines and prone to criminality. The images reproduced here are very reminiscent of Nazi “Zi*****-Bilder” and seem almost eugenic. The press also has a (historical) responsibility for the “knowledge” it disseminates as expertise to the public.

Rip-offs as a Family Business

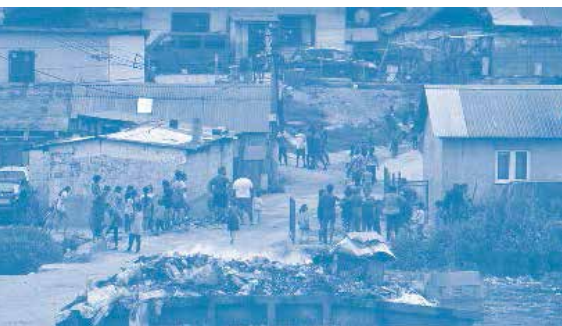
The investigators of the Berlin State Office of Criminal Investigation know exactly who they are dealing with. It is mostly Polish Roma families who make millions in Germany with the scare calls. The investigators have created entire family trees of suspects, which contain 30, 40 names. At the top are the masterminds – three brothers and their parents – then the logisticians, callers, and at the bottom of the system the pick-up men. According to the State Criminal Police Office, they are all somehow related. (...) This is precisely what makes it so difficult to take action against the gangs. From the outside, no one can penetrate the strictly patriarchal structures and get to the leading minds. “They are tightly organized, there are very clear hierarchies, very clear instructions that are given,” says Höhlich. But now the police have apparently found a way into the structure. The investigators do not reveal how exactly.”

(rbb24, December 12, 2023)

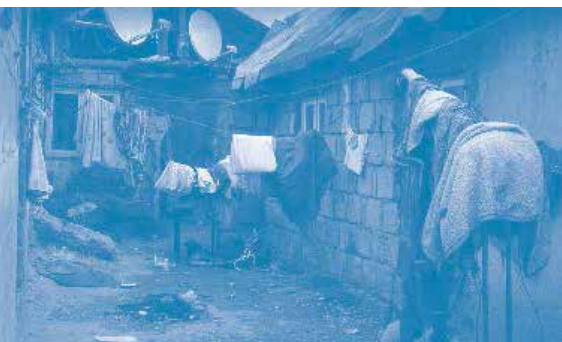
Visual Stereotypes



Berliner Morgenpost, September 3, 2023



mdr, November 2, 2023



mdr, November 2, 2023



rbb24, November 16, 2023



IMAGO, Screenshot from June 1, 2023

The use of images to illustrate articles continues to pose a particular problem. The imagery often suggests to readers that people with an actual or externally-ascribed Roma background are neglected, maladjusted or different. Furthermore, the images accompanying articles tagged with the keyword “Roma” often show women with long, dark hair and long skirts from behind. However, in the case of these agency images, it is usually not known who can be seen in them. Amaro Foro has often pointed out that this representation of Roma as a de-subjectivized, faceless and potentially alien “mass” has a centuries-old tradition in European regimes of the gaze – while members of the dominant society tend to be portrayed as subjects on an equal footing, and with their consent.

One topic in which problematic images are almost always used is media coverage of foreign countries. In such reports, the question arises as to what extent the (justified) scandalization of precarious living conditions should be reflected visually and when the line to voyeurism has been crossed. Often, the focus is on an alleged backwardness that is an age-old antigypsyist cliché – without making the necessary distinctions or even naming responsibilities. It has an effect on readers when the label “Roma” is always combined with an image of a horse-drawn carriage or with visual markers of poverty or even garbage and dirt.

This type of image is also used in the Berlin context, for example when reporting on “problem houses” or homeless settlements. This striking imagery further reinforces the effect of reversing the roles of perpetrator and victim in readers’ minds. The recurring images of dilapidated houses and rubbish do not contribute to a differentiated debate about the connection between racism and poverty, exploitation and housing. Instead, they link Roma to poverty and waste in a devastating way. In some cases, as in the rbb24 article, there is a large text-image gap: An otherwise well-meaning, well-researched article undermines its impact by selecting highly problematic images. As in this case, the privacy and personal rights of Roma are often disregarded, for example by taking pictures of living spaces, publishing addresses and showing people recognizably without their consent. In the worst case, these unprofessional practices can provoke racially motivated, violent attacks on those affected. This has happened frequently in the past.

In fact, picture editors, who work under extreme time pressure anyway, have few alternatives. The databases still contain a large number of stereotypical images, some of which are tagged with extremely damaging keywords. For example, the tag “Sinti and Roma” is sometimes used for images that were not even taken in connection with the community, such as photo reportages about child poverty in Pakistan or rows of garbage cans. In addition, several thousand images tagged with the racist and pejorative label can be found in all major German image databases.

As part of the media project, Amaro Foro has developed an approach to solving the problem of imagery. We have built up a photo library that is available free of charge on our homepage for journalistic purposes. We counteract the use of third-party images with our own, self-determined images. The photo library will be updated this year and has already been used by media professionals. We hope to make the photo library better known and to be able to expand it continuously in order to make a positive contribution in the long term against antigypsyism at the image level of reporting.



Roma belong to German society and should be represented accordingly and in all their diversity. Self-determined images are important, but it is not always easy for picture editors to find them. That is why we provide editorial offices with non-discriminatory images that avoid clichés in our photo library. (Amaro Foro/Sarah Eick)

Remembering the Porajmos and the Struggle over the Memorial

In recent years, it has been noticeable that a large proportion of the results for the keyword search “Roma” were articles on the subject of the Holocaust (and its commemoration). Although this development is a welcome one in itself, these are often only incidental mentions. In the vast majority of articles, Roma are only mentioned in a list of victim groups. An explicit, in-depth examination of the antigypsyist ideology of the National Socialists and the Porajmos is extremely rare in the press.

Since 2020, Berlin newspapers have reported selectively on the conflict surrounding the construction of the S-Bahn along the Memorial to the Sinti and Roma of Europe Murdered under National Socialism. In 2020 and 2021, there was still a relatively large amount of reporting, mostly in a spirit of solidarity, in which various voices from the community were placed at the center of the articles. In the meantime, however, articles that primarily address the conflict as an obstacle to the construction of the supposedly more important S-Bahn have become the norm. Articles repeatedly emphasize the importance of the City S-Bahn and uncritically quote the sometimes insensitive and misleading statements of politicians. The B.Z. goes so far as to end a short column entitled “The new S-Bahn tunnel must not end in failure because of the Tiergarten monument” with the sentence “What the S-Bahn is planning here is a once-in-a-century project. It cannot and must not fail because of the monument in the Tiergarten.” (October 17, 2023). In view of the genocide of Sinti and Roma by the National Socialists, the second persecution of the community in the FRG and the fact that it was only through the decades of struggle by the Sinti civil rights movement that the German government recognized the genocide at all and ultimately erected the only memorial to the Sinti and Roma of Europe murdered under National Socialism in 2012, we consider such a formulation to be disrespectful, trivializing and worryingly oblivious of history.

What is Missing

The perspectives of those affected are still missing where they are particularly important. Namely, in making visible what antigypsyism specifically means and has meant. Stories of resistance against National Socialism must be given more space. We would like to see more reports from partisans and on the lasting consequences of National Socialism, but also on current struggles for dignified commemoration and for political participation.

Unfortunately, we have to conclude in retrospect that ethnicity is still mentioned primarily when it comes to constructing a narrative of threat and a supposed counter-image to the “Western ideal.” To this end, clichés are increasingly articulated in subtle ways, even if the basic mechanism of othering remains the same. This makes it more difficult for readers to recognize the openly antigypsyist narratives.

There is a disturbing silence when it comes to racist violence against Roma, whether of a structural or individual nature. Whether it is reports on memorial services for the 1991 pogrom in Rostock-Lichtenhagen or the racist and right-wing terrorist attacks at the Olympia shopping mall in Munich in 2016 and in Hanau in 2020 – the fact that Roma were also murdered is not reflected in the media. The situation is similar for racist police violence. In the mainstream German public, it is apparently not newsworthy when Roma, some of them still teenagers, are murdered by the police throughout Europe. The murders of Stanislav Tomaš , Nikos Sampanis and Kostas Fragoulis in Greece received almost no mention. In this context, the situation has tended to deteriorate. It is left to the self-organizations on the ground to bring the cases to the public.

The same applies to incidents of right-wing and racist violence. Here, the media could serve as a corrective to the general tendency to trivialize right-wing and racist terror, some of which is specifically directed against Roma. Instead, those affected by right-wing violence are often blamed for the attack, even in news coverage. To counteract this reversal of perpetrator and victim, it

would help to address the structural dimensions of antigypsyism more clearly. In June 2023, a child died in a fire in a refugee shelter in Apolda, Germany.⁹ The death of the eight-year-old Ukrainian boy attracted a lot of attention, but Roma identity did not play a role in the reporting. In this case, it is assumed that it was a technical defect. It is a failure of the state when security in the shelters cannot be guaranteed – with fatal consequences.

Speaking openly about racism remains risky. Those concerned are often not believed, as the reporting on a racist incident in Lieberose has shown. The statements of those affected are relativized or countered with the opinions of neighbors. Furthermore, racist comments by prominent people on television are dismissed as “hype,” “excitement” or “controversy.”

So we still need self-organized associations to bring these issues into the media. We still need workshops to raise awareness of anti-gypsyism in reporting! It is time to realize that media reports have an impact on the real lives of those concerned. The number of attacks on refugees and their shelters has increased nationwide.¹⁰ The naming of specific apartment buildings and “camps” poses a real threat to the people living there. It is not uncommon for media reports to end up in right-wing chat groups and forums.¹¹ When anti-refugee sentiment is stirred up, the hate speech and violence are always directed against Roma as well. Unfortunately, in 2023 we have to realize once again that Roma cannot feel safe in Germany. And the media contributes to this in its own way.

The shift to the right has recently had a political impact. In the media, the shift to the right is determined solely by the approval ratings of right-wing populist parties, but the federal government’s changes to the law on the right of asylum are also a significant factor. The tightening of asylum laws, which have almost abolished the fundamental right to asylum, are difficult to reverse. The fact that Germany has not created a solution for the rights of residence for Roma, but continues to deport them, shows that the government is still far from fulfilling its historical responsibility.

The media are not uninvolved in these developments: the millions of members of Europe’s largest minority are constantly and generally portrayed in a negative light; the stereotypes have changed little for centuries. Migration is constantly constructed as a threat, although it has always been a reality in our society. For a long time, self-organized associations, activists and media professionals from the community have been fighting for a self-directed, diverse representation with the support of critical colleagues in media companies who show solidarity. The work of self-organized associations will be essential to ensure that antigypsyism remains visible in the future! We would therefore like to end our 10th anniversary of media monitoring by thanking all those who support our efforts in the media landscape in the fight against discrimination.

⁹ Press release, Central Council of German Sinti and Roma (June 9, 2023).

¹⁰ Amnesty International (February 2, 2024).

¹¹ This is shown, for example, by a case from the Torgauer Zeitung, which we do not wish to reproduce here.

Supporting Documents

Media Monitoring

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Amaro Foro e.V.

Obentrautstr. 55 | 10963 Berlin

Phone

030 432 053 73

Email

info@amaroforo.de

Website

www.amaroforo.de

Editorial Team

Amaro Foro e.V.

Translation

Matilda Tucker

Graphic Design German Edition

renk.studio

Layout English Edition

Charlotte Bräuer

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This is how victims of antigypsyism and witnesses can report incidents to DOSTA/MIA Berlin:

Via our online reporting portal



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